

MINNEAPOLIS CITY COUNCIL APPOINTMENT CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate Name: Dr. Reginald Freeman

Position Title: Fire Chief

Department: Minneapolis Fire Department

INSTRUCTIONS

The following questionnaire is intended to gather candidate responses for City Council consideration during the appointment process. There are two sections, the first contains questions posed to all appointed candidates, the second are questions more specific to the respective department's scope of work. Section One is broken into 4 categories, each with three questions. Section Two contains 8 department specific questions. Please ensure you respond to each question asked and aim for thorough but concise responses of roughly 1-3 paragraphs per question and the response field will adjust as you type.

Once completed, responses should be submitted to the City Clerk by the return date noted above. Should a question does not directly apply to your background, briefly explain why and describe the most relevant analogous experience.

QUESTIONS FOR ALL APPOINTED CITY DEPARTMENT HEADS

1) Vision, Challenges, & Opportunities

- a) Please share what attracted you to this role with the City of Minneapolis?
- b) What do you see as the top challenges and opportunities facing this department?
- c) What are your top three priorities for the department to pursue this term? How have these priorities evolved throughout your previous appointments to this role?

Response

A) What attracted me most to Minneapolis was not simply the opportunity to lead another fire department, it was the opportunity to help shape the future of one of America's most important cities.

Minneapolis is a city with an incredibly proud fire service tradition, highly talented firefighters and paramedics, and a community that expects excellence. It is also a city that has experienced tremendous change over the past several years. Moments like these require leaders who can unite people around a shared vision while maintaining an unwavering commitment to public safety.

Throughout my career, I have intentionally sought opportunities where meaningful transformation was possible. Whether leading Hartford through international accreditation, achieving ISO Class 1 status, guiding emergency management through the COVID-19 pandemic and presidentially declared disasters, serving as Oakland's Fire Chief, or leading fire and EMS operations internationally in Saudi Arabia, I have learned that sustainable organizational excellence is built by investing in people, fostering trust, embracing innovation, and making decisions grounded in data and collaboration.

Minneapolis presents that same opportunity.

I believe deeply that this department can become a national model, not because of one individual, but because of the extraordinary professionals already serving this city. My responsibility is to create an environment where they can perform at their absolute best while strengthening public trust and delivering exceptional service to every neighborhood.

Ultimately, I accepted this position because I believe Minneapolis deserves a fire department that is pursuing innovation, consistently applies accountability, embraces resiliency and fully connected to the community it serves.

B) Every fire department today faces significant challenges, and Minneapolis is no exception. However, I also believe that every challenge presents an opportunity for growth.

The first challenge is workforce sustainability.

Like many departments nationwide, recruiting, retaining, and developing the next generation of firefighters requires thoughtful leadership. Today's workforce values mentorship, wellness, professional development, and organizational culture as much as compensation. We must become an employer of choice while continuing to uphold the highest professional standards.

The second challenge is maintaining operational excellence amid increasing service demands.

Today's fire departments respond to far more than fires. Medical emergencies, behavioral health incidents, technical rescues, hazardous materials, climate-related disasters, and increasingly complex emergencies require a modern, adaptable organization. That means investing in training, technology, data-driven deployment, and continuous improvement.

The third challenge is strengthening trust, both internally and externally.

High-performing organizations are built on trust. Employees must trust their leaders, and communities must trust their fire department. Trust is earned through transparency, accountability, consistency, and meaningful engagement.

Fortunately, these challenges also represent tremendous opportunities.

Minneapolis has an exceptionally talented workforce. The opportunity exists to strengthen leadership development at every level, leverage technology and performance analytics, enhance

firefighter health and wellness, deepen community partnerships, and continue building a culture centered on service, professionalism, and excellence.

C) I believe Minneapolis has every ingredient necessary to become one of the premier metropolitan fire departments in America.

While every community has unique needs, my leadership priorities have remained remarkably consistent throughout my career because they are foundational to long-term organizational success.

Priority One: Invest in Our People

Everything begins with our firefighters, EMS personnel, civilian professionals, and leaders.

When team members feel valued, supported, well-trained, and empowered, they deliver exceptional service to the community.

That means investing in professional development, leadership succession, health and wellness, behavioral health resources, mentorship, and creating an organizational culture built on accountability, respect, and continuous learning.

I've often said that organizational excellence begins with firefighter excellence.

Priority Two: Deliver Exceptional Service Through Innovation and Accountability

The community deserves a fire department that is prepared for tomorrow's challenges, not yesterday's.

We will leverage data, performance metrics, technology, community risk reduction strategies, and operational best practices to continually improve service delivery.

Accreditation principles, strategic planning, Standards of Cover, performance measurement, and continuous improvement have been central throughout my career because they provide objective ways to evaluate whether we are truly meeting community expectations.

Priority Three: Build Lasting Partnerships with the Community

Public safety is strongest when it is collaborative.

The fire department cannot accomplish its mission alone.

Success requires strong partnerships with residents, neighborhood organizations, elected officials, labor leadership, healthcare systems, schools, businesses, and other public safety agencies.

My goal is to ensure every resident feels their fire department is accessible, responsive, transparent, and fully invested in their well-being.

How have these priorities evolved?

The priorities themselves have remained consistent, but my understanding of how to implement them has evolved significantly through experience.

Early in my career, I focused primarily on operational performance and organizational improvement.

Over time, I learned that sustainable excellence is fundamentally about people.

Policies matter.

Budgets matter.

Technology matters.

But culture matters most.

When people trust one another, understand the mission, embrace accountability, and feel empowered to lead from every rank, organizational performance naturally follows.

That philosophy has been reinforced throughout every leadership role I've held, from Hartford, to Oakland, to international leadership, and now here in Minneapolis.

If confirmed, my commitment is simple: to leave this department stronger than I found it, to develop the next generation of leaders, and to ensure the Minneapolis Fire Department continues to earn the confidence and trust of every resident we have the privilege to serve.

2) Leadership Style & Management Practices

- a) Describe your leadership style and management philosophy? How do you recognize when staff are engaged and effectively supported?
- b) How do you incorporate continuous improvement into your own management practices, accountability standards, and oversight of senior and mid-level leadership within the department?
- c) As a department leader, how do you promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring, promotion, and department culture?

Response

2. Leadership Style & Management Practices

a) Describe your leadership style and management philosophy. How do you recognize when staff are engaged and effectively supported?

I describe my leadership style as servant, transformational, and accountable.

Servant leadership means my responsibility is to remove barriers that prevent our people from succeeding. My role is to create the conditions where firefighters, paramedics, civilian professionals, and leaders have the resources, training, and support they need to perform at the highest level.

Transformational leadership means creating a shared vision that inspires people to become part of something larger than themselves. I believe people perform at their best when they understand the mission, feel connected to the organization's purpose, and know that their contributions matter.

At the same time, servant leadership does not diminish accountability, it strengthens it. I believe people deserve clarity regarding expectations, honest feedback, measurable performance standards, and leaders who consistently model the behaviors they expect from others.

One of my core beliefs is that leadership is not about position, it is about influence. Every member of the department has the capacity to lead regardless of rank.

I know employees are engaged when communication becomes proactive rather than reactive, when innovation comes from every level of the organization, when supervisors are developing future leaders instead of simply managing daily operations, and when team members demonstrate pride and ownership in the department's success.

Engagement is also reflected in measurable outcomes: improved retention, lower preventable injuries, increased participation in professional development, stronger collaboration across divisions, and improved team member feedback.

Ultimately, people know when leadership genuinely cares about them. When employees trust leadership, they become more willing to embrace change, solve problems collaboratively, and hold themselves accountable to high standards.

b) How do you incorporate continuous improvement into your own management practices, accountability standards, and oversight of senior and mid-level leadership within the department?

Continuous improvement begins with humility.

As leaders, we should never assume that because something has always been done a certain way, it is the best way.

Throughout my career, I have relied on strategic planning, accreditation principles, Standards of Cover, performance metrics, after-action reviews, and employee feedback to drive organizational improvement. These frameworks help remove subjectivity and ensure decisions are based on evidence rather than assumptions.

Personally, I seek regular feedback from peers, labor partners, team members, community stakeholders, and elected officials. Leadership requires the discipline to listen, even when the

feedback is difficult, and the courage to make adjustments when appropriate.

For senior and mid-level leaders, accountability begins with clearly defined expectations. Every leader should understand the outcomes they are responsible for and how success will be measured.

I believe accountability should focus on three dimensions:

- Operational performance and service delivery.
- Leadership behaviors and people development.
- Organizational values, professionalism, and ethical decision-making.

I expect leaders to develop their teams, mentor future leaders, communicate transparently, and solve problems collaboratively, not simply manage tasks.

When challenges arise, my first approach is coaching and development. However, accountability also means addressing persistent performance issues fairly, consistently, and professionally.

My objective is to build a culture where accountability is viewed as a tool for growth rather than punishment.

c) As a department leader, how do you promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring, promotion, and department culture?

I believe diversity, equity, and inclusion are fundamentally about ensuring that every qualified individual has a fair opportunity to succeed and that every employee is treated with dignity, professionalism, and respect.

Our communities are diverse, and our workforce is strongest when we attract talented people from every background who are committed to serving others.

In hiring, my focus is expanding recruitment efforts, removing unnecessary barriers where appropriate, ensuring outreach reaches all communities, and maintaining selection processes that are transparent, objective, and based on merit and qualifications.

In promotions, I believe team members must have confidence that advancement is earned through demonstrated competence, leadership, integrity, preparation, and performance. Transparent processes build trust throughout the organization.

Within department culture, inclusion means that every team member feels respected, heard, and valued, not because everyone thinks alike, but because different perspectives strengthen decision-making and improve organizational performance.

As Fire Chief, I set the tone for that culture through my own actions. I believe in being visible, accessible, listening first, engaging team members across every rank, and creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue.

At the same time, I expect every member of the organization to uphold our shared values of professionalism, respect, accountability, and service. Those expectations apply equally to everyone.

Ultimately, the goal is to build a workplace where every team member can perform at their highest level, where differences are respected, where opportunities are equitable, and where our collective focus remains on delivering exceptional service to the residents of Minneapolis.

Throughout my career, I have learned that organizations achieve excellence by widening opportunity, investing in people, and maintaining high expectations for everyone. The strongest departments are those where every team member knows they belong, every promotion is earned, every voice is respected, and every member is united by a shared commitment to serving the community.

3) Organizational Structure, Staffing, & Budget

- a) How do you evaluate the department's existing organizational structure, staffing, and budget priorities? When areas for reform are identified, how do you implement those changes?
- b) What is the Director's role in management of a department's operational budget? Describe your own approach to budget oversight and how you have adapted to any previous budget challenges.
- c) As a department leader, how do you balance budgetary demands between your programmatic and personnel budget?

Response

3. Organizational Structure, Staffing & Budget

a) How do you evaluate the department's existing organizational structure, staffing, and budget priorities? When areas for reform are identified, how do you implement those changes?

One of the first responsibilities of any new Fire Chief is to understand the organization before attempting to change it.

I don't believe in arriving with predetermined solutions. Instead, I believe in conducting a thoughtful assessment grounded in data, operational analysis, and meaningful engagement with the people who know the organization best.

That evaluation includes reviewing organizational structure, deployment models, staffing levels, workload, response performance, fiscal resources, community risk, succession planning, and employee feedback. Equally important is listening to firefighters, company officers, chiefs, labor leadership, civilian staff, community stakeholders, and elected officials.

When opportunities for improvement emerge, I ask three questions:

- Does this improve service to our residents?
- Does it strengthen our workforce?
- Is it fiscally responsible and sustainable?

If the answer is yes, then change becomes worth pursuing.

Successful reform is not about imposing change, it is about building understanding and creating ownership. People are much more likely to support change when they understand why it is necessary and have an opportunity to contribute to the solution.

Throughout my career, I have led significant organizational improvements, including achieving international accreditation, earning ISO Class 1 recognition, modernizing operational systems, strengthening emergency management capabilities, and implementing strategic planning initiatives. In every case, the most successful changes were collaborative, transparent, data-driven, and aligned with a long-term vision.

b) What is the Director's role in management of a department's operational budget? Describe your own approach to budget oversight and how you have adapted to previous budget challenges.

The Fire Chief serves as both the department's operational leader and its chief financial steward.

Every budget decision reflects organizational priorities and ultimately affects the level of service we provide to the community.

My responsibility is to ensure public resources are managed responsibly, transparently, and strategically while delivering the highest possible value to taxpayers.

My approach begins with aligning financial decisions to the department's strategic goals. Every expenditure should support firefighter safety, operational readiness, community risk reduction, workforce development, or improved service delivery.

Equally important is maintaining disciplined financial oversight throughout the year, not simply during budget season. That includes regularly monitoring expenditures, forecasting future obligations, identifying potential risks early, and adjusting spending when necessary to remain fiscally responsible.

Throughout my career, I have led organizations through periods of fiscal constraint, economic uncertainty, and competing priorities. Those experiences taught me that effective budgeting is rarely about simply spending less. It is about spending smarter.

That means pursuing efficiencies, leveraging technology, seeking grant opportunities, improving business processes, evaluating return on investment, and ensuring limited resources are directed toward the department's highest priorities.

Good financial stewardship requires balancing today's operational needs with tomorrow's organizational sustainability.

c) As a department leader, how do you balance budgetary demands between your programmatic and personnel budget?

Personnel will always represent the largest investment in any fire department because our people are our greatest asset.

However, investing in personnel cannot come at the expense of maintaining the equipment, training, technology, facilities, and programs necessary for those employees to succeed safely and effectively.

I don't view personnel and programmatic budgets as competing priorities, they are interdependent.

Well-trained team members require modern equipment.

Safe operations require ongoing training.

Strong recruitment and retention require investments in wellness, leadership development, and organizational culture.

Likewise, innovative programs only succeed when they are supported by talented, engaged employees.

When difficult financial decisions must be made, I rely on three guiding principles.

First, protect the department's core mission of life safety and emergency response.

Second, prioritize firefighter health, safety, and operational readiness.

Third, make decisions that are sustainable over the long term rather than solving short-term problems at the expense of future stability.

I also believe transparency is critical during budget discussions. Team members and elected officials deserve to understand not only what decisions are being made, but why they are being made. That openness builds trust and helps create shared ownership of difficult choices.

Ultimately, effective budgeting is not simply about balancing dollars. It is about aligning resources with organizational priorities so the department can consistently deliver exceptional service to every resident of Minneapolis.

Throughout my career, I've had the privilege of leading organizations ranging from municipal fire departments to complex international public safety systems. While the scale has varied, one principle has remained constant: every dollar entrusted to the fire department is a public

investment. My responsibility is to ensure that investment produces measurable improvements in firefighter safety, organizational performance, and service to the community. Fiscal stewardship is not separate from leadership; it is one of its highest responsibilities.

4) Collaboration with City Council & City Government

- a) How does this appointed position fit within the City's government structure, including your relationships with the City Council, Mayor, OPS, OCS, and other City departments? Where does direction come from, where do you bring concerns?
- b) What factors do you believe are critical to building and maintaining a productive working relationship with the City Council? Describe your approach and experience communicating on significant issues, responding to Council concerns, and balancing policy direction with your professional judgment on operations.
- c) How can the City Council better support this role and department?

Response

4. Collaboration with City Council & City Government

a) How does this appointed position fit within the City's government structure, including your relationships with the City Council, Mayor, OPS, OCS, and other City departments? Where does direction come from, where do you bring concerns?

The Fire Chief serves as both the operational leader of the Minneapolis Fire Department and a member of the City's executive leadership team.

I understand that my role is to implement the policy direction established by the Mayor and City Council while providing professional, objective, and evidence-based advice regarding public safety operations.

Operationally, I report through the City's administrative structure and work closely with the Office of Community Safety, Office of Public Service, the Mayor's Office, and other City departments to advance shared priorities. Public safety is increasingly interconnected with housing, public health, emergency management, infrastructure, and community engagement. Success requires collaboration across the entire organization.

I view the City Council as an essential governance partner. The Council establishes policy, approves budgets, exercises oversight, and represents the priorities of Minneapolis residents. My responsibility is to ensure Council Members have accurate, timely, and transparent information that allows them to make informed decisions.

Direction regarding policy comes from elected leadership and the City's administrative structure.

My responsibility is to implement that direction professionally while ensuring operational decisions remain grounded in industry best practices, legal requirements, firefighter safety, and community needs.

When concerns arise, I believe they should be addressed early, honestly, and collaboratively. I don't believe in allowing problems to become crises through lack of communication.

My approach is simple: no surprises.

Whether communicating with the Mayor, City Council, labor leadership, or employees, transparency and proactive communication build trust and ultimately lead to better outcomes.

b) What factors do you believe are critical to building and maintaining a productive working relationship with the City Council? Describe your approach and experience communicating on significant issues, responding to Council concerns, and balancing policy direction with your professional judgment on operations.

Strong relationships between a Fire Chief and City Council are built on trust, credibility, transparency, and mutual respect.

I recognize that Council Members bring different experiences, represent different communities, and may have different priorities. My responsibility is not to persuade them politically but to provide objective professional expertise that helps inform sound policy decisions.

That means being accessible, responsive, and prepared.

Council Members should never have to wonder whether they will receive timely information or honest answers from their Fire Chief.

Throughout my career, I have regularly presented budgets, strategic plans, operational reports, accreditation efforts, emergency management updates, and significant policy initiatives before elected officials. I've learned that difficult conversations become much easier when relationships are built before challenges arise.

When responding to Council concerns, I begin by listening carefully to understand both the question being asked and the underlying concern. I then provide factual information, explain operational implications, identify available options, and offer my professional recommendation while recognizing that policy decisions ultimately belong to elected leadership.

There may be occasions when my professional recommendation differs from the policy direction adopted by the City. When that occurs, I believe my responsibility is to respectfully provide my best professional advice, ensure decision-makers understand the operational impacts, and then faithfully implement lawful policy decisions once they are made.

That approach preserves both professional integrity and respect for democratic governance.

c) How can the City Council better support this role and department?

The most valuable support the City Council can provide is a strong partnership built on communication, shared understanding, and mutual trust.

Public safety is one of the City's most visible and essential responsibilities. Maintaining excellence requires consistent investment, not only in apparatus and facilities, but in people, training, technology, wellness, and leadership development.

I believe the Council can best support the department by continuing to engage with firefighters, visiting stations, understanding operational realities, and maintaining open dialogue with department leadership throughout the year, not solely during budget season or in response to emergencies.

I also believe stability is important.

Transformational organizational improvements take time. Whether improving recruitment, enhancing firefighter wellness, modernizing technology, implementing strategic initiatives, or strengthening community partnerships, sustainable progress requires consistency and long-term commitment.

Finally, I would encourage continued candid dialogue. I welcome difficult questions because accountability strengthens public confidence.

If confirmed, my commitment is that the Council will always receive honest assessments, thoughtful recommendations, and transparent communication from me—even when the conversations are challenging.

Together, I believe we can continue building a fire department that reflects the values of Minneapolis while providing exceptional service to every resident.

Throughout my career, I have viewed the relationship between the Fire Chief and elected officials as a partnership rooted in mutual respect. The Council establishes policy and represents the voice of the community. My responsibility is to bring professional expertise, operational transparency, and honest advice to that partnership. When we each fulfill our respective roles with integrity and respect, the greatest beneficiaries are the residents of Minneapolis and the dedicated members of the Minneapolis Fire Department.

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DEPARTMENT SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you believe are the biggest challenges the Minneapolis Fire Department (MFD) is currently facing? How do you plan to address and overcome these challenges?

Response

From my perspective, some of the biggest challenges that MFD is currently facing includes recruitment and staffing, health & wellness and strengthening organizational alignment. I would overcome these issues by being very intentional, listening before I lead, Build a shared strategic vision / direction and invest into our people while maintaining accountability.

- 2) Recognizing current economic challenges, and their potential to impact operational budgets, how do you prioritize the work of MFD to balance resources with the demand for emergency services?

Response

I believe every Fire Chief has two equally important responsibilities: protecting public safety and being a responsible steward of public resources. Those responsibilities are not in conflict, they reinforce one another.

Economic conditions will inevitably change, but our commitment to protecting lives and property cannot. That means we must continually evaluate how we deliver services and ensure every dollar invested in the Minneapolis Fire Department advances our mission.

My approach begins by identifying and protecting the department's core mission. Life safety, firefighter safety, emergency response readiness, and operational reliability are non-negotiable. Those priorities remain protected even during periods of fiscal constraint.

Beyond that, I rely on data and performance analysis to guide decisions rather than assumptions. We should regularly evaluate response times, call demand, deployment models, overtime trends, apparatus utilization, facility needs, staffing patterns, and community risk. Those metrics help us determine where resources are producing the greatest value and where opportunities for improvement exist.

I also believe fiscal challenges should encourage innovation rather than simply reductions. Throughout my career, I've learned that some of the best improvements emerge when organizations challenge long-standing practices and look for more effective ways to accomplish their mission. That may include improving business processes, leveraging technology, expanding community risk reduction initiatives, strengthening partnerships with other agencies, pursuing grant opportunities, or identifying operational efficiencies that maintain, or even improve, service levels.

At the same time, I am careful not to pursue short-term savings that create long-term costs. Deferred maintenance, delayed equipment replacement, reductions in training, or underinvestment in firefighter wellness may appear fiscally prudent today but often result in greater operational and financial consequences in the future.

I also believe transparency is essential. During periods of financial pressure, employees, elected officials, and the public deserve to understand the decisions being made, the rationale behind them, and the anticipated impacts. That openness builds trust and fosters shared ownership of difficult decisions.

Ultimately, my philosophy is to balance resources through strategic prioritization, not across-the-board reductions. Every budget decision should answer one fundamental question:

Does this help us deliver safer, more effective, and more reliable service to the residents of Minneapolis?

If the answer is yes, it deserves serious consideration. If the answer is no, we should carefully evaluate whether those resources can be better aligned with our mission.

3) What is the role of MFD in the City's larger public safety ecosystem? How will you manage communication and collaboration efforts across internal and external partner agencies?

Response

The Minneapolis Fire Department is an essential component of the City's larger public safety ecosystem. Its role extends well beyond fire suppression. MFD provides emergency medical response, technical rescue, hazardous-materials response, fire prevention, community risk reduction, disaster preparedness, and support during complex incidents that require a coordinated citywide response.

Because firefighters and paramedics respond throughout the city every day, MFD is often the first point of contact between residents and the public safety system. That gives the department both an operational responsibility and a unique opportunity to identify emerging risks, connect residents with appropriate services, and help prevent future emergencies.

However, no single department can independently address every condition that affects public safety. Effective service requires strong coordination with the Office of Community Safety, Police Department, Emergency Management, 911, public health, hospitals, regulatory services, public works, housing, transportation, schools, regional fire and EMS agencies, labor partners, and community organizations.

My role as Fire Chief would be to ensure that MFD is a dependable, informed, and solutions-oriented partner within that system.

My approach to communication and collaboration would be built around four principles.

Establish clear roles and expectations

Effective partnerships begin with clarity. During routine operations and major emergencies, each agency must understand its responsibilities, decision-making authority, communication channels, and operational limitations.

I would work with internal and external partners to review mutual-aid agreements, emergency operating plans, incident-command procedures, information-sharing protocols, and agency responsibilities. When an emergency occurs, that work should already have been completed. A crisis is not the time to exchange business cards or determine who is responsible for what.

Build relationships before they are tested

Interagency trust must be developed during normal operations, not only during emergencies.

I would establish regular communication with the leaders of partner departments and agencies, participate actively in citywide public safety planning, and ensure MFD is represented in discussions that affect emergency response, community safety, infrastructure, public health, and resilience.

I also believe relationships must extend below the executive level. Senior leaders, field supervisors, dispatch personnel, emergency managers, investigators, and frontline responders should have opportunities to train and plan together. Operational collaboration is strongest when relationships exist throughout each organization.

Communicate consistently and share information responsibly

Good decisions require timely, accurate, and relevant information. I would promote disciplined information-sharing before, during, and after significant incidents while respecting legal, operational, and privacy requirements.

Internally, MFD personnel should understand emerging risks, City priorities, and changes affecting their work. Externally, our partners should receive the information they need to coordinate resources and make informed decisions.

During significant emergencies, communication should be organized through established incident-command and emergency-management structures so the City speaks with accuracy, consistency, and one coordinated voice.

Learn together and continuously improve

After major incidents, exercises, or complex multiagency operations, I believe in conducting candid after-action reviews. The purpose is not to assign blame. It is to identify what worked, what did not, and what must improve before the next incident.

Those reviews should result in clear corrective actions, responsible owners, measurable deadlines, and follow-through. Lessons identified only become lessons learned when they produce changes in training, policy, equipment, communication, or operational practice.

My experience in fire service leadership and emergency management has taught me that successful collaboration depends on relationships, preparedness, disciplined communication, and mutual respect. Each agency brings a distinct mission and professional expertise, but residents experience public safety as one interconnected City system.

My expectation would be that MFD remains confident in its responsibilities, respectful of the responsibilities of its partners, and fully committed to coordinated problem-solving.

Ultimately, the public should not have to navigate organizational boundaries during an emergency. They should experience a public safety system that is prepared, connected, responsive, and focused on achieving the best possible outcome.

The Minneapolis Fire Department must be more than an excellent emergency response agency. It must be a trusted partner in prevention, public health, emergency preparedness, community resilience, and coordinated public safety. My responsibility as Fire Chief will be to ensure MFD brings operational competence, clear communication, and a spirit of partnership to every table where the safety and well-being of Minneapolis residents are being addressed.

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- 4) What are some potential strategies you would pursue to reduce increasing overtime expenses while also accounting for the demands related to response times – or are the two items inseparably linked?

Response

Overtime expenses and response-time performance are related, but they are not necessarily inseparable.

In a fire department, some overtime is unavoidable and operationally appropriate. It may be necessary to maintain minimum staffing, fill vacancies, cover long-term absences, support major incidents, conduct mandatory training, or respond to extraordinary events. The goal should not be to eliminate overtime indiscriminately. The goal should be to distinguish necessary overtime from overtime generated by correctable staffing, scheduling, administrative, or operational conditions.

I would begin with a comprehensive analysis of what is driving the overtime. We should

understand how much is associated with vacancies, unscheduled leave, injuries, training, special events, callback procedures, deployment practices, minimum staffing requirements, and other recurring conditions. Without that level of analysis, broad reductions could create unintended consequences for firefighter safety and community service.

Several strategies could then be considered.

Stabilize authorized staffing

Persistent vacancies often create recurring overtime. A strong recruitment and retention strategy is therefore also an overtime-management strategy.

I would evaluate hiring timelines, academy frequency, attrition trends, retirement projections, promotional vacancies, and the time required to move candidates from application to deployment. The department should maintain a staffing pipeline that anticipates foreseeable losses instead of reacting after vacancies have already affected daily operations.

At the same time, authorized staffing levels must be evaluated against actual service demand. If the department routinely depends on overtime to meet its established minimum staffing, that may indicate a structural issue rather than simply a spending issue.

Improve workforce forecasting

Overtime should be monitored prospectively, not only reviewed after it has been spent.

I would use historical leave patterns, anticipated retirements, injury trends, training schedules, major events, and seasonal demand to forecast staffing pressures. Early forecasting allows the department to adjust academy planning, leave approvals, training schedules, temporary assignments, and other operational decisions before overtime becomes excessive.

Senior leaders should receive regular overtime reports showing expenditures, projected year-end costs, organizational drivers, and corrective actions.

Evaluate scheduling and deployment practices

Scheduling arrangements should be reviewed collaboratively to determine whether existing practices continue to support operational efficiency, employee wellness, and reliable coverage.

That review could include relief-factor assumptions, vacancy-filling procedures, callback processes, specialty-team coverage, shift trades, holdovers, leave practices, and how personnel are assigned across divisions.

Any changes affecting represented employees must be approached in partnership with labor and in accordance with collective bargaining obligations. The objective should be to identify mutually beneficial improvements rather than treating labor costs as an adversarial issue.

Reduce preventable injuries and absences

Firefighter injuries, occupational illness, and behavioral-health challenges can create significant operational disruption and overtime.

Investments in injury prevention, physical readiness, cancer-risk reduction, behavioral health, early intervention, return-to-work programs, and employee wellness can reduce long-term personnel costs while supporting our workforce.

That is an example of why short-term budget reductions can sometimes increase long-term expenses. Eliminating preventive programs may produce immediate savings but contribute to greater overtime, workers' compensation, and disability costs later.

Schedule training strategically

Training is essential and should never be treated as optional. However, it should be planned in a way that minimizes unnecessary backfill and disruption.

I would evaluate whether required training can be delivered through improved scheduling, regional partnerships, technology-assisted instruction, train-the-trainer models, or other approaches that maintain quality while reducing unnecessary overtime.

The same analysis should apply to administrative assignments, special projects, and events that remove personnel from normal deployment.

Strengthen accountability and financial controls

Overtime must be actively managed at every leadership level.

Command officers and division leaders should understand their overtime budgets, document significant variances, and identify corrective actions. Large or recurring expenditures should receive appropriate review, but the process must still allow operational leaders to respond rapidly when public safety requires it.

Accountability should focus on patterns and root causes, not on discouraging supervisors from making necessary staffing decisions during emergencies.

Protect response capability

Any overtime-reduction strategy must be evaluated against response times, unit availability, community risk, mutual-aid dependency, firefighter fatigue, and operational resilience.

Reducing overtime by regularly placing units out of service, operating below safe staffing, or delaying responses would not represent responsible financial management. It would simply transfer financial pressure into operational risk.

Therefore, I would use data to model the consequences of proposed changes before implementing them. That includes examining call volume, unit-hour utilization, concurrent incidents, travel time, station coverage, peak demand, and neighborhood-level risk.

Overtime should be treated as both a financial indicator and an operational indicator. Rising overtime may reflect inefficient practices, but it may also signal vacancies, inadequate relief staffing, increasing service demand, employee injuries, or a mismatch between authorized staffing and operational expectations.

My approach would be to protect minimum staffing and response capability while aggressively addressing avoidable overtime through workforce stabilization, forecasting, prevention, scheduling, collaboration, and accountability.

The ultimate objective is not simply to lower an overtime line item. It is to develop a sustainable staffing and deployment model that protects firefighters, maintains dependable response times, and provides the greatest possible value to Minneapolis residents.

Overtime and response times are connected, but they should not be viewed as an automatic tradeoff. With disciplined analysis and responsible workforce planning, we can reduce avoidable overtime while protecting operational readiness. I will never pursue financial savings that compromise firefighter safety or the community's access to timely emergency service.

5) What is the role of pathway programs for MFD's recruitment and hiring practices – including efforts to attract a wider range of candidates?

Response

I believe pathway programs are one of the most important long-term investments a fire department can make in its workforce.

Recruitment should not begin when a vacancy occurs, it should begin years before someone ever submits an application. If we want to build a sustainable workforce, we must intentionally cultivate interest in the fire service, prepare qualified candidates, and ensure talented individuals understand that a career with the Minneapolis Fire Department is both attainable and meaningful.

Pathway programs allow us to expand opportunity while maintaining the high professional standards our community expects.

That means introducing young people to the fire service through Explorer and Cadet programs, partnering with Minneapolis Public Schools, community colleges, universities, military transition programs, EMS education programs, and community-based organizations. It also means offering mentorship, physical readiness guidance, interview preparation, and clear information about the

hiring process so qualified candidates are not discouraged by unfamiliarity with the profession.

I also believe recruitment should reflect the communities we serve. Minneapolis is a diverse city, and we should ensure that people from every neighborhood, background, and life experience are aware of the opportunities available within MFD. The goal is to widened the pipeline of qualified applicants and remove unnecessary barriers that may prevent talented individuals from pursuing the profession.

Once people are hired, the pathway continues.

Successful recruitment is incomplete without strong onboarding, field training, mentorship, leadership development, and career progression. We should invest in employees throughout their careers so they have opportunities to grow into company officers, chief officers, instructors, technical specialists, and future organizational leaders.

Throughout my career, I have found that the strongest organizations are those that view workforce development as a continuous process rather than a hiring event.

I also believe recruitment is everyone's responsibility, not just the Human Resources Division. Every firefighter, company officer, and chief officer should serve as an ambassador for the profession. The way we treat one another, the culture we create, and the pride we demonstrate in our work are often our most effective recruitment tools.

Ultimately, pathway programs help accomplish three important objectives.

First, they strengthen the department's long-term workforce by creating a predictable pipeline of qualified candidates.

Second, they broaden awareness and opportunity so individuals who may never have considered a fire service career can see themselves serving the City of Minneapolis.

Third, they reinforce public trust by demonstrating that MFD is committed to developing exceptional professionals who reflect the values of service, integrity, excellence, and inclusion.

6) MFD currently operates out of facilities across the City, including 19 fire stations. How do you effectively oversee and manage workforce culture, needs assessments, training opportunities, and employee support programming across all of these locations?

Response

Managing a department that operates from 19 fire stations and multiple support facilities requires more than centralized policies. It requires a leadership system that is visible, consistent, responsive, and connected to the daily experiences of employees throughout the organization.

My approach would be based on four principles: presence, communication, empowered leadership, and measurable accountability.

Maintain a consistent leadership presence

As Fire Chief, I believe it is important to be visible throughout the organization.

I would regularly visit stations, training facilities, administrative divisions, and support units, not only during formal events, but during normal operations. Station visits provide an opportunity to listen directly to team members, understand working conditions, recognize strong performance, and identify concerns before they become larger problems.

However, workforce engagement cannot depend solely on the Fire Chief's visits. Deputy chiefs, battalion chiefs, company officers, and division leaders must also be present, accessible, and actively engaged with their personnel.

Team members should experience leadership as something that is consistently available, not something that appears only when there is a problem.

Establish consistent expectations across every location

Each fire station will naturally develop its own identity, but every location must operate within one departmental culture.

Team members should receive the same expectations regarding professionalism, safety, respectful conduct, accountability, training, communication, and service, regardless of assignment, shift, rank, or station.

Consistency is especially important in a geographically dispersed organization. When standards are applied differently across stations or shifts, trust deteriorates and informal cultures can replace organizational values.

My responsibility is to clearly define expectations and ensure leaders at every level apply them fairly and consistently.

Use structured needs assessments

Station and workforce needs should be identified through both data and direct team member input.

I would establish a regular process to assess:

- Facility condition and maintenance needs.

- Apparatus and equipment readiness.
- Staffing and workload.
- Training deficiencies.
- Health, wellness, and behavioral health needs.
- Technology and communication requirements.
- Workplace culture and employee concerns.

Some of that information will come through inspections, performance data, safety reports, injury trends, training records, and facility assessments. Other important information will come from station visits, team member surveys, labor-management discussions, listening sessions, and direct feedback.

The key is not only collecting information, but establishing a transparent process for prioritizing and responding to identified needs. Team members should know that concerns are documented, evaluated, assigned, and followed through to resolution.

Deliver equitable and accessible training

Training opportunities must be consistent across stations, shifts, ranks, and assignments.

I would expect the department to maintain a comprehensive training plan based on operational risk, regulatory requirements, performance gaps, emerging threats, and employee development needs.

Training should include company-level drills, multi-company exercises, command development, technical rescue, EMS competencies, leadership education, safety training, and professional development.

Because employees work different shifts and assignments, training delivery must be designed so access does not depend on where someone is assigned or who their supervisor happens to be.

Technology-assisted learning can support consistency, but it should complement, not replace, hands-on training, coaching, and realistic operational exercises.

I would also hold leaders accountable for maintaining training standards and developing their personnel. Training is not solely the responsibility of a training division; it is a fundamental responsibility of every officer.

Provide reliable team member support

Employee support programs must be visible, trusted, accessible, and confidential where appropriate.

That includes behavioral health resources, peer support, chaplain services, occupational health, cancer-prevention initiatives, injury prevention, physical fitness, family support, and return-to-work programs.

It is not enough for these resources to exist on paper. Employees must understand how to access them, trust that using them will not create stigma, and see senior leaders actively supporting their use.

Company officers and chief officers should also be trained to recognize when employees may need assistance and understand how to connect them with appropriate resources without attempting to become clinicians themselves.

Empower leaders while maintaining accountability

A department operating across 19 stations cannot be managed effectively through the Fire Chief's office alone.

I believe strongly in empowering leaders at every rank. Battalion chiefs and company officers are essential to culture, communication, performance, and employee support because they are closest to the workforce.

Empowerment, however, must be accompanied by accountability.

Leaders should be evaluated not only on emergency operations, but also on how they communicate, develop personnel, address workplace issues, support employee wellness, maintain training readiness, and uphold departmental values.

My expectation would be that every leader understands that culture is part of their operational responsibility.

Create dependable communication systems

In a distributed organization, employees should not receive critical information differently based on their station or shift.

I would establish multiple communication channels, including command briefings, written updates, station-level discussions, labor-management meetings, digital communication platforms, and opportunities for direct employee feedback.

Communication must also move in both directions. Senior leadership should communicate priorities and decisions clearly, while employees must have credible ways to raise concerns, suggest improvements, and receive responses.

That two-way communication helps prevent misinformation, builds trust, and creates greater organizational alignment.

Measure progress

Finally, I would evaluate whether these strategies are working.

Measures could include team member-engagement results, training completion, injury and illness trends, overtime patterns, grievance and complaint patterns, promotional development, retention, facility work-order completion, and utilization of support resources.

Data will not tell us everything about culture, but it can help us identify patterns, disparities, and areas requiring leadership attention.

The greatest risk in a geographically dispersed department is allowing distance to create inconsistency, isolation, or unequal access to resources.

My responsibility as Fire Chief would be to ensure every team member, regardless of station, shift, rank, or assignment, experiences the same commitment to safety, development, support, accountability, and respect.

Nineteen stations should not function as 19 separate organizations. Each station may have its own history and identity, but every employee must be connected to one mission, one set of values, and one standard of excellence. That requires visible leadership, empowered officers, consistent communication, equitable access to resources, and accountability throughout the chain of command.

7) What strategies or community engagement opportunities can MFD utilize to build relationships and trust with City residents?

Response

I believe trust is earned long before a resident calls 911.

While emergency response will always be our core mission, the Minneapolis Fire Department has an opportunity to build relationships every day through prevention, education, visibility, and meaningful community engagement. The strongest public safety organizations are not only responsive during emergencies, they are present, accessible, and trusted before emergencies occur.

My philosophy is that community engagement should be intentional, continuous, and integrated into the department's daily work rather than viewed as a separate program.

There are several strategies I believe are particularly important.

Be present in the community

People are more likely to trust an organization they know.

I would encourage firefighters and department leadership to participate regularly in

neighborhood meetings, community events, school programs, open houses, youth activities, senior outreach, cultural celebrations, business associations, and public safety forums.

Those interactions allow residents to see firefighters not only as emergency responders but as partners invested in the well-being of their neighborhoods.

Community engagement should occur throughout all areas of Minneapolis and reflect the diversity of the city we serve.

Focus on community risk reduction

One of the greatest opportunities to strengthen trust is helping people avoid emergencies altogether.

Community risk reduction includes smoke alarm installation, home safety assessments, fall prevention, CPR and AED education, youth fire-setting intervention, wildfire and severe weather preparedness where appropriate, and fire safety education for businesses, schools, apartment residents, and community organizations.

When residents see the department actively working to prevent emergencies rather than simply responding to them, trust naturally grows.

Build partnerships rather than programs

No department can meet every community need alone.

I would strengthen partnerships with neighborhood organizations, schools, healthcare providers, faith-based organizations, nonprofit agencies, business leaders, housing organizations, emergency management partners, and other City departments.

These partnerships improve communication, expand our reach, and allow the department to better understand the unique needs of different communities.

The objective is not simply to inform residents, it is to listen and collaborate with them.

Make leadership visible and accessible

Community trust begins with accessible leadership.

As Fire Chief, I would make it a priority to attend community meetings, visit neighborhoods, participate in public events, and remain approachable to residents, employees, and community leaders.

People deserve opportunities to ask questions, raise concerns, and hear directly from department leadership.

Listening is one of the most important leadership responsibilities. Effective engagement is a dialogue, not simply a presentation.

Communicate proactively

During emergencies, residents expect timely and accurate information. Between emergencies, they deserve transparency about department priorities, initiatives, accomplishments, and challenges.

I believe MFD should continue to use multiple communication channels, including social media, community meetings, traditional media, multilingual outreach, neighborhood newsletters, and the City's communication platforms, to ensure information reaches all communities.

Effective communication also means explaining why decisions are made, not simply announcing them.

Transparency strengthens credibility, particularly during periods of organizational change or significant incidents.

Engage our youth

One of the most meaningful long-term investments we can make is introducing young people to the fire service.

School visits, Explorer and Cadet programs, career days, mentoring opportunities, CPR education, and youth leadership initiatives not only improve public safety but also inspire future firefighters, paramedics, and community leaders.

These programs strengthen both community relationships and the department's long-term recruitment efforts.

Measure success by outcomes, not attendance

Successful community engagement should be evaluated by its impact.

I would want the department to assess whether our efforts improve public awareness, increase participation in prevention programs, strengthen recruitment, reduce preventable incidents, and enhance public confidence.

We should seek regular feedback from residents and community partners to ensure our engagement strategies remain responsive to community needs.

Ultimately, trust cannot be built solely during emergencies.

It is built through thousands of everyday interactions, how we communicate, how we treat people, whether we follow through on our commitments, and whether residents believe their fire

department genuinely cares about their safety and quality of life.

My goal is to ensure the Minneapolis Fire Department is recognized not only for operational excellence, but also as one of the City's most trusted and engaged public institutions.

I believe the fire service holds a unique place in every community. Firefighters are consistently among the most trusted public servants in our nation, and with that trust comes a responsibility to be present, accessible, compassionate, and accountable. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that every interaction between the Minneapolis Fire Department and our residents strengthens that trust and reflects our unwavering commitment to service.

8) In addition to what you have already shared - can you identify any additional areas of opportunities or challenges that you believe are important for the City Council to recognize?

Response

Thank you for the question.

While I have spent considerable time learning about Minneapolis and the Fire Department, I also recognize that my understanding will continue to grow through listening to team members, labor leadership, elected officials, community members, and our public safety partners.

That said, I believe there are several broader opportunities that are important for all of us to consider.

Preparing for the future of emergency services

The fire service is changing rapidly.

Across the country, fire departments are responding to increasing medical calls, behavioral health emergencies, climate-related events, technological hazards, aging infrastructure, and growing community expectations. Success will require us to continually adapt our training, deployment strategies, technology, and community risk-reduction efforts.

My goal is not simply to manage today's operations, but to ensure Minneapolis is prepared for the public safety challenges of the next decade.

Investing in leadership development

Every organization is only as strong as its leaders.

One of my highest priorities will be developing leaders at every rank, not just chief officers, but company officers, acting officers, firefighters, civilian professionals, and future leaders throughout the organization.

Succession planning cannot begin when someone retires. It must become part of our organizational culture.

Strong leadership creates stronger decision-making, healthier workplace culture, greater accountability, and ultimately better service to our residents.

Supporting firefighter health and wellness

Our firefighters respond to people on the worst days of their lives, often while carrying extraordinary physical and emotional burdens themselves.

Investments in behavioral health, cancer prevention, physical readiness, peer support, and overall wellness are not employee benefits alone, they are operational investments that improve readiness, reduce injuries, enhance retention, and strengthen long-term organizational performance.

Healthy firefighters provide better service to the community.

Leveraging technology and data

Technology should never replace good leadership, but it should enhance informed decision-making.

The department has opportunities to continue using performance analytics, deployment modeling, community risk assessments, predictive planning, and modern technology to improve response capabilities, allocate resources more effectively, and identify emerging trends before they become larger operational challenges.

My leadership philosophy has always been to pair experience with evidence.

Continuing to strengthen organizational culture

Perhaps the greatest opportunity is culture.

Facilities can be modernized.

Apparatus can be replaced.

Technology can be upgraded.

But culture determines whether an organization reaches its full potential.

I believe the Minneapolis Fire Department already has exceptional people and a proud history. My responsibility is to help cultivate a culture where people feel respected, developed, accountable, empowered, and united around a shared mission of serving this community.

When organizational culture is healthy, performance, innovation, recruitment, retention, and public trust all improve.

Building long-term stability

Finally, transformational improvements require consistency.

Whether we are improving recruitment, modernizing equipment, developing leaders, investing in wellness, or strengthening community partnerships, meaningful progress occurs over years, not months.

I hope to work closely with the Mayor, the City Council, our labor partners, and our employees to establish a shared vision that extends beyond any single budget cycle or administration.

That long-term perspective will position the Minneapolis Fire Department to continue serving this community with excellence for generations to come.

If confirmed, my commitment is to lead with integrity, transparency, humility, and accountability.

I believe leadership begins with listening, is sustained through trust, and is measured by the positive impact we leave on the people and communities we serve.

My goal is simple:

To leave the Minneapolis Fire Department stronger than I found it; to develop the next generation of leaders; to be a responsible steward of public resources; and to ensure every resident of Minneapolis receives exceptional, compassionate, and professional service when they need us most.

Thank you again for your time, your thoughtful questions, and the opportunity to share with you more insight about my character and personality. It would be an honor and a privilege to serve as the next Fire Chief of the Minneapolis Fire Department.

