

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM

Meeting Date: May 18, 2021
To: Honorable Mayor and Honorable City Councilmembers
From: Fire Committee: Emergency Services Fire Committee/Emergency Preparedness/Fire Department Long Term Staffing Goals and Solutions
Councilmember Diana Rich
Councilmember Patrick Slayter
City Manager-Attorney McLaughlin
Assistant City Manager/City Clerk Mary Gourley
Fire Chief Bill Braga
Subject: Fire Committee Report Out
Recommendation : That the Mayor and City Council Accept the Report and Authorize Committee to Move Forward On Proposed Options
Funding: Currently Budgeted: _____ Yes _____ No XX N/A
Net General Fund Cost: N/A
Amount: \$0

Account Code/Costs authorized in City Approved Budget (if applicable) AK (verified by Administrative Services Department)

INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE:

This item is to request that the City Council Accept the Report and Authorize Committee to Move Forward On Proposed Options

BACKGROUND:

On November 1, 2017, the City Council established the creation of two committees:

1. Sub-Committee formed to further review topics and provide recommendations for updating of policies, procedures and to return to the City Council with recommendations; and
2. Sub-Committee formed to discuss the Sebastopol Fire Department and analyzing where it is, where it needs to be and recommendations for reaching those goals.

The sub-committees met periodically to discuss updates to the emergency operations plan as well as discussion of long term needs of the Sebastopol Fire Department. In an effort to create efficiency, the Council proposed the consolidation of the two committees and created one committee:

Fire Committee: Emergency Services Fire Committee/Emergency Preparedness/Fire Department Long Term Staffing Goals and Solutions

This new committee is comprised of the following:

Councilmember Rich
Councilmember Slayter
City Manager/City Attorney McLaughlin

Assistant City Manager/City Clerk Gourley
Fire Chief Braga

DISCUSSION:

Natural hazards are becoming a part of living for Sonoma County. We have experienced floods, fires, PG&E outages to name a few but we also need to be prepared for any potential natural and manmade disasters such as earthquakes, terrorism, hazardous material spills, etc. Disaster can strike at any time without warning and can affect thousands of people every year.

The preservation of life and property is an inherent responsibility of all levels of government. Since disasters in many devastating forms may strike at any time, the City of Sebastopol must provide safeguards that will save lives and minimize property damage through prior planning, preparedness measures and training. In an effort to be prepared for these disasters, we also have to look at the services of the City as a whole, but also the services provided by the Fire Department for the protection of our community.

One responsibility the Fire Committee has been charged with is the update of the City of Sebastopol Emergency Operations Plan. The Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) establishes an Emergency Management Organization (EMO) and assigns functions and tasks consistent with California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and the National Incident Management System (NIMS). It provides for the integration and coordination of planning efforts of multiple jurisdictions. An Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is activated because a developing incident is occurring where either a major disaster has occurred or a field Incident Commander has upgraded the event to a major incident and has requested with management support, EOC activation. The update of the EOP and EOC has been budgeted for in the upcoming FY 2021-2022 budget. Once in final draft, the report will be presented to the City Council for review and approval.

Another responsibility charged to the Fire Committee is recommendations for long term needs of the Sebastopol Fire Department. The Volunteers of the Sebastopol Volunteer Fire Department have provided one of the highest forms of community service – they respond to fires, emergencies, medical calls, and natural disasters such as floods and fires. Nothing beats the sense of fulfillment that comes from doing an important job well while helping the community and this is what the volunteers do. They are valued volunteers of this community and in the spirit of respect and collaboration, this committee first began the initial stages of discussing the fire department challenges and needs by meeting with the Fire Chief as well as an ad hoc committee consisting of volunteers of the fire department with the support and approval of the Fire Chief.

The Fire Committee and the ad hoc volunteer committee are committed to open and honest communication. The discussion of planning for the future, funding, personnel recruitment, building and maintaining leadership and realistic and appropriate equipment needs can be difficult topics and require respect and trust from all parties. It is important to note the ad hoc committee is comprised of experienced, professional and knowledgeable volunteers with extensive experience in fire services - these individuals are critical resources for the Fire Committee.

In these meetings, the Fire Committee discussed the needs of the fire department as brought forward by the ad hoc committee through the Fire Chief. These requests included budgetary items such as personnel, equipment, vehicles, station repairs, etc. The ad hoc committee provided a presentation to the Fire Committee regarding these budget requests and in transparency, the full copy of the ad hoc committee's presentation is attached for reference. The Fire Committee also forwarded those requests to the Budget Committee for their information during the budgetary process.

As the Fire and Budget Committees do not yet have full information for budgeting of personnel, equipment and vehicles, the Fire Committee is highly recommending creation of a projected five-year rolling forecast for

personnel, equipment and vehicle needs. This would be a schedule for replacement of equipment and contain the relevant information from the City-wide Vehicle Replacement Schedule, as well as projected personnel needs based upon current trends in calls for service. Initially, this report would be reviewed by the Fire Committee who will make recommendations to the budget committee and then the entire City Council annually as part of the budget process. Due to the current budget process already well underway, the Fire Committee is recommending continuing the established method for FY2021/2022 with an eye towards the revised procedure for FY2022/2023.

The Fire Committee recognizes this may establish a slightly different process for the development of a single department's proposed budget, but the Fire Department is unlike any other City department; largely staffed by volunteers and with mandated equipment replacement periods for vital equipment. It is the Fire Committee's position that our community would be well-served by this type of process, ensuring the highest quality service and the greatest level of protection.

The Fire Committee also discussed strategies and processes to determine the following:

- Accurate cost projections to determine the current budget liability
- Short term and long term strategies
- Accurate cost projections for lease or purchase of vehicles and equipment
- Accurate cost projections for personnel

The Fire Committee will continue the process of analysis, however, before continuing the process of developing strategies for various options, it is requested the Council determine if there is consensus to continue analyzing particular alternatives. The Fire Committee will return to the Council once a projected budget has been determined for various options. In order to provide the Council with as much accurate information as possible, a subject matter expert may be needed and the Council should anticipate a request for appropriate compensation.

The Committee has not vetted any option but with Council approval, would continue the process and will consider all available options. The Committee expects its inquiry will be broad and will include the following:

- Review of: Increase in Fire Department Budget to Ensure Appropriate Planning for Costs of Equipment and Employees (to include 5 year plan for overall budget and fire equipment/vehicles). Review would be of current funding to include stipend pay as well as projected funding.
- Review of: Restructuring of Fire Department as Full Time (Staffed by Employees) Fire Department for City
- Review of: Sales Tax Measure to Fund Full Time (Staffed by Employees) Fire Department - City only
- Review of: Sales Tax Measure to Fund Full time/Volunteer Department - City only
- Review of: Consolidation with Another Fire Department (positive or negative impact)
- Discussion with outside agencies to include LAFCO, County, other Fire Departments
- Discussion with County about supporting / not supporting consolidation
- Processes for consolidation/costs
- Funding to obtain outside counsel/consultants to review budgetary items if support for consolidation
- Funding for financial advisory to create five year projected forecast of Fire Department
- Debt financing information for long-term capital projects or equipment items

The Sebastopol Fire Department has seen the number of requests for fire department services increase over the years. As evidenced from the Annual Level of Service Report presented to the Council at the April 20, 2021 City Council Meeting, Emergency Calls for Service for 2020 for the Fire Department were as follows:

Year-to-Date = 1164

Types:

- Medical/Vehicle – 626 (54%)
- Public Service – 98 (8%)

- Fire Alarms – 54 (5%)
- Hazmat/Spills – 61 (5%)
- Good Intent – 274 (23%)
- Fires/Misc – 51 (5%)

As the community grows, public expectations for a more efficient fire service grow. The funding resources for our City Fire Department are not increasing at a rate equal to the increase in costs for this department such as vehicles, apparatus, staffing, station repairs, etc. It is our responsibility as a Council to look at all avenues in how we provide these services. This committee is committed to looking at all avenues, from remaining status quo to consolidation, that would provide continuation of the high quality of fire services to the community.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

As of the writing of this staff report, the City has not received any public comment. However, if staff receives public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this staff report such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting. In addition, public comments may be offered during the “Public Comment” portion of the City Council discussion.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

This item was noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to scheduled meeting date.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with the recommended action tonight; however, it is recommended that the Fire Committee will be requesting budgets for various options be discussed at the goals and priorities fiscal budget meeting of May 19th.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Mayor and Council Accept the Report and Authorize Committee to Move Forward On Proposed Options

Attachments:

None