



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 17, 2015

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of an Update on Hiring of Firefighters for Engine 210 and Request for Release of Contingent Reserve Funding for Overhires.

ISSUE: Overhire update and staffing of Engine 210

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Receive a presentation from the Fire Department on the status of the hiring process, and
- (2) Designate the \$1,295,000 in FY 2016 contingent reserves be released to the FY 2016 Fire Department Operating Budget for employing 20 overhires for the purpose of staffing Engine 210 as soon as feasible.

BACKGROUND: As part of the FY 2016 budget discussions, City Council allocated \$1,295,000 to contingent reserves and requested staff to propose options on how to best staff Engine 210 as soon as feasible and return to Council with a hiring plan that could be implemented in FY 2016.

Fire Department staff provided a presentation to City Council on October 28, 2014, outlining the Fire Chief's long-term vision for the Department. In this briefing, the Chief outlined that his proposed plan was to move towards having all medic positions in the Fire Department eventually become cross-trained firefighters. As outlined in the presentation, this change would allow for staffing Engine 210 without adding additional full time employees.

As part of this long-term cross-training proposal, the Department also outlined that all 73 single-role medic positions need to be cross-trained before the full benefits of the system, including staffing Engine 210 within existing positions, can be realized. Staffing Engine 210 will take four positions per shift for three shifts for a

total of 12 positions plus a relief factor when one or more of these 12 positions takes leave. The engine for Station 210 has already been purchased. Staff explained at that October briefing that the system would have to be revisited in two to three years to see how progress was coming along and when the benefits of the system might be realized.

It was also stated that the estimate for staffing station 210 was mid-FY 2016 based primarily on medic cross-training and estimated Fire Department turnover due to retirements. Since the Fire Department's presentation in October 2015, the Fire Department has experienced greater employee turnover and due to the current recruit school (graduating June 18, 2015) Fire has not been able to start another fire school for existing medics who wish to cross-train. Therefore, the Fire Department will not be able to meet its earlier projected end of 2015 staffing date. Hence, in order to staff 210 in FY 2016, additional financial resources were proposed and set aside during the FY 2015 budget process.

The proposed option of employing 20 overhires gives the Department the ability to staff an engine at Station 210 while continuing to work on the long-term strategy of moving towards cross-training all paramedic positions.

As part of their final add/delete session, City Council set aside \$1,295,000 in contingent reserves to staff Engine 210. As part of this set aside decision, City Council requested a briefing from Fire Department staff before authorizing release of funds for these 20 overhires to ensure that this amount is the needed amount based on where the Department is in the recruitment and hiring process (which had not yet started when the FY 2016 budget was proposed).

DISCUSSION: The staffing of Engine 210 is now dependent on the hiring of these 20 overhires as soon as possible. Engine 210 will be placed in service by the end of December 2015 based on whether there will be enough eligible candidates who have existing certifications. If there are, then these candidates could be hired by September and would be able to complete a shorter recruit school than normal, and the Engine could be placed in service by the end of December 2015. If there are not enough candidates with certifications remaining at the end of the vetting process, then a normal recruit school would be held in September, and Engine 210 would be in service by the end of March 2016.

The Fire Department is continuing to focus its hiring efforts on those applicants who have these pre-existing certifications. At this point in the process, the Department has identified enough candidates with existing certifications that Engine 210 could be placed in service by the end of December 2015. However, the process is not complete yet, and there are still several steps (such as, background checks, candidate physicals and final interviews) that need to occur before the December 2015 date becomes certain. A final determination on the number of candidates and their certification levels will not be known until mid-August.

Regardless of the number of candidates with prior certifications, the Department will need to hire the 20 overhires in September to staff Engine 210 in FY 2016. Hiring less than 20 overhires in September will not provide the staffing levels to ensure Engine 210 and the rest of the Fire Department can be staffed fully on a daily basis in FY 2016. Overhiring at the 20 position level will provide staff for the 12 Engine 210 positions, a relief factor for those 12 positions, as well as a hedge against further Fire Department retirements, disability situations or recruit school attrition.

Beyond just the 20 overhires to keep Engine 210 staffed, the Department also currently has four vacancies, with three confirmed retirements occurring in the fall of 2015. Depending on the candidate pool, these vacancies may be filled in September, or may be filled with another recruit school in the spring of 2016.

FISCAL IMPACT: Budget Memo 25 dated April 17, 2015 outlined that the costs for 20 overhires beginning in September would cost approximately \$1.3M. This figure was revised to \$1,295,000 in the Add/Delete process. The costs are made up by one-time uniform, Personal Protective Equipment and supply costs (\$220,000), coverage for additional instructors (\$120,000), and salary and benefit costs of 20 overhires (\$940,000).

Regardless of whether Engine 210 is staffed by the end of December 2015, or March 2016, the Department will need to hire 20 overhires to keep the engine in service. Hiring fewer than this number will allow the engine to be in service temporarily but not for the duration of the year without significantly increasing overtime. In order for the Department to move forward with the hiring 20 individuals, formal offers will need to be made in August 2015. To ensure this hiring can happen, the funds would need to be allocated to the Fire Department's budget at the Council's June 23rd meeting. It is intended that these 20 positions would be considered budgeted authorized and permanent overhires in FY 2016 and beyond and would not be added on an ongoing basis to the Fire Department's position count. Staff will evaluate the need for overhires for FY 2017 as part of the preparation of the FY 2017 budget.

STAFF:

Robert Dubé, Fire Chief

Morgan Routt, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget