

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 6, 2010

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

SUBJECT: APPLICATION TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY FOR A STAFFING FOR ADEQUATE FIRE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE (SAFER)

ISSUE: Consideration of a grant application to the SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grant program, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve the submission of the grant application (due September 17, 2010); and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute the necessary documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: On August 17, 2010, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security, opened the grant application period for the 2010 SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grant program. SAFER grants provide financial assistance to help fire departments increase the number of frontline firefighters. (Note that EMS and other employees are excluded). 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 grants program provides funding to local fire departments to increase staffing and deployment capabilities in order to respond to emergencies wherever they occur. For the Alexandria Fire Department, enhanced staffing will facilitate a reduction in response time and ensure that an appropriate number of personnel will be present at an emergency incident scene. Additionally, augmenting current staffing levels will guarantee that all front-line apparatus have a minimum of four trained personnel to continue our effort to meet OSHA standards, which are already met by most surrounding jurisdictions. Ultimately, SAFER funding for additional fire fighting personnel will ensure faster response, safer and more efficient incident scenes, and optimal community protection against fire and fire-related hazards.

In December 2008, the Fire Department was awarded a 2007 SAFER grant totaling \$325,140 that is to be spent over a five-year period. This funding covers approximately 25% of the cost to hire three additional Firefighter-Rescuers. Using this allocation, three Firefighter-Rescuers were a part of the Fire Department's recruit school, which began in April 2010 with graduation last Friday.

DISCUSSION: Over the past three years the Fire Chief has discussed with Council the report prepared by J. Gordon Routley, an expert in the field of fire incident analysis. Mr. Routley prepared a detailed review and analysis of the Fire Department's response to the August 25, 2007, fire at 6101 Edsall Road (Alexandria Knolls West). This analysis listed a number of serious issues that adversely affected the Department's ability to handle this fire safely and effectively and included a recommendation that the Fire Department increase the minimum staffing of numbers of firefighters assigned to engine and truck companies from three to four per vehicle.

For the first two years of the grant the 2010 SAFER grant funding requested from the Department of Homeland Security will fund fully the cost of hiring nine Firefighter-Rescuers, who will be hired in FY 2012. As this funding is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), cost sharing by local jurisdictions is not mandated. Furthermore, unlike previous SAFER funding requirements, there are no annual salary limits.

This 2010 SAFER Grant is the continuation of a multi-year plan to address firefighter staffing and other recommendations in the Routley Report. If these grant monies are awarded, four of nine Fire Department engine companies will each have minimum staffing levels of four personnel. Alexandria would be following the precedent set by Arlington and Fairfax Counties that took a multi-year approach to increasing their firefighter staffing and successfully used SAFER grant funds to offset local costs.

FISCAL IMPACT: SAFER funding will be used to pay for 100% of the actual salary and benefit costs of nine newly hired Firefighter-Rescuers without a local cost-share requirement. The 2010 SAFER Grant funding will provide \$645,840 for the first and second year of the grant period (\$71,760) per Firefighter-Rescuer. There are no annual salary limits. The third year and all subsequent years must be funded with General Fund monies. A retention commitment requires grant recipients to keep these SAFER-funded positions for one additional year beyond the SAFER grant two-year period of performance.

The SAFER grant funds only the salary and benefit cost for these positions. It does not include funding for training, personal protective equipment, self-contained breathing apparatus or radios. If the grant is awarded, one-time funding for these items will need to be included in the FY 2012 budget. The cost per fire fighter for training and equipment is approximately \$17,500. The addition of nine fire fighters would require a City investment of \$157,500.

STAFF:

Adam K. Thiel, Fire Chief
James Lynch, Chief, Administrative Services, Fire Department
Mayuri Middough, Fiscal Officer, Fire Department