

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 20, 2006

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER *J*

SUBJECT: SUBMISSION OF ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANT
APPLICATION TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
TO FUND THE INSTALLATION OF A SPRINKLER SYSTEM AT FIRE
STATION 208 - 175 NORTH PAXTON STREET

ISSUE: City Council consideration of a grant application, in the amount of \$100,000, for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve the submission of an electronic grant application totaling \$100,000 to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to fund the installation of a fire sprinkler system at Fire Station 208; and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute all necessary documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, is a program to award grants directly to fire departments and non-affiliated EMS organizations for the purpose of enhancing their ability to protect the health and safety of the public, as well as that of their personnel, facing fire related hazards. This grant funds two major programs: (1) The Fire Operations and Firefighter Safety Program; and (2) The Vehicle Acquisition Program. Under the Fire Operations and Firefighter Safety Program there are five different activities available for funding, including training activities; wellness and fitness activities; firefighting equipment acquisition; personal protective equipment acquisition; and modifications to fire stations and facilities. The grants are awarded on a competitive basis to fire departments that best demonstrate financial need for assistance and illustrate how the funds will benefit firefighters.

DISCUSSION: Not unlike other jurisdictions, one of the Fire Department's biggest concerns is the safety of emergency personnel. A few years ago a volunteer fire station in a neighboring jurisdiction caught fire and the emergency personnel escaped by exiting through the windows. Following that incident, the Alexandria Fire Chief requested that the City's Code Enforcement staff evaluate the safety of the City's fire stations. The results of the evaluation revealed that if Fire Station 208 were built today, it would not comply with the current fire code.

Built in 1976, Fire Station 208 is a two-story, 13,920 square foot facility located at 175 North Paxton Street, which currently houses a frontline engine company, aerial ladder truck company and an Advanced Life Support (ALS) medic unit. The units that operate out of this station answer the most calls per year of any fire station in the City, or 16 percent of the total departmental calls. Last year, the units housed at this station responded to over 2,800 calls, including over 1,400 emergency medical calls, over 190 fire calls and over 120 mutual aid responses.

Currently, there is no fire sprinkler system in this station. The station is configured with sleeping quarters adjacent to the apparatus bays, which historically, is the most likely area in the station for a fire to start, because the fuel and fire apparatus are stored in that location. In addition to the potentially hazardous location of the bedrooms, there is no second means of egress in the sleeping quarters. By Code, the windows in the sleeping quarters are too small to be considered a viable emergency exit in the event of a fire. Replacement of the windows in order to bring them up to code would require major modifications to the building and would be very costly. In the event of a fire, a sprinkler system becomes a good defense against fire. The sprinkler system will help to extinguish the fire or prevent the fire from spreading, providing emergency personnel at the station time to move to safety.

It should be noted that many of the City's fire stations are in need of renovation. We expect the final consultant report on fire station locations to address other needed fire station renovations. Staff will be developing a work plan to address renovation issues in the context of the FY 2008 budget.

FISCAL IMPACT: The City hired an engineer to evaluate the building and estimate the cost to install a sprinkler system. The engineer recommended that the department purchase a wet/dry sprinkler system with a fire alarm component that would meet National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards. The initial cost estimate for the system was \$100,000. This grant application is in the amount of \$100,000 and will provide for the purchase and installation of a wet/dry sprinkler system at FS 208. The federal share of the grant would be \$80,000, or 80 percent of the total, and the City share would be \$20,000, or 20 percent. The Fire Department would propose using funds currently budgeted in the Approved FY 2006 - FY 2011 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for fire station renovations, currently budgeted at \$225,000 annually, to cover the City share of this grant.

In addition, the City is also responsible for normal administrative costs associated with this grant, including financial and reporting oversight to be provided by the Fire Department, as well as the Office of Management and Budget and the Finance Department.

The Fire Department has electronically submitted the grant application in order to meet the deadline of April 7, 2006, with the understanding that subsequent City Council approval would be required to accept this grant award.

STAFF:

Gary Mesaris, Fire Chief

John North, Battalion Chief

Alfred Coleman, Division Chief, Administrative Services, Fire

Laura Pettus, Grants Coordinator