

**SAN BERNARDINO CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT  
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Mayor Davis and Common Council

**From:** Paul A. Drasil, Interim Fire Chief

**Subject:** Proposed Fire Department Budget for Fiscal Year 14/15

**Date:** June 26, 2014

**Copies:** Allen Parker

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Mayor and Councilmembers, at your request I have prepared a brief summary of the Fire Department's proposed budget for 2014/15, as well as summary of some my impressions of the Citygate report that was presented to the Council on June 17,2014.

**Citygate**

Citygate was asked to review four issues about the Fire Department, which they provided in a "fire crew deployment study" this provided the bulk of their report. This information provided baseline data for three other issues they were asked to evaluate.

1. Could the City consider closing fire stations to help balance the budget, can any be closed? If so where and with what impacts?
2. Should the City continue to provide paramedic service?
3. What are the options for contracting out or merging fire service?

I will only provide my comments on these 3 issues in this summary, as they are the most relevant.

*Station Closures:* Citygate's recommends the closing of Fire Stations 223 (Highland and Medical Center) and 231 (Waterman and Vanderbilt) if necessary. (Page 11, Recommendation #4, Vol.1) They provide an excellent summary of the impacts of closure of these or any of our stations. (Page 9 Section 1.4, Volume 1) To highlight they stress that due to our high call volume both, fire and emergency medical services (EMS), we should work to lower our response to non-life threatening EMS calls in order to allow our units to respond more appropriately to all calls for service. We had been using a priority dispatch system but elected to stop utilizing this program in July 2013. This system allows our dispatcher to "hand off" non-life threatening calls to our ambulance provider, they will then respond solo. We have begun the process of getting that system completely functional again, by meeting with the appropriate agencies. Our hope is to

have it in place within 60 days. This will reduce our EMS calls for service, as of now we cannot give an estimate as to the number of calls that could be affected.

Fire management staff and I disagree with the stations Citygate selected for closure, we feel a better option, if needed, would be to close Station 230 (Mill and Arrowhead) and remove one of the units from Station 224 (north of Highland and E St.) Station 230 was one of the final 5 stations that were considered. We feel Station 230 is a better candidate for closure for several reasons:

- Least impact on surrounding agencies (Citygate cautions before their recommended closures mutual aid and auto aid contracts be re-visited and enhanced)
- Station 230 has the least travel time increase of another City fire unit into that district. (20 secs. the lowest of all station districts)
- The building itself is not owned by the City, (owned by the National Orange Show NOS) maintenance has been a continual headache for both the City and the NOS.
- Station 230 is our 7<sup>th</sup> busiest station. Approximately 2,000calls/year in 2013 or 5.5 calls/day, and is not in the core of the City.
- For further detail regarding criteria refer to Page 67, Section 5, Vol. 2 of the Citygate report.

The removal of one unit (crew) from Station 224, does impact one of our busiest stations (approximately 4,000calls/year or 11calls/day). Currently this station is one of two in the City staffed by two units, Station 221 (Sierra Way and 3<sup>rd</sup>) being the other. We are proposing to leave a full 3 person crew, at Station 224, to staff either the truck or engine, and add a Paramedic Squad (2 person crew) to respond to EMS calls for service.

The reduction of these two crews is not desirable but is necessary to meet our budget goal; this will be discussed later in the document.

*Paramedic Service:* Citygate recommends that we continue to provide paramedic service for the foreseeable future. (Page 11, Recommendation #8, Vol. 1). We agree with this recommendation, as the potential cost savings and the possible revenue loss (Contract with San Bernardino County Fire) nearly offset each other the first year. Citygate also mentions that there may be some form of revenue in the future as a result of the Affordable Care Act. If we opt out of providing paramedic service now we would not be eligible for any re-imbursement. The option of not provide paramedic service will still be available, if at some point the decision is to only respond to fire and rescue calls.

*Contract or Merger of Fire Service Options:* We agree with Citygate's analysis of this option. (Page 12, Section 1.6, Vol. 1) The report does an excellent job of walking through the process that would be required, quite clearly this would not be a viable option for this fiscal year. I feel this could be a future option at some point if all parties are in agreement.

## **Proposed Budget for 2014/2015**

The proposed Fire Department budget for fiscal year 2014/2015 is approximately \$28,000,000. At the budget workshop held May 28, 2014 our budget was presented to the Council. This proposal uses that budget as a framework. We have made some changes that incorporate some of the recommendations from the Citygate report; this proposal also presents some more detail.

In order to meet our proposed 2014/2015 budget, we are presenting a plan to Council that includes the following:

Reducing the staffing on 2 engine companies and bring a Paramedic squad in service to fill behind one of the engine companies. These reductions could result in the reduction of 3 Captain Positions, 6 Engineer positions, and 3 Firefighter positions. (Total of 12 positions, savings of \$1,800,000) The total on duty/day sworn personnel would be reduced to 40 from the current 44 positions. The original proposal was to reduce staffing on 2 engine companies; it did not include putting a squad in service and resulted in a loss of 18 positions.

The first proposal included a reorganization of the management staff, eliminating one shift Battalion Chief Position per day and creating 2 Deputy Chief Positions. We have elected to maintain 2 shift Battalion Chiefs on duty per day and have added a Deputy Chief Position back to the management staff. We feel this position is essential to oversee the operational side of the department, currently the Fire Chief must assume the duties of the Deputy Fire Chief. This has been difficult and staff has recognized that the operation and oversight of the Fire and EMS side of the Department has suffered.

The original proposal included a provision of a minimum staffing model, this would allow for the reduction or "brown-out" of engine companies as needed to manage the amount of personnel working extra shifts. Currently we have to staff every piece of equipment each day, this is commonly known as "constant staffing", every vacant position (currently there are 14, or 3.5/day) and earned day off taken is filled by another off-duty firefighter. The minimum staffing model would allow fire management staff to "brown-out" an engine when personnel take time off (Vacation, Holiday, or sick) if conditions allow for it. There are a number of factors that need to be considered prior to making the decision to "brown-out" they may include: environmental conditions, special events, projected staffing needs, fire activity in adjacent jurisdictions, and budget constraints. The overriding determination will be based on public and firefighter safety.

The Citygate report stressed that we should move towards reducing the number of responses to non-life threatening EMS calls, to help address that we are proposing the addition of three Dispatcher Supervisors. This will enable us to have three dispatchers on duty, (24/7) which will enable them to more fully utilize the priority dispatch system. Another benefit will be to decrease call handling time, which was identified as a concern in the Citygate study. (Page 57, Section 4.2.1, Vol. 2) We are eliminating a Fire Communications Manager position (vacant), for a net gain of 2 personnel in our Fire Communications Division.

The original proposal included the addition of a Fire Equipment Mechanic II and a Deputy Fire Marshal (non-safety), the elimination of an Emergency Services Manager position (vacant) and

Fire Prevention Officer; this has been changed to a Fire Prevention Tech. position (vacant). These have remained unchanged. We have added an additional Fire Prevention officer position, to the current proposal; therefore our Community Risk division will see a net change of two positions. This will enhance their ability to be proactive and to meet the needs of residents, contractors and developers. This division generates approximately \$1,000,000 in revenue and the proposed cost for 2014/15 will be approximately \$975,000.

## **Impacts**

The proposed budget presented to the Mayor and Common Council will have impacts to Fire Department operations and to the residents of San Bernardino. The Citygate report provides a good analysis of these impacts; additionally these impacts were presented to Council during the Budget Workshop held May 28, 2014. The work load associated with these two units will have to be absorbed by other companies in the City. Due to fiscal stress the City is under, all City departments have had to endure budget reductions that have affected service levels and employees, this proposal is no different. This proposal, as presented, meets our proposed 14/15 budget, at cost to the General Fund of approximately \$28,071,000.

## **Summary**

I have presented a very brief overview of our proposed budget; there are many moving parts to the plan. The minimum staffing component can greatly enhance fire management ability to manage cost balanced with providing a service level appropriate to the current conditions and needs of the City. Implementing this proposal in a timely manner is essential to staying on target and being able to meet our projected budget.

Respectfully,

Paul Drasil  
Interim Fire Chief