

CITY COUNCIL COMMUNICATION FORM

FROM: Chuck Cerasoli, Fire Chief
THROUGH: Gary Suiter, City Manager
DATE: March 2, 2021
ITEM: Fire Department 2021 Staffing Update

DIRECTION
 INFORMATION
 ORDINANCE
 MOTION
 RESOLUTION
 PROCLAMATION

I. REQUEST/ISSUE & BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In October 2020 city council was provided an update regarding the affects of the pandemic on the fire department staffing plan, along with considerations on how we may move forward with staffing in 2021. It was discussed that an update would be provided once the FEMA FY 2020 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program was released and evaluated by staff as to how the City of Steamboat Springs may best utilize this program.

II. SUMMARY AND ALTERNATIVES:

In the fall of 2020, the fire department's primary focus on staffing was to reinstate the two full-time FF/EMT floater positions back into the budget. The main goals being to provide backfill coverage and thus to avoid possible overtime constraints which could lead to a reduction in minimum staffing levels and FF fatigue. There were indications that the FEMA FY 2020 SAFER grant may be adjusted to reflect recent staffing difficulties fire departments were experiencing due to the pandemic. The recommendation to council at that time was to hold off on hiring any positions until staff was able to review the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the grant and determine what the best approach would be to hiring new personnel. The grant has been noticed and applications are being accepted until March 12, 2021.

During review of the NOFO it was noted that the funding priorities of the grant did not change substantially, however the program now allows the hiring of firefighters into positions that had been previously funded but were cut due to the pandemic. The SAFER grant program will pay 100% of the salary and benefits of operational personnel for three years.

The primary focus of the grant is on; "Increasing the number of firefighters to help communities meet industry minimum standards and attain 24-hour staffing to provide adequate fire protection from fire and fire related hazards, and to fulfill the traditional missions of fire departments." The program is very clearly looking for improvement towards the response standards outlined in NFPA 1710 which narrowly focuses on a fire departments ability to respond to a residential structure fire with the appropriate number of personnel.

In the fall staff had concerns with the idea of hiring more than the two firefighters while in the midst of a very difficult budget year. While this concern is still prevalent, we feel that in order to provide the best case to the grant review panel we should consider increasing our request to four full time firefighters. This would allow the department to place one additional firefighter on each shift and one firefighter into a floater position. This approach should help us avoid future overtime constraints as we would not initially increase our current minimum staffing numbers.

As an alternative, we could apply to hire two full-time firefighters into the floater positions we removed from the 2020 and 2021 budgets. The concern with this approach is that it would provide a less convincing case to the review panel as it would not increase our daily staffing numbers.

III. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

After evaluation of the NOFO for the SAFER grant, staff is recommending the City of Steamboat Springs apply for the SAFER grant to hire four new Full-Time Firefighter/EMT's.

IV. FISCAL IMPACT:

The SAFER grant will cover salary and benefits at 100% for the first three years of employment. Ongoing personnel costs starting in year four is estimated at \$89,300/FF or \$357,200 total (This estimate considers movement through the firefighter pay plan.)

The grant does not cover any added operating costs associated with the additional personnel and staff estimates \$136,000 for the four FF's in the first year and \$60,000 in subsequent years (see attached).

The alternative scenario of hiring two FF's would have fiscal impacts estimated using a similar approach. Ongoing personnel costs in year four are estimated at \$89,300/FF or \$178,000 total.

Operating cost increases for two firefighters are estimated at \$100,000 in the first year and \$30,000 per year after that (see attached).

V. LEGAL ISSUES:

NA

VI. CONFLICTS OR ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES:

NA

VII. CONSISTENCY WITH COUNCIL GOALS AND POLICIES:

This item is consistent with the mission to provide superior services to the community of Steamboat Springs.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Grant Recommendation

Attachment 2: FF Analysis – 4 FF

Attachment 3: FF Analysis – 2 FF