

Subject: Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response Grant Program

The Fire Department is planning to request the City Council to approve application for a Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant from FEMA to add full time firefighters. The grant period is for three years and the grant will cover salary and benefits for the three-year period. At the end of the three-year period, the cost for the salary and benefits are then assumed by the City. This allows the City to plan for changes and adjust budget projections for the Fire Department.

Background and reasoning:

The Fire Service assessment identified turn out time as a significant barrier for meeting acceptable response time standards. Currently the response is within 9:39 from time of call to arrival 90% of the time (2020 statistic). More than 4 minutes of this is the time it takes for units to respond after the call has been toned out. This is the time it takes for units to respond after the call has been toned out. This number would be greater but for the daytime duty crew responses from 4 stations M-F 0800-1700, positively affecting the metric. The assessment also identified the staffing issue including command staff as critical to the Department's ability to meet the response needs of the City.

The changes to the City's response risk, density, and development and the inability to currently provide adequate response is driving the need to add full time personnel to begin to meet current and future response needs of the City.

The goal is to expand the response capability to 24-hour response from six stations with adequate staff reducing the turn out time by 2.5 minutes. This will have to be accomplished over a period of time and will include full time and part time staff with the ultimate goal of providing 24 hour staffed response from all six fire stations utilizing both full and part time firefighters.

Currently the Fire Department is a combination department with 8 full time firefighters – 4 Chiefs/command staff, 4 inspector/firefighters, and 108 part time firefighters.

The Department has difficulty in recruiting and keeping qualified candidates for part time firefighter positions. Most recruits have no training and no experience requiring a significant investment on the part of the City over an 18-month period just to attain basic level certifications. The demands and training requirements for a part-time firefighter to maintain required proficiency and certifications has become very difficult to achieve.

The Department is currently have continuing difficulty in staffing daytime duty crews or special duty crews for weather or special events and emergencies. In addition, we have been unable to maintain staffing/response levels 24/7 with part time firefighters responding from home via pager alert.

The current response for calls shows a significant number of calls for service that have an inadequate number of firefighters on a truck. A response of less than 3 firefighters per unit is included in this count and includes response units with one or two firefighters responding.

- 8 months of 2020 [May-December] = 551 instances responding with one or two (out of 2359 calls).
- January 2021 = 65 instances responding with one or two (out of 222 calls).

Due to a change in data collection and management systems in the Fire Department the recorded number of units responding with 2 or 1 which is considered inadequate was recently re-constituted and is the reason for partial and incomplete statistics. The Department also has a number of incidents

where units failed to respond to a call from a station and we are working on those statistics. It is important to note that no call went unanswered and any call not covered by the closest station was covered by another unit.

The Department has studied the feasibility of utilizing part time firefighters for 24 hour staffing at the stations. The part time model for staffing has limitations when applied to a 24 hour in station staffing model. The number of firefighters to reach full 24 hour staffing with part-time firefighters is in excess of 175 just to achieve a 20 hours/week/firefighter time commitment. The required 20 hours per week required of each firefighter becomes prohibitively time consuming in light of their full time employment and family responsibilities. The ability to even hire that many part time firefighters is not feasible as the Department has struggled and failed to meet and maintain a much reduced staffing of 130 much less than the goal of 150.

The current response system of firefighters carrying pagers and responding when alerted has been in place for many years. While this has been effective for many years, it no longer is able to meet the response needs of the City. In addition the current system has resulted in a fairness issue as some fighters are required to respond to many fewer calls than others due to the disparity in call volume across the City. An effort to examine the current requirements to earn pension credits is being planned to adjust to a more equitable system and provide better response coverage for the City.

The grant closes March 12 and will be awarded sometime between July 1 and September 30. The City has an opportunity to refuse the grant if awarded. If accepted, the City then has 180 days to hire the firefighters provided for in the grant.

This request for the grant submission approval is for 18 full time firefighters to provide partial 24-hour coverage from 3 stations. This plan will utilize full time firefighters and additional part time firefighters to provide more consistent staffing and response.

There are infrastructure deficiency issues with the fire stations that will need to be addressed to temporarily accommodate 24-hour response staffing until the deficient stations are re-built.

I know that there will be a lot of questions regarding this initiative. Please send your questions to Assistant Chief Forster and we will answer all the questions and publish an ongoing FAQ document with the questions and the responses to those questions.