

CITY COUNCIL COMMUNICATION FORM

FROM: Chuck Cerasoli, Fire Chief
THROUGH: Gary Suiter, City Manager
DATE: October 14, 2020
ITEM: Fire Department call volume and staffing update.

_____ DIRECTION
 INFORMATION
_____ ORDINANCE
_____ MOTION
_____ RESOLUTION
_____ PROCLAMATION

I. REQUEST/ISSUE & BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

City Council requested an update from the Fire Department on the status of calls for service in 2020 and the fire department's staffing situation. While 2020 call volume numbers are down compared to 2019 the overall trend in call volume remains on the increase. The department continues to be challenged responding to many calls with the appropriate number of people in a timely manner. The Strategic Plan outlined a goal of staffing 12 firefighters on each shift with a staffed engine and staffed ambulance in both the Mountain and Downtown areas. The primary objectives of this goal were to offer a more consistent and quicker assembly of force to our major call volume and population centers. The current staffing model creates difficulties for fire department personnel to appropriately and safely staff a growing number of calls due to their complexity and timing and often these calls may not receive the desired level of personnel in a timely manner.

With the passage of the Fire and EMS mill levy in 2019, City Council had approved the hiring of three additional firefighters in 2020. The department planned to hire those three firefighters along with two others who would fill vacant floater positions from 2019. With the onset of the Coronavirus Pandemic

SSFR, along with all other departments in The City of Steamboat Springs cut out large portions of our operating budget along with the elimination of vacant positions. The elimination of the floater positions has created challenges for the department to stay within our overtime budget while continuing to operate with a minimum staffing of eight personnel 24 hours a day.

Along with the challenges of COVID-19 has come a potential opportunity for the department to apply for the SAFER grant. The grant has been expanded to include the replacement of positions that may have been eliminated due to the financial challenge municipalities may be having due to the pandemic. SSFR will be taking a closer look at the grant opportunity once it is published and may approach the council with suggestions on how we may take advantage of the grant opportunity.

II. SUMMARY AND ALTERNATIVES:

While call volume overall in 2020 has decreased, the overall trend for call volumes over the last 14 years continues to show an increase. The department continues to struggle with staffing many calls with the appropriate number of personnel in a timely manner.

III. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff will be taking a look at the SAFER grant when it is posted in the early part of 2021 and may approach council with a recommendation to apply for the grant in order to re-instate two floater positions that were eliminated. In addition to these positions the department would require additional operating expenses to properly outfit and train the new fire fighters.

IV. FISCAL IMPACT:

If SAFER grant is awarded to the fire department personnel expenses would be paid 100% for the first three years. Operating expenses would not be covered in the grant and are estimated at approximately \$70,000-\$80,000 in the first year. This amount would be substantially less in subsequent years as equipment purchase and training will have already taken place.

V. LEGAL ISSUES:

No legal issues noted in this update.

VI. CONFLICTS OR ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES:

No environmental issues noted.

VII. CONSISTENCY WITH COUNCIL GOALS AND POLICIES:

NA

ATTACHMENTS: