

# CITY OF TAFT



## **PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:**

The Cities and Joint Powers Committee (Committee) of the 2016-2017 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) inspected the City of Taft (City) on November 17, 2016, 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 Human Resources, Municipal Recorder and other City officials. 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:**

The City of Taft is located approximately 30 miles southwest of Bakersfield, California. The name was in honor of the 27<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, William Howard Taft.

As noted on the plaque by Victor Killingsworth at the Oil Workers Monument:

*“When the news spread that oil had been discovered in the San Joaquin Valley of California, young men responded from all parts of our nation. They came from the farms of Missouri and Kansas, the ranches of Texas, the hills of West Virginia and the mines of Pennsylvania. They were strong and rugged men, unskilled in their new jobs, but from these men came new ideas and innovation. They toiled in dangerous and dirty conditions with temperatures sometimes reaching over 120 degrees in the summer. There were no hard hats or other safety equipment that we use today. From these oil fields men took the ideas and technology around the world.”*

As noted on the plaque by Pete Gianopulos at the Oil Workers Monument:

*“In 2010 Taft celebrated its 100 year anniversary. Taft got its start when the railroad laid tracks to Taft and beyond. Siding Number Two was where it all started along the tracks in the vicinity of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Supply Row. Railroad cars were being unloaded with supplies for the rapidly expanding oil production for miles along what was called the Midway-Sunset Oil Field. Buildings began springing up, followed by houses, businesses, schools, and everything needed for a progressive city to start itself. Electricity and a water supply were brought in. The voters approved incorporation and Taft became a city on November 7, 1910. The railroad began subdividing, installing streets, sidewalks, gutters, and curbs. The city of Taft was taking shape. The downtown area was flooded with workers at all hours of the day, working 12-hour shifts. It is said Taft resembled a mining town that never slept. Those were the good times and the good times have never stopped.”*

## **FACTS:**

- A. The population of the City is approximately 9,100, which includes 585 inmates at the Taft Modified Community Correctional Facility (MCCF). The City is composed of 60% White, 35% Hispanic and 5% other.
- B. There are two prisons in Taft: MCCF, owned and operated by the City, and Taft Federal Prison. The MCCF current contract with the California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation ends June 30, 2018.
- C. The MCCF has approximately 77 staff members, which includes Correctional Officers, Teachers, Nurses, and a contracted Doctor and Dentist. The MCCF is administered by the Taft Police Department.

- D. The Taft Police Department has 16 sworn officers, an Animal Control Technician, five dispatchers and a temporary janitor.
- E. The City's governing body is composed of five council members, elected by residents. The City Council meetings are held twice monthly. The agenda is posted on the City Hall bulletin board and on the City website. The City Manager is hired by the City Council. The City has 137 full time employees, including a Municipal Record/Grant Administrator.
- F. Fire protection services are contracted with the Kern County Fire Department. Trash disposal is contracted with a private company, Westside Waste Management.
- G. Parks and Recreation facilities are managed by the Westside Recreation and Park District.

## **FINDINGS:**

- F1. The City Budget is seven million dollars a year. Revenue from the MCCF contract is approximately two million dollars a year which represents the cost of Police and Fire services.
- F2. Future single-home development plans will include biking and walking paths.
- F3. A contract with Habitat for Humanity concerning two city-owned infill lots provides plans to construct homes for qualified low income families. To qualify, applicants must have a job, meet credit qualifications, and take a two hour education course. Part of the assistance is a "Silent Second" mortgage. If the homeowner defaults, the City will assume the second mortgage.
- F4. The City has a Community Development Block Grant, funding a housing rehabilitation program for low-income homeowners. This grant has committed over \$200,000 to housing rehabilitation since 2015. In 2014, a HOME Investment Partnerships grant for first-time homebuyers became available under the First Time Home Buyers Down Payment Assistance Program. This program allows the City to assist income qualified homebuyers to purchase their first home in Taft.
- F5. The City Manager stated that an analysis by ConsumerAffairs.com indicates Taft is among the safest cities in the United States. The Taft Police Department has a website containing patrol reporting statistics listing crime incidents. Security cameras have been installed on City busses, walking paths, monuments, skateboard park, and City Hall.

- F6. On May 23, 2016, Taft hosted the first “Coffee with a Cop” Training Workshop in Central California. The Police Department has hosted eight “Coffee with a Cop” events throughout the community. The City has launched the Citizen Volunteer Program to better serve the community, and to enhance crime prevention services and community awareness.
- F7. The City Code Enforcement has a concern regarding vacant buildings occupied by transients. The City anticipates budgeting \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year to tear down abandoned structures.
- F8. By advertising and promoting bus use, the City’s Transportation Department has increased the number of days Dial-A-Ride curb-to-curb service is offered to the community.
- F9. The City’s revenue is from property and sales taxes, primarily from oil industry and related employment.
- F10. West Kern Community College District operates Taft College, a public institution that provides educational and vocational training with a focus on engineering. Taft College also offers special courses for the handicapped, including a 2 year program for transitioning to independent living.
- F11. The Waste Water Plant treats influent from residential and commercial customers in the City, as well as some portions of unincorporated areas surrounding Taft.
- F12. A grant from the State of California Department of Housing and Community Development in the amount of \$948,167 will be used to install curbs, gutters and sidewalks in severely distressed neighborhoods. This will benefit approximately 2,400 residents.
- F13. In July of 2016, a 16 foot self-contained Command Post trailer was purchased using budgeted disaster funds. The trailer has since been upgraded with laptops, monitors and multi-band radios.

**COMMENTS:**

The City Staff was accommodating and informative. The Committee drove around the City and viewed the Oil Worker Monument. The streets were clean and well maintained. The Staff is to be commended for vision and planning for future growth.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

NONE

## **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.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury](http://www.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury).
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: [www.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury](http://www.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury).

## **RESPONSE REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS:**

**PRESIDING JUDGE  
KERN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT  
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 200  
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**

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

## APPENDIX:

Appendix A: From the Plaque at the Oil Workers Monument  
“The Oilworker” by Victor Killingsworth.

Appendix B: From the Plaque at the Oil Workers Monument  
“History of Taft” by Pete Gianopulos dated April 2010

