

## **Memorandum 13-138 Fire Department Budget Requests**

**Memorandum ID:** 13-138

**Memorandum Status:** Information Only

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TO: Mayor and City Council

THROUGH: Jo Johnson, Acting City Manager

FROM: Robert Painter, Fire Chief

DATE: October 7, 2013

SUBJECT: Fire Department Budget Requests

Honorable Mayor Wythe & City Council:

Having reviewed the City Manager's Budget Memo to Council I would like to provide comment regarding the lack of support for the numerous funding requests presented to the City Manager regarding urgently needed and necessary maintenance issues regarding the existing station and the serious lack of advanced life support coverage during the summer months.

The Homer Volunteer Fire Department was established in 1952 by volunteers dedicated to providing fire protection and ambulance service to their neighbors. In 1979, following years of fundraising, the existing station on Pioneer Avenue was constructed using mostly volunteer time and labor and dedicated in 1980. Following consolidation with the City of Homer in 1990, the station and other assets were transferred to the city's care. Except for a major seismic construction upgrade and other necessary repairs in 1996/97 there has been little done to the station except routine maintenance. The majority of the floor coverings (rubber tile and carpeting) is original to the building (installed in 1979) and is simply wearing out. The exterior of the building, last stained more than 5 years ago, is also in desperate need of repainting and staining to maintain both the structure of the building and to prevent rot and decay of this critical infrastructure.

We realize that replacing the existing fire station with a new Public Safety Building has been identified as a capital priority but this process, with all good intentions, will still take at least 3-5 years before completion, if funding is obtained. In the meantime, it is vital that the existing facility be adequately maintained so that it retains its value and functionality. Deferring routine maintenance is neither wise, nor fiscally prudent if there is money in the building depreciation account.

As indicated in the City Manager's memorandum, his budget only included funding to replace the exterior fire escape and to replace aging and obsolete gas detectors and calibration equipment necessary for the safety of our responders.

For Fiscal Year 2014 the Fire Department also requested funding for two, full-time seasonal Emergency Service Specialists (Firefighter/EMT-3) personnel to help provide coverage during the summer when a number of our volunteer responders are on leave and our paid staff tend to take annual leave (full staffing places 3 personnel [Fire Chief, Departmental Services Coordinator and ESS] in the station during the workweek 8 am until 5 pm, but only 1 on duty [ESS] 24 hours). As the call volume of the fire department continues to rise almost every year, our volunteer membership is harder pressed to be available around the clock, especially during the daytime hours when the majority of calls are handled. These two seasonal employees would aid in providing a more immediate response to calls both during the day and help ensure that advanced life support is available 24/7 as required by our ambulance certification level. As the fire department has had a vacant full-time position for some time (Assistant Chief), the remaining staff strives to provide continuous EMS coverage, often resulting in overtime and on-call pay.

I can assure the Mayor and City Council it is not my desire or intention to create a fully paid fire department. The community has been well served by the mostly volunteer fire department for over 60 years, and we strongly desire to retain both the volunteer spirit and level of professionalism demonstrated by HVFD from its inception.

None-the-less, I do believe that we have reached a crossroads in the evolution of the fire service in Homer and must, for the benefit of our community, add more paid personnel during the busiest time of year to relieve the stress on both paid staff and volunteers alike.

I request the Council's support of my request for additional seasonal personnel in the 2014 budget.

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