



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 6, 2019

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 2018 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Program from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency.

ISSUE: Consideration ahead of the City's FY 2020 budget decision making process of a grant application to the 2018 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and its subsequent local funding impact.

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 February 20, 2019, 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. The Alexandria Fire Department remains the last locality in the National Capital Region to operate with less than four-person staffing on all fire apparatus. Ten of the Alexandria Fire Department's thirteen apparatus are staffed with four persons, leaving three engines not staffed at the four-person level. In 2001 NFPA issued standard 1710, which outlined 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. However, the dual-role conversion has been slower to fully ramp up than originally projected. The Fire Department has three remaining engine companies that are staffed with three-person crews.

On October 28, 2014, the Fire Chief outlined to City 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. In 2015, the Department began cross-training all medic positions and moving towards a dual-role provider system whereby all medics serving in the Department would also be firefighters. This plan would allow the Department to cross-train and staff all engines with four personnel. 28 single-role medics remain in the system though and until enough of them attrite through the system (not projected to occur for at least 10 to 15 years) the four-person staffing model for the remaining three engines cannot occur.

DISCUSSION: 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 28 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 28 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 crossover, 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 engines, 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 of the three remaining engine companies 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 28 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 will complete engine staffing to four-person 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 \$0.6 million in the third year and 100% or \$0.9 million by the fourth year.

The City applied for and received a similar SAFER grant for 9 positions in 2018. As a result, the City already has a future growing responsibility for these positions. This 2019 SAFER grant would double that responsibility. The following chart depicts the current and future local funding impact.

<u>Local Cost Impact (\$ in millions)</u>						
Fire Positions added	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024 and beyond
9 2018 SAFER grant local obligation	\$0.2	\$0.2	\$0.6	\$0.9	\$0.9	
9 2019 SAFER grant local obligation	—	\$0.2	\$0.2	\$0.6	\$0.9	
Total 18	\$0.2	\$0.4	\$0.8	\$1.5	\$1.8	

If the City does not commit to funding the local portion of this grant, the grant application at the end of the FY 2020 budget process by approving an add/delete for the FY 2020 needed \$0.2 million will be withdrawn.

ATTACHMENTS: None.

STAFF:

Debra Collins, Deputy City Manager

Robert Dubé, Fire Chief