


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 6, 2008

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A GRANT APPLICATION TO THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF FIRE PROGRAMS TO REPAIR AND RENOVATE THE FIRE DEPARTMENT'S BURN BUILDING

ISSUE: Consideration of a grant application in the amount of \$400,000 to repair, renovate, and enhance the Fire Department's burn building on South Payne Street.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council authorize the City Manager to:

- (1) Submit a grant application to the Virginia Fire Services Board/Virginia Department of Fire Programs by the February 15 deadline to repair and renovate the Fire Department's burn building; and
- (2) Execute all necessary documents and agreements that may be required to receive funding under this grant program.

BACKGROUND: The Fire Department's burn building is a two and a half story, 4,040 square foot building that was constructed in 1981 to help train firefighters in controlled fire environments simulating the challenges and hazards of fighting fires. The structure has thick concrete pillars and slabs with block walls that support no load bearing weight. The interior has state-of-the-art high temperature linings which have minimized damage to the outer structure. With repeated use, however, the burn building has sustained moderate damage due to normal wear and tear.

Since FY 1999, the Fire Department has received two grants, totaling \$147,762, to replace the original plywood and panel walls with new block walls and to cover the walls with special fireproof tiles. Annually, the Fire Department spends about \$4,000 from its operating budget on small repairs and replacement of damaged tiles to maintain the structure. The state requires the Fire Department to keep the building in good conditions so that fire training evolutions, or effective fireground activities, can be carried out in an environment that meets national training requirements for fire suppression personnel.

DISCUSSION: Last spring, the Virginia Department of Fire Programs assessed burn buildings throughout the state and recommended Alexandria's facility for renovation because of its age and frequent use, and to increase safety for firefighters who are trained in the building. The renovation plan includes repair of cracks in the concrete flooring and walls due to the effects of repeated heating and cooling. The plan also includes replacing the doors, windows, railings, walls and some high temperature linings. As an important technology upgrade, a new electronic monitoring system would be installed to monitor temperatures in the burn rooms and to make the building safer for firefighter training.

Overall, this state grant helps Virginia jurisdictions ensure that their fire training activities are conducted in safe facilities and that exposure to health and safety hazards is minimized. This renovation project will provide a safer training environment for Alexandria's firefighters and should extend the useful life of this 27-year-old burn building.

We have included the burn building project in the City's Capital Improvement program for FY 2009. If the grant is approved, we will be able to begin work on the renovation and enhancements described above this summer. We believe that there are other burn building enhancements that we need to consider funding in future years, and we are working on a cost estimate for the balance of the project that we can discuss in our February 25 budget work session on the Capital Improvement Program.

FISCAL IMPACT: This grant request totals \$400,000, to address the renovations and enhancements described above. The state requires no local grant match; however, the Fire Department is required to allow other Virginia fire departments, including the fire department at Ronald Reagan National Airport, to schedule and use the burn building for fire training activities. The Fire Department plans to accommodate this added training.

The City is responsible for the normal administrative costs associated with this grant, including financial and reporting oversight provided by the Fire Department, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Finance Department.

ATTACHMENT: None. This grant application will be made available upon request.

STAFF:

Adam K. Thiel, Fire Chief
Wayne Bryant, Fire Lieutenant, Assistant Fire Training Officer
Edward Mandley, Director, General Services
Michele Evans, Deputy City Manager
Karen Winey, Grants Coordinator