

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 20, 2005

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 77 : SERVICE AND BUDGETARY IMPACTS OF DELAYING THE HIRING OF THE FOLLOWING POSITIONS IN FIRE, REAL ESTATE ASSESSMENTS, PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES, AND REGISTRAR OF VOTERS

This memorandum responds to a request from Councilman Krupicka to provide the service and budgetary impact on delaying the hiring of a new Deputy Fire Marshal, new staffing for the Office of Real Estate Assessments in the form of a Supervisory Real Estate Appraiser and a Management Analyst, a new Events Manager, Events Administrator, and Volunteer/Outreach Coordinator in the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Activities Department, and one of the two new proposed positions at the Registrar of Voters.

Fire Department

In the context of the Proposed FY 2006 budget, the Fire Department has proposed the addition of one Deputy Fire Marshal position as part of a plan to reorganize the Fire Prevention Section of the Code Enforcement Bureau to improve customer service. The supplemental budget request, in the amount of \$98,991, provides for not only one additional Deputy Fire Marshal position, but the upgrade of three Code Enforcement Inspectors to Deputy Fire Marshal positions to staff the Fire Prevention Section as part of the reorganization plan to provide adequate day time staffing levels and resources evenly throughout the City.

The plan is designed to provide a better balance between inspection and investigation activities while improving service quality and the level of Code Enforcement expertise available City-wide. The plan will divide the City evenly into four geographical quadrants; assign each Chief Deputy Fire Marshal two quadrants; staff each quadrant with a day shift Deputy Fire Marshal, a shift Deputy Fire Marshal and two Fire Inspectors; with the ninth Fire Inspector to be assigned to City-wide inspection duties and rodent abatement activities. This reorganization plan was designed to address code enforcement, environmental, quality of life and nuisance issues. Fire Marshals and Inspectors will work together on area problems and through the redistribution of staff, there will be sufficient staff coverage to handle the majority of issues and incidents that occur annually in the City.

While current staffing levels and job assignments provide coverage across the City on paper, the continued demands for services and the amount of time to properly investigate, document and manage code cases and investigations successfully has become extremely difficult to manage. Staff must continually shift priorities and refocus efforts to new incidents and concerns which has a negative impact on proactive and regular enforcement activities.

If the hiring of the new Deputy Fire Marshal is delayed, the reorganization plan and its associated benefits will not be parceled out and the plan cannot be fully implemented. This delay will impact the ability of staff to respond to complaints in a timely manner; respond to environmental investigations with sufficient resources; and process regular inspection permit requests and proactive inspections in a timely manner. The new Deputy Fire Marshal position is key to the success of the reorganization plan by providing proper staffing levels within the Fire Prevention Section to address code enforcement and quality of life issues expected by the citizens of Alexandria.

Real Estate

The requested Supervisory Real Estate Appraiser (\$73,536) is needed due to the continued increase in the real property tax base and the number of assessable parcels over the last ten to fifteen years. The real property tax base has nearly tripled in the last three years to a total of \$27.4 billion. There has been \$2.5 billion in new construction in the last five years. The City currently has 41,086 parcels, which results in a parcel count of 5,700 per appraiser. This count is above the average of 5,100 per appraiser which is typical in other Virginia jurisdictions. Real Estate Assessments has not had any additional appraisers added since the mid-1980's to compensate for the growth in development, parcel counts and complexity of appraisal issues confronted in an area with complex development scenarios which impact the fair market value of the properties. This position will supervise the appraisal staff and also serve as an additional commercial appraiser. The increasing complexity of mixed use projects, lease structures which require analysis, condominium conversions adding another 5,000 parcels in the next 12 to 18 months all combine to make this position essential. Supplemental Assessments could be impacted without the additional staff person, resulting in a loss of revenue. The Department of Real Estate Assessments estimates that this new position could result in new real estate tax revenue generated due to the time allotment allowing for more individual analysis on complex commercial valuations and, as a result, it more than pays for itself..

The requested Management Analyst II (\$68,296) is needed to manage assessment data used by the Department as well as required by the Virginia Department of Taxation. This position will enhance the Department's ability to analyze data components of property to determine contributions to fair market value. This will result in a greater ability to report information accurately by area and type, and will allow assessed value to be closer to actual fair market value, which should result in more tax revenue. In Budget Memo #48, the City Manager proposed that consideration of this additional position be postponed to FY 2007 as part of the effort to identify budget changes to accommodate a 91.5 cent real estate tax rate as directed by Council. While this position is needed, waiting until FY 2007 is an acceptable delay.

Parks, Recreation and Cultural Activities

The Arts, Marketing and Special Services Division is charged with the enhancement, extension and expansion of the Department's programs, services and special events through aggressive marketing strategies and improved supervision and utilization of volunteers.

The Events Office is committed to facilitating a wide range of special events that highlight the diverse communities within the City. The requested full-time Events Manager and a part-time Events Administrator will process more than 120 cultural and special events applications of City-sponsored, non-City sponsored, co-sponsored and inter-agency requests for festivals, concerts, birthday celebrations, parades, remembrance services, etc., including logistics, permitting and safety issues.

The Events Manager and Events Administrator will strengthen the Department's ability to promote and manage the more than 120 cultural and special events currently under the purview of the Department and enable the Department to honor new requests for special events sponsorship. Without these positions, or with a delay in hiring these positions, the current service levels to the growing partnership with citizens, businesses and community-based organizations will be denied.

The proposed part-time Volunteer/Outreach Coordinator will assist the Division Chief for Special Projects with the responsibility of sustaining the current cadre of volunteers and maintaining the ongoing recruitment, screening, placement and supervision process of the existing groups of volunteers who support all of the Department's operation. The Division Chief for Special Projects currently handles all coordination efforts associated with the departmental volunteers as well as grant writing and community outreach, and the responsibility of creating and implementing an effective and comprehensive marketing plan. In Budget Memo #48, the City Manager has proposed that consideration of the part-time Events Administrator position and the part-time Volunteer/Outreach Coordinator position be postponed until FY 2007 as part of the effort to identify budget changes to accommodate a 91.5 cent real estate tax rate as directed by Council.

Registrar of Voters

The Proposed FY 2006 Budget includes two new full-time positions for the Registrar of Voters that were fully funded through a reduction in part-time and over-time costs, resulting in no new net cost to the City. If one or both of these positions is not approved, the part-time and over-time would need to be restored. Otherwise, the Registrar of Voters would not be able to provide the current service level or support activities such as voter registration and absentee voting.

Although there is no budget impact associated with the two full-time positions, they were proposed to improve services to Alexandria citizens. If either of these positions is delayed, and the part-time and over-time funds are restored, the Registrar of Voters could continue the current service level, but would be unable to provide improved services.

The full-time Administrative Assistant for the Elections Division was proposed to improve the effectiveness of services provided to the City's voting public. Currently, these services are provided by one full-time professional staff person (Elections Administrator) and part-time staff. The new full-time position is offset by a reduction in part-time and over-time costs to improve the effectiveness of the Elections Division. If this position is not approved, existing staff would continue to provide these services by working overtime.

The conversion of a part-time Assistant Registrar position to full-time status would serve the City's diverse community, particularly the Spanish speaking population. In addition, it would allow voter outreach services to fully engage a greater portion of the community, including language minorities. If this position is not approved these goals could not be achieved with existing part-time staff. Part-time staff would continue to provide the current level of services only.