

CITY OF TAFT



Photo provided by Grand Jury

PREFACE:

Although small in size and population, the City of Taft has made an indelible cultural mark on Kern County. Taft's oil legacy is well documented and dates back over 100 years. Several movies have been filmed in Taft, which include *Thelma & Louise*, *Attack of the 50 Foot Women* and *The Best of Times*. Additionally, the football rivalry between Taft Community College and Bakersfield Community College was huge. Taft's football program was cancelled 25 years ago, and they still lament its loss.

Today, Taft boasts a stable infrastructure, a committed City Council and solid leadership.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

The Cities and Joint Powers Committee (Committee) of the 2018-2019 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) visited the City of Taft (City) on February 14, 2019, to inquire into the operations and management of the City pursuant to California Penal Code §925a.

PROCESS:

The Committee met with the City Manager, Director of Planning, Finance Director, Municipal Records/Grant Administrator and the Chief of Police. The meeting was held at City Hall located at 209 East Kern Street, Taft, CA 93268. In addition, the Committee researched information on the internet and reviewed public documents.

BACKGROUND:

Taft is located in the foothills approximately 30 miles southwest of Bakersfield. The City was originally called "Siding Number Two" by the Sunset Railroad in the early 1900s. The name Moron was also used to refer to Taft until a fire burned down much of the town. In 1909, the City's name was changed to Taft in honor of the 27th President of the United States.

Taft is situated in a major petroleum and natural gas production region in California. It is one of the few remaining towns in the United States which exist exclusively because of nearby oil reserves. In celebration of its oil heritage, Taft holds its "Oildorado" festival every five years. Oildorado began in 1930.

The City, which has experienced ups and downs due to the boom and bust cycles of the oil industry, has recently experienced new development and business growth:

- A three-story, 70-room Best Western Plus Taft Inn
- A craft brewery, Black Gold Brewing Company, in the historic downtown on Center Street
- The reopening of the historic Taft Fox Theater
- The opening of a new bar and grill called The Bank in the historic Taft State Bank Building
- A new Taco Bell restaurant
- Many more "mom and pop" small businesses

The City owns a 46-acre former Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad property in the center of town featuring the West Kern Oil Worker's Monument; a 37 foot (11 m) world-class, all bronze, sculpture depicting several human figures displayed on an oil derrick by artist Benjamin Victor. The monument was paid for with donations from local residents, visitors and oil companies. The railroad property is part of a redevelopment project that the City is using to attract new businesses, housing and commercial office space.

FACTS:

- A. The City population is approximately 9,425, which includes 582 inmates at the Taft Modified Community Correctional Facility (MCCF).
- B. There are two prisons within the City limits, the MCCF and the Taft Federal Prison. In June 2018, the City renewed a five-year contract with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation for the MCCF.
- C. For fiscal year 2018-2019, fire protection services were contracted with the Kern County Fire Department for \$556,470.
- D. For fiscal year 2018-2019, trash disposal was contracted with Westside Waste Management for \$347,980.
- E. The City's governing body is composed of five council members elected by city voters. The City Council meets twice a month. The agenda is posted on the City Hall bulletin board and the City website.

FINDINGS:

- F1. The City's approved budget for 2018-2019 is \$8.1 million.
- F2. The City has 129 full time and 21 part time employees:
 - Administrative Employees
 - 16 full time
 - 1 part time
 - Taft Police Department (TPD)
 - 15 sworn Peace Officers
 - 11 full time Support Staff
 - 1 part time Support Staff
 - MCCF
 - 52 full time Correction Officers
 - 20 part time Support Staff
 - Public Works Employees
 - 9 full time
 - 6 part time
 - Transit Employees
 - 5 full time
 - 2 part time
- F3. Crime increased 13% over the past three years. Larceny is the most common crime in the City followed by aggravated assault and stolen vehicles. Simple assault and burglary declined from last year.

- F4. The Taft City Council utilizes an “At Large” form of representation with no plans to change to a “District” format.
- F5. Taft Police Chief and City Officials strongly disagree with the recent federal study stating Taft is one of the fifty most dangerous cities in the country.
- F6. In 2018, the TPD incorporated the use of two drones that work in conjunction with Kern County Sheriff’s Department.
- F7. The main sources of income are from sales tax, followed by property taxes and state and federal grants.
- F8. In 2013, the City initiated the “Silent Second” mortgage assistance program, which assists first time homebuyers in purchasing a home by offering a second mortgage at zero percent interest. To date, 13 homes have been financed.
- F9. The City is in its first year of a three-year study to analyze retail strategies. The City hired a private consulting company at a cost of \$45,000 per year to assist in attracting new retail businesses.
- F10. In an effort at transparency, the City maintains a local TV channel to broadcast City Council meetings. The City contracted with a cable provider to enhance their transmission feed.
- F11. Few City Officials were familiar with the *Lean Six Sigma* program. After the Committee explained this cost saving program, the City Manager was open to participating.
- F12. The City benefits from an experienced leadership team:
- City Manager - 7 years; 21 years working for the City
 - Director of Planning and Development - 5 years
 - Assistant to the City Manager - 7 years
 - Chief of Police (previously retired from the Kern County Sheriff’s Department) - 11 months as Chief; 8 years with the TPD
 - City Clerk - 5 years
 - Finance Director - 15.5 years
- F13. The City has no plans to annex Ford City or the City of Maricopa because of the tremendous investment needed to update the infrastructure. Property tax revenues from these cities would not cover the infrastructure costs needed for additional City services.
- F14. The City’s financial statement has not been updated since June 2017.

- F15. The City organized the Community Planning Assistance Team (C-PAT), in association with America Planning Association, to conduct focus group and work sessions with downtown business owners to identify what it takes to operate a business in Taft.
- F16. The City recently completed a \$2.5 million public transit project. The Transit Center is available for rent and has become a popular venue for weddings and special events.



Photo provided by Grand Jury

COMMENTS:

The Grand Jury would like to thank the Taft City Manager and Staff for their information and cooperation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- R1. In order to avoid possible litigation, and bring about a more fair form of representation, the City should reconsider transitioning from an “At Large” to a “District” form of representation. (Finding 4)
- R2. City Officials should learn more about the cost saving program, *Lean Six Sigma*, and consider implementing it. (Finding 11)
- R3. The City’s Fiscal Year End (June 30, 2018) financial statement should be completed prior to June 30, 2019. (Finding 14)

NOTES:

- The City of Taft should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: www.kerncounty.com/grandjury.
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: www.kerncounty.com/grandjury.

RESPONSE REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS, TO:

**PRESIDING JUDGE
KERN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**

**CC: FOREPERSON
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**