

**CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: April 16, 2024**

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To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From: Councilmembers Neysa Hinton and Jill McLewis, Fire Ad Hoc Committee
Subject: Fire Department Staffing, Recruitment for Second Fire Engineer Position

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RECOMMENDATIONS: Authorize City staff to initiate recruitment for and hire a second Fire Engineer position, currently authorized but vacant.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Sebastopol Fire Department has two authorized Fire Engineer positions. The positions were created to enhance fire service delivery and support the Fire Department's daytime operational capacity by ensuring a qualified Driver/Operator is on duty. The second position is crucial for addressing staffing shortages and improving response capability. Staff has submitted a request to the County of Sonoma in the amount of \$117,000 to provide bridge funding for eight months for the position (May 1-December 31) until Measure H (recent sales tax for fire services) takes effect on October 1, 2024. The request has also been made through and supported by Sonoma County Fire Service Working Group. Because Measure H funding will be available three months sooner than anticipated with the request, the amount under County consideration is now \$73,125. (Note: Staff inadvertently requested \$7,195 more than necessary and will adjust our request accordingly.)

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION: The Fire Department faces challenges with its current staffing model. From 2020-2023, during full alarm structure fire assignments within city limits, the department was unable to meet NFPA 1720 standards. In some instances, Department personnel were unable to respond and relied on our neighboring fire departments to provide agreed upon mutual aid. In the Fire Department's opinion, had this position been filled when approved in year's budget, Sebastopol would have been in a better position to respond with our neighboring fire departments.

The incident workload has steadily increased over decades, with projected calls for service in 2024 expected to surpass 1400, up from 1325 in 2023. The staffing model currently in place is insufficient to adequately meet the emergency response needs of the City.

Currently, the Fire Department operates with one 40-hour Fire Engineer, working Monday through Thursday. This engineer primarily serves as a qualified Driver/Operator for the first responding engine company when on duty. They also provide a fire prevention role, working to enforce Fire Code and other prevention tasks throughout the city. If this individual is on leave, the role may be filled by a stipend firefighter (who may or may not be a qualified Driver/Operator) or may be left vacant. Friday through Sunday, all Fire Department responses are provided by stipend firefighters (who may or may not be qualified Driver/Operators).

Securing a second career fire engineer will ensure a qualified Driver/Operator is available seven days a week, for ten hours a day, and provide additional support to cover absences due to vacation or sick leave, currently left uncovered or filled by stipend firefighters. The expectation is that this second Fire Engineer will work Thursday through Sunday, allowing for overlap on Thursday (the day of the weekly Fire Department drill), and providing more consistent staffing.

Council saw fit to add a second Fire Engineer, and approved funding this position as part of the FY 23-24 budget. A prior interim Fire Chief attempted to hire for this position but was unsuccessful in finding a suitable candidate. The role remains essential to the department's operations.

STAFF ANALYSIS: City staff have thoroughly evaluated the necessity of the second engineer position and its alignment with the Fire Department's objectives. The addition of this role is deemed essential for maintaining minimal operational efficiency and improving response capabilities.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH: This item has been noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to schedule meeting date.

FISCAL IMPACT: For the remainder of FY 23-24, if hired by May 1, the position will cost up to \$31,472 including \$4,500 for recruitment and \$4,000 for equipment. There will be no impact to the City if the County provides the requested bridge funding. If the County does not approve the request for bridge funding, the City will absorb the costs.

For FY 24-25 and beyond, it will cost up to \$137,830 annually. If the County approves bridge funding until Measure H takes effect on October 1 (which would be \$34,458 for the three months of July through September), the cost to the City for the remainder of FY 24-25 will be up to \$103,373. The Fire Ad Hoc Committee and staff support continued funding for the position which will be possible with \$1.1 million in annual Measure H funding expected.

OPTIONS:

1. Recruit and fill the vacant Fire Engineer position immediately to ensure that the Fire Department is staffed with a minimum of one qualified Driver/Operator during the day, 7 days a week.
2. Continue the current staffing model of one Fire Engineer 4 days a week and rely on a volunteer response for a qualified Driver/Operator for the balance of the week.

ATTACHMENTS: March 19th, 2024, letter to the Fire Service Working Group requesting funds.

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval: Approval Date: 4-10-2024

CEQA Determination (Planning): Approval Date: 4-10-2024

The proposed action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Administrative Services (Financial) Approval Date: 4-10-2024

Costs authorized in City Approved Budget: Yes No N/A

Account Code (f applicable) 100-31-02-4010

City Attorney Approval: Approval Date: 4-10-2024

City Manager Approval: Approval Date: 4-10-2024



City of Sebastopol
FIRE DEPARTMENT
7425 Bodega Ave.
Sebastopol, CA 95472
707 823-8061



Todd Derum
Interim Fire Chief

Date: March 19, 2024

To: The Fire Service Working Group (FSWG)
From: Todd Derum, Fire Chief
Subject: Funding request to bridge critical staffing needs

FSWG Leadership,

The City of Sebastopol is seeking funding from the County of Sonoma to make an incremental staffing increase for our Fire Department's operational staff. The request is for \$117,000. These funds would allow us to fill and outfit our second 40-week fire engineer for ten months. This would assist us by bridging the gap from May 2024 to the anticipated distribution of Measure H monies in January 2025.

Currently, the Sebastopol Fire Department has one 40-hour a week fire engineer that works Monday – Thursday. The primary purpose of this individual is to provide a qualified Driver/Operator for the first responding engine company. Often the balance of this engine company is made up of a stipend firefighter or volunteers when available. Securing a second fire engineer will allow for a qualified Driver/Operator 7-days a week, 10-hours a day and the depth to cover shifts behind vacation or sick leave.

From 2020-2023 the Sebastopol Fire Department was **unable** to meet NFPA 1720 73% of the time for full alarm assignments within the city limits. In a hand full of occasions, the department was **unable** to respond at all. The Sebastopol Fire Department is on pace to exceed 1400 incidents this year with nearly 250 of which are simultaneous or back-to-back calls for service.

We look forward to the potential funds from Measure H and plan to staff a 3.0 engine company 24-hours/day, 7-day/week 365-days/year in the 24/25 FY. In the meantime, the securing of our second fire engineer position is a crucial next step in insuring a safe response of our first out engine company and to our city.

Your collective consideration and support are greatly appreciated.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "T. Derum".

Todd Derum, Fire Chief
Sebastopol Fire Department