



Legislation Text

File #: 18-7460, Version: 1

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 4, 2018

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of a Grant Application to the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Program from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency.

ISSUE: Consideration of a grant application to the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve the submission of a grant application for \$1.5 million over a three-year period to partially fund the addition of nine additional firefighters over a three-year period; and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute the necessary documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: On March 26, 2018, FEMA opened the competitive grant application period for the 2018 SAFER grant program. SAFER grants provide financial assistance to help fire departments increase the number of frontline firefighters. The goal of SAFER is to enhance the abilities of fire departments to comply with staffing response and operational standards established by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

The SAFER grant program provides funding to local fire departments to increase staffing and deployment for new positions added to a department. On October 28, 2014, the Fire Chief outlined to Council a plan that included converting overtime single-role medic positions to dual-role firefighters. This change would allow the Department to utilize staffing efficiencies and advantages due to the eventual schedule consolidation of single-role medics (42-hour work weeks) to dual-role firefighters (56-hour weeks). The long-term goal of the plan would allow for four-person staffing on all engines, ladder trucks and the heavy rescue squad. The Alexandria

Fire Department remains the last locality in the National Capital Region to operate with less than four-person safe staffing on all fire apparatus. In 2001 NFPA issued standard 1710, which increased desired staffing on engines, trucks and other fire vehicles to a four-person standard. It has been the City's plan to achieve the four-person staffing level through the dual-role conversion plan. Additionally, the Alexandria Fire Department does not have dedicated staffing for its heavy rescue vehicle and the conversion of single-role medics to a dual-role system will create the capacity to staff a heavy rescue company.

DISCUSSION: Since October 2014, the Fire Department due to its shift to a dual-role system has not hired single-role medics. The Department has been working with those remaining single-role medics who are willing to obtain firefighter certifications and make them dual-role providers. All new hires are firefighter/EMT and some are firefighter/medics. In October 2014, there were 63 single-role medics along with 10 single-role EMS supervisors. Now there are 29 remaining single-role medics with all 10 of the EMS Supervisors choosing to convert to dual-role EMS Captains. The Department has offered the remaining 29 single-role medics the opportunity to cross over to a dual-role, but very few have indicated that they have a desire to do so. The Department's policy is not to force these individuals to cross over, but wait for them to complete their careers. However, in waiting, the Department cannot reach the desired outcome of four-person staffing on all fire apparatus for a significant period of time beyond the initially stated three to five years.

To complete the goal of four-person staffing more quickly on the three ladder trucks, the Department is proposing to apply for a SAFER grant for nine additional positions. The Department would allocate three firefighters across each of the three shifts to increase the minimum staffing on each ladder truck from the current three to four responders.

While the original plan for cross training did not call for increasing positions, the majority of the remaining 29 single-role medics are expected to remain with the Department for many years as single-role medics. Therefore, the original timetable of achieving four-person and heavy rescue staffing has been delayed. Adding nine positions through a SAFER grant can greatly accelerate ladder truck staffing to four-person minimum safe staffing. As more single-role medics retire and are replaced by firefighters, these nine positions will ultimately help to reduce daily overtime.

FISCAL IMPACT: The SAFER grant currently pays for 75% of the positions in the first year, 75% in the second year, and 35% in the third year. This equates to a \$1.5 million three-year grant. Localities are responsible for all costs of the positions in the fourth year and thereafter. A locality is also responsible for all gear and equipment costs as the grant will only pay for salaries and benefits.

The total personnel costs of adding nine firefighters is \$0.8 million in the first year and second year with the City responsible for 25% or \$0.2 million for each of the first two years. For the following two years, the City's estimated costs increase to 65% or \$0.5 million in the third year and 100% or \$0.9 million by the fourth year.

The cost match for the first two years is planned to come from reducing the Department's overtime budget. This reduction is possible by teaching part of recruit schools through an outside vendor to instruct new recruits for their Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Basic license rather than use six or seven firefighters/medics who would normally come from field operations for 12 to 14 weeks. By keeping these six or seven instructors in fire and rescue assignments for 12 weeks, the Department will save \$0.2 million in overtime costs. This reduction will pay for the cost of the City's match in the first and second years.

To cover the additional match in the third and fourth years, the Department plans to use a combination of reducing overhires and overtime. In the third year, the Department would reduce two authorized overhire

positions (bringing the total to 17) saving \$0.2 million. This reduction will be possible through likely attrition or conversion of at least two more single-role medic positions. The remaining \$0.2 million would be saved by reducing overtime related to paramedic training for single-role firefighters to become dual-role firefighters. The Department would continue to utilize the Assistance to Firefighters grant for this purpose, thereby lowering overtime costs to the City.

In the fourth year, the City would be responsible for the full \$0.9 million cost. The Department would again reduce two more overhires saving an additional \$0.2 million. The remaining \$0.15 million would be saved by reducing overtime related to changing off-duty training for EMT-Basic recertification. Off-duty recertification costs the Department overtime as all positions are required to recertify each year. By the fourth year, the Department would be able to perform this training strictly on-duty due to a sufficient number of coverage positions working each shift.

The nine SAFER positions would be dedicated to increased staffing on the three truck companies thereby meeting the requirements of the grant. As the dual-role initiative progresses, there will be a gradual offset in overtime levels in the Department as single-role medics leave the department and firefighters are hired. There would be options to assign personnel to relief positions, thus reducing overtime callbacks each day. The Fire Department currently has no staffing to cover annual, sick, or military leave and uses overtime to cover these vacancies. The Fire Department will use the Virginia Department of Fire Programs funds to cover the gear and equipment costs, as this is initially a one-time funding issue.

ATTACHMENTS: None.

STAFF:

Debra Collins, Deputy City Manager
Robert Dubé, Fire Chief