

## City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 13, 2009

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

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

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**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 (FEMA) for funding for firefighters.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council:

- (1) Approve the submission of the grant application (due December 18, 2009); and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute the necessary documents that may be required.

**BACKGROUND:** On November 16, 2009, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security, opened the grant application period for the 2009 SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) Program. SAFER grants provide financial assistance to help local fire departments increase the number of frontline firefighters. (Note that single-role 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 safely and effectively respond to emergencies when and wherever they occur. Enhanced staffing will facilitate a reduction in firefighter injuries and ensure that an appropriate number of personnel will be present at the emergency incident scene. Additionally, augmenting current staffing levels will guarantee that all front-line apparatus have a minimum of four trained personnel to meet OSHA standards, a standard that is already met by surrounding jurisdictions. Ultimately, SAFER funding for additional fire fighting personnel will ensure faster response, safer and more effective incident scenes, and optimal community

protection against fire, trauma/medical, hazardous materials, technical rescue, and water-related events.

In December 2008, the Fire Department was awarded a 2007 SAFER grant totaling \$325,140 to be spent over a five-year period. This funding covers approximately 25% of the cost to hire three additional Firefighter-Rescuers (cross-trained firefighter-emergency medical technicians). Using this allocation, three Firefighter-Rescuers will be part of the Fire Department's next recruit school, which is scheduled to begin in April 2010.

**DISCUSSION:** During the March 25, 2008 City Council meeting and the April 1, 2008 Budget Work Session on Public Safety, staff discussed and presented to Council a report prepared by J. Gordon Routley, an expert in the field of fire incident analysis. Mr. Routley formulated 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. Included in the Routley Report was a recommendation that the Fire Department increase its minimum staffing (the number of firefighters assigned to engine and truck companies) from three to four per vehicle.

The 2009 SAFER grant funding requested from the Department of Homeland Security will fully fund the cost of hiring nine Firefighter-Rescuers, who will be part of an upcoming recruit school in FY 2012 or FY 2013. 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 2009 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 were awarded, five of eleven Fire Department engine/truck companies will each have minimum staffing levels of four personnel. Alexandria would be following the precedent set by Arlington and Fairfax Counties, which 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 2009 SAFER Grant funding will total \$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 retain these SAFER-funded positions for one additional year beyond the SAFER Grant two-year period of performance. The soonest the General Fund would be required to pick up the cost of these positions would be FY 2013 at an estimated \$700,000 per year. It is possible that the City may provide additional funding in the years beyond FY 2013 to further increase the number of engine/truck companies with minimum staffing levels of four personnel.

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

**STAFF:**

Adam K. Thiel, Fire Chief

James Lynch, Fire Department

Virginia Lester, Fire Department