


Office of the City Manager

ACTION CALENDAR

October 5, 2004

To: Honorable Mayor and
Members of the City Council

From:  Phil Kamlarz, City Manager

Subject: Implementation of FY 2005 Adopted Budget: Fire Department

RECOMMENDATION

1. Continue discussions with the Berkeley Fire Fighters Association regarding a salary savings at substantially the same percentage impact on total compensation as contributed by all other labor unions, equivalent to approximately \$300,000, from the Fire Department FY 2005 budget.
2. Provide final recommendations for equivalent reductions (approximately \$300,000) to the FY 2005 budget through the reduction of service in the Fire Department should no agreement for reduction in compensation be achieved.
3. Reinstate the Fire Department service reduction in FY 2006 should the Paramedic Tax pass.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

1. Should agreement be reached with the labor union, the Fire Department's FY 2005 budget would be balanced with no further reduction in service to the public.
2. Reduction in hours to one fire company by shutting the company from the hours of 6 P.M. to 8 A.M. beginning November 8, 2004 would reduce overtime expenditures that are necessary to maintain minimum daily staffing. The Department estimates that such a closure will save approximately \$300,000 in FY 2005.
3. Passage of the Paramedic Tax would provide \$1.2 million to the Fire Department's FY 2006 budget. This would allow for full staffing of the current fire companies and would provide a service enhancement to the City by providing First Responder Advance Life Support (FRALS) fire companies Citywide.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

On June 22, 2004, the City Council took action to balance the FY 2005 Budget. In that action, the City Council authorized the City Manager to achieve equivalent cost savings at substantially the same percentage impact on total compensation as contributed by other labor unions, equivalent to approximately \$300,000, from the Fire Department FY 2005 Budget, and return in October 2004 with specific reduction recommendations. The City Manager is now returning to Council with options and final recommendations for the \$300,000 from the Fire Department's budget.

With the exception of the Berkeley Fire Fighters' Association, all labor unions in the City are taking a salary reduction in FY 2005. The side letter agreements with the unions state that the City will make all reasonable efforts to establish equivalent cost-saving mechanisms in all other City representation units. It is a matter of maintaining good will with the other labor organizations and City employees, who have agreed to salary give-backs, for Council to take action.

The City Manager plans to come back to Council on October 19, 2004 to finalize these recommendations.

BACKGROUND

Berkeley has a relatively low number of structure fires, in part due to an effective fire prevention program. Fires of all types account for 3-5% of the total call volume; structure fires make up 1-3% of this number. The Department responds to 120-140 structure fires per year. Other types of fires include vehicle fires, wildland fires, and other outdoor fires, including trashcans or dumpsters on the street. The Fire Department responds to an average of 1-2 reports of a structure fire daily, but only 1 out of 3 of these calls are actual structural fires.

Current Fire Department staffing requires 33 firefighters on duty each 24 hour shift to staff 7 engine companies, 2 truck companies and 3 ambulance units. When, as a result of vacations and sick leave, the shift staffing falls below the minimum number of 33, the Department uses overtime hiring to fill the companies. On average, the Fire Department hires 3 or more firefighters per shift. By closing a fire company from 6 P.M. to 8 A.M., the Department will be able to use personnel from the "out of service" company to fill vacancies that otherwise would be filled using overtime.

Engine and truck companies are staffed with 3 firefighters; ambulances are staffed with 2 firefighters. The engine companies are located at each of the City's 7 fire stations. The truck companies are co-located with an engine company at fire stations 2 (Berkeley Way and Henry Street) and 5 (Shattuck and Derby).

Engines carry a water supply and fire hose and are the initial fire suppression units. Engines are also dispatched as first responders for medical calls. Trucks provide vital rescue and ventilation capability at structural fires. They have the aerial ladders that allow access to multi-storied buildings and also carry much of the specialized rescue equipment (like the "Jaws of Life" used in vehicle extrication). Trucks generally are not dispatched on emergency medical calls.

The proposed plan calls for placing one truck company out of service between the hours of 6 P.M. and 8 A.M., and using personnel normally assigned to the station to fill vacancies in other companies. **The plan does not call for the closing of a fire station.** Fire management staff believes that reducing truck company coverage during nighttime hours will have the least impact on fire department operations. The fire station housing the truck company will still have an engine company in service and will be available to respond to fires and other emergencies. **No area of the city will be without emergency response coverage. Response times for**

emergency medical service will not be reduced, as would be the case if a fire station were closed.

During the planned shutdown, only one truck company would be staffed to cover the City. For areas previously protected by the closed truck, response times for a truck will increase. Mutual aid for a second truck can be used to combat a major fire. Certain operational changes will be put in place to mitigate the reduced staffing. The Fire Department's operational plan is to maintain the truck crew at the station with the out of service truck. Operation of a truck and the equipment it carries requires special knowledge and skills. The truck crew would staff the engine company in the station. This would allow the crew to cross-staff to the out of service truck when the other truck is committed to an incident or is otherwise occupied.

One advantage to the reduction of truck hours in the night is that firefighters for the engine company with the trained truck crew will likely be available in the station (not in training or other department activities that take place during the day) and can place the truck in service with proper notification and communication within the fire department. **Engine response time to all areas of the City should not be affected.**

An analysis of Berkeley's fire history for a three-year period indicates a second ladder truck is actually needed 10 to 12 times a year. 55% of the fires in Berkeley occur at night (6 P.M. to 8A.M.). Nighttime fires have a great rescue potential because more people are home and asleep. Reducing the truck staffing by one-half suggests 5-6 times a year a second truck would be critical for fire operations and could cause a request for mutual aid from another jurisdiction. We estimate this could occur 5-6 times a year during reduced staffing.

Response times for a City truck to some portions of the City will increase. A study of fire locations determined that more fires occur in the south part of the City, with University Avenue being the dividing line. It is proposed to keep the 24 hour ladder truck at Station 5 (Shattuck and Derby) in service and maintain 10 hours of operation at Station 2 (Berkeley Way and Henry Street).

A mutual aid ladder truck has a longer response time than a City truck. Response time for mutual aid from the closest truck in north Oakland has been estimated to be 10 minutes to south Berkeley and 20 minutes to north Berkeley. Emeryville Fire does not have a truck, but has combination engines with aerial ladders that provide a smaller aerial ladder that can be used at some incidents. At this time, mutual aid from Richmond Fire may not be possible due to Richmond's staffing cuts.

In summary, **no fire stations will be closed.** We will maintain two trucks during the day and one at night. Operational changes will help mitigate any increased structure fire loss and delay in rescue services for the few incidents that might occur.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Berkeley has excellent fire station coverage. The City has a station coverage ratio of one station for every 1.4 square miles. Comparable cities range from one station for every 2 to 8.9 square miles. **The Department will continue to have seven fully staffed fire stations**, as it has since the 1970's. During this time of reduced staffing, one truck will be available 24 hours a day. A second truck will be available 10 hours a day from 8 A.M. to 6 P.M. This plan will achieve the necessary cost savings in the Fire Department budget with the least impact on community safety and Department operations.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

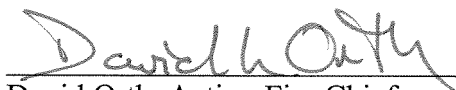
The Fire Department has already eliminated staff positions in its FY2005 budget (Assistant Fire Chief, Assistant Director of Training/Fire Lieutenant, Associate Analyst). No other cost saving measures will achieve the \$300,000 required in FY 2005 from the Fire Department budget.

The \$300,000 cost savings would be accomplished by June 2005. If the Paramedic Tax measure passes in November 2004, it would bring an additional \$1.2 million to the Department's budget. The closure of the truck company would be reinstated in FY 2006 should the Paramedic Tax pass.

CONTACT PERSON

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Approved:



David Orth, Acting Fire Chief