



STAFF REPORT

TO: Chair and Board Members MEETING DATE: November 18, 2017

FROM: Stephen C. Lieberman, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: Reserve Firefighter Program

RECOMMENDATION

Provide direction to the Fire Chief regarding whether to implement a plan for a phased transition of the Reserve Firefighter program from part time to full time employees, along with a plan for temporary fire station closures.

BACKGROUND

The Board recently adopted a Strategic Plan which identified critical staffing needs for the next five year period (summary documents attached). What the plan did not include was a phasing component. This staff report has a focus on one of the job classifications, namely the transition to a full-time Firefighter position.

Long before the creation of the Five Cities Fire Authority in 2010, each of the member communities had volunteer-based fire departments. Due to a number of factors including the availability of volunteer community members to respond to 9-1-1 calls, increasing State and Federal safety and training requirements, increasing call volume, an aging population and increased development, the member communities began a transition to full-time staffing in the 1990's. The last vestige of the volunteer fire service within the Five Cities Fire Authority is the Reserve Firefighter (part time) program.

Reserve firefighters are stationed on a daily basis at the three fire stations, and are often the Driver/Operator at the Oceano Station #3 due to two-person staffing. Recruitment and retention challenges continue to plague this program, with a consistent decline in the employee base. The current roster of available reserve firefighters is currently seven employees. The shortage of trained employees is creating operational challenges in the areas of safety, staffing levels and the operating budget.

The Fire Chief and staff have attempted to sustain the program by:

- Increasing the hourly wage
- Visiting the local fire academy for recruiting visits
- Sending letters to other fire academies throughout California
- Transitioning to a "continuous" recruitment model

Other communities in San Luis Obispo County are also dealing with this challenge. The City of Atascadero has hired full time firefighters, Paso Robles has approved additions to staffing based on increasing call volume and development, and the City of Pismo Beach has made contractual modifications with CAL FIRE to maintain appropriate staffing levels at the firefighter rank.

Due to this ongoing challenge in providing appropriate staffing levels, two organizational challenges have been identified; safety and funding.

Safety

The more significant threat is safety. As the Board is aware, this organization is experiencing significant year over year increases in call volume (2017 year to date is currently 4.1% higher than 2016). Lacking the appropriate staffing levels, the communities will receive an inconsistent level of service. These challenges have been more specifically identified in a separate attorney client privilege memorandum to the Board under the signature of the Authority's General Counsel.

As the Fire Chief has shared with the Board in the past, clinical changes in Emergency Medical Services (EMS) response to cardiac arrest has had an impact on staffing levels. Recent clinical research has shown that rapid chest compressions performed for up to 20 minutes at the scene of the patient's collapse have a profound effect on patient outcome. To perform what is referred to as "High Performance" or "Pit Crew" CPR, the engine company should have three personnel to integrate with the ambulance crew. Currently, there are only two employees stationed at Station 3 (Oceano). This station responds in not only Oceano but into areas of Arroyo Grande and Grover Beach. When Engine 3 is committed to a CPR call, they will request a second FCFA engine company to assist them with the chest compressions. This reduces the availability of available resources and moves a second engine company out of their geographic response area.

The recent fire on Traffic Way in Arroyo Grande was another example of the challenges this organization is confronted with. Initial dispatch reports stated that a vegetation fire had spread to a residential home. FCFA responded with all available resources, a total of 9 personnel (one of which was transported to the hospital by ambulance for possible dehydration). CAL FIRE resources also responded per the existing automatic aid agreement; but they responded from outside of the service area. As illustrated by the May 11, 2017 commercial structure fire in Arroyo Grande, there is no guarantee that additional resources will be able to respond to assist the FCFA. On May 11th, CAL FIRE was committed to another commercial fire in Los Osos and additional resources were slow to respond to assist FCFA on that date.

These challenges will continue to affect operations, staffing and responses by the Authority until additional resources are developed to address some of operational challenges addressed in the examples above.

Funding

Funding for the program is based on a standard formula:

365 days/year x 24 hours	8,760 hours
8,760 hours x 3 fire stations	26,280 hours
26,280 hours x \$14/hour	\$367,920

This formula does not account for unfilled shifts filled by Reserve Firefighter overtime rates (1.5x). Related to filling open shifts, full-time Fire Captains and Engineers will work these open shifts when needed at an overtime rate (1.5x) which impacts the full-time employee overtime budget. Given the current staffing level of 7, the employees are working more overtime shifts.

Reserve Firefighter – Standard 24-hour shift	\$346
Reserve Firefighter – Overtime 24-hour shift	\$519
Fire Engineer - Overtime 24-hour shift	\$1,005
Fire Captain - Overtime 24-hour shift	\$1,194

Reserve Firefighter Budget

Staff has made some preliminary calculations related to the available funding for the remainder of the fiscal year (8 months as of 10/31/17), utilizing hybrids of the needed shifts being filled by employees at the compensation levels identified above. In the best case scenario (Firefighters working a standard shift), funding remains for less than 8 months. In a more extreme case, funding would be exhausted in less than 5 months.

Career Captain/Engineer Overtime

Overtime to fill a Firefighter position was not included in the budget planning process for the full time employees. Adequate funding does not exist in the Overtime budget that would allow career personnel to fill the firefighter position.

Given all of the factors identified in the opening section of this report and the General Counsel's memorandum to the Board, the organization can no longer support a part-time employee program (which is required to perform a skilled and vital role), and the initial transition to full-time employees must be considered.

Given both available funding and staffing, the Fire Chief is recommending the Board consider moving forward with the initial recruitment of three full-time firefighters, and a planned transition to 9 FTE firefighters over the next two fiscal years. Initially, an attempt to preserve the Reserve Firefighter program at the current level along with the appointment of three FTE Firefighters would be attempted.

Several scenarios are presented below for Board consideration:

Current Deployment Strategy

	Station 1	Station 2	Station 3
	AG	GB	OCE
Captain	1	1	1
Engineer	1	1	
Firefighter (PT Reserve)	1	1	1
Total	3	3	2

5-Year Strategic Plan

	Station 1	Station 2	Station 3
	AG	GB	OCE
Captain	1	1	1
Engineer	1	1	1
Firefighter (FTE)	2	1	1
Total	4	3	3

FTE Transition Scenario - Maintain 6 PT / Hire 3 FTE (2018/2019)

	Station 1	Station 2	Station 3
	AG	GB	OCE
Captain	1	1	1
Engineer	1	1	
Firefighter (3 FTE/6 PT Reserve)	1	1	1
Total	3	3	2

FTE Transition Scenario - Hire Additional 6 FTE (2019/2020)

	Station 1	Station 2	Station 3
	AG	GB	OCE
Captain	1	1	1
Engineer	1	1	
Firefighter (FTE)	1	1	1
Total	3	3	2

To the extent the operational and staffing recommendations proposed by this staff report are not approved, the Board should consider the temporary closure (Brown Out) of a fire station should staffing levels reach unacceptable staffing levels. Maintaining a two-person crew at a fire station is inadequate and creates operational challenges. The Board could consider the temporary closure of a specific fire station or a rotational model which would have each of the three stations temporarily closed.

Should the Board support the concept of a temporary station closure, the remaining two fire stations will have three-person crews. The downside to this option is increased response times to areas served by the closed fire station, and less personnel serving the communities.

Station Closure Scenario #1 - Current Staffing

	Station 1	Station 2	Station 3
	AG	GB	OCE
Captain	1	2	
Engineer	1	1	
Firefighter (PT Reserve)	1		
Total	3	3	0

Station Closure Scenario #2 - Transition to 3 FTE (2018/2019)

	Station 1	Station 2	Station 3
	AG	GB	OCE
Captain	2	1	
Engineer	1	1	
Firefighter (3 FTE/6 PT Reserve)	1	1	
Total	4	3	0

Allows for Squad Staffing

Station Closure Scenario #2 - Transition to 9 FTE (2018/2019)			
	Station 1	Station 2	Station 3
	AG	GB	OCE
Captain	2	2	
Engineer	1	1	
Firefighter (FTE)	2	1	
Total	5	4	0
Allows for Squad Staffing			

* Firefighter position based on addition of three positions and use of available Captain position to fill Engineer/Firefighter position at second fire station.

FISCAL IMPACT

The current budget for the Reserve Firefighter program will likely be expended before the end of the current fiscal year. Overtime for career Fire Captains and Engineers will also likely be overspent due in part to filling open Reserve Firefighter shifts.

Based on planning estimates, the cost of a full-time firefighter is \$100,000 annually. Three employees are required to perform the duties of one firefighter position (shift scheduling). The total estimated cost is \$300,000.00 annually. Assuming the Board was to support the following transition strategy, additional investment would be estimated at the following level:

FY 2018/2019	Hire 3 Full Time Firefighters	\$300,000
FY 2019/2020	Fire 6 Full Time Firefighters	\$600,000

Once phased out, the Reserve Firefighter budget of approximately \$368,000 would provide a partial offset.

ALTERNATIVES

The following alternatives are provided for the Board's consideration:

1. Direct the Fire Chief to plan for a transition to full time Firefighter staffing in the next planned budget process (this would also entail working with Local 4403 in amending the existing MOU), along with planning for temporary fire station closures as needed.
2. Direct the Fire Chief to sustain the Reserve Firefighter program, supplementing open shifts with career Fire Captains and Engineers as needed. Additionally, direct the Fire Chief to order temporary fire station closures when staffing requirements cannot be met.
3. Direct the Fire Chief to immediately proceed with a transition replacing the Reserve Firefighter program with three full-time Firefighter positions (this would also entail working with Local 4403 in amending the existing MOU), initiating a recruitment, and to move forward with an implementation plan to implement temporary fire station closures.
4. Provide other direction.

ATTACHMENTS

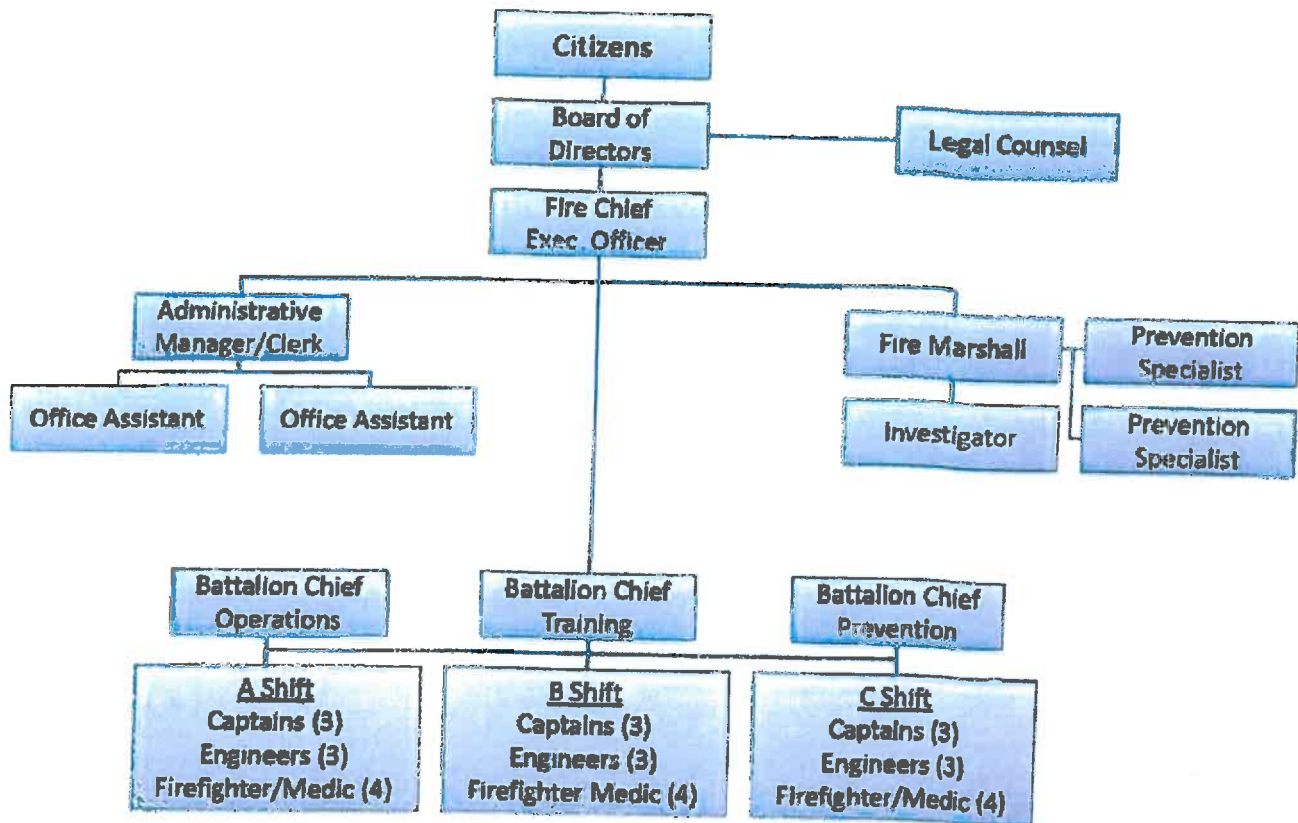
Five Cities Fire Authority Strategic Plan – Proposed Organization Chart (Schedule B)
Five Cities Fire Authority Strategic Plan – Staffing Summary (Schedule G)

PREPARED BY

S. Lieberman

Schedule B

Five Cities Fire Authority



2017 Strategic Plan

Total Budgeted Headcount

Full Time	41
Part Time	0
Reserve Firefighters	0
Total	41

Schedule G

Strategic Plan - Staffing Summary

<u>Title</u>	<u>Current State</u>	<u>End State</u>	<u>Variance</u>
Fire Chief	1	1	-
Battalion Chief	2	3	1
Fire Captain	9	9	-
Fire Engineer	6	9	3
Reserve Firefighter	18	0	(18)
Firefighter Paramedic	0	12	12
Fire Marshall	0	1	1
Fire Prevention Specialist	0	2	2
Fire Investigator *	0	1	1
Administrative Assistant/Clerk	1	0	(1)
Administrative Manager / Clerk	0	1	1
Office Assistant	0.5	2	1.5
Total	37.5	41	3.5

Annual Increased Investment

Battalion Chief	\$372	\$600	\$228
Fire Engineer	\$775	\$1,162	\$387
Firefighter*	\$368	\$1,200	\$832
Fire Marshall	\$0	\$175	\$175
Investigator	\$0	\$105	\$105
Prevention Specialist	\$0	\$180	\$180
Admin Manager/Clerk	\$113	\$140	\$27
Office Assistant	\$28	\$170	\$142
Subtotal	\$1,656	\$3,732	\$2,076
Firefighter/Paramedic Differential*	\$0	\$72	\$72
Worker's Comp Premium	\$101	\$115	\$14
Overtime	\$202	\$337	\$135

Note: Numbers in 000's

Total	\$1,959	\$4,256	\$2,297
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