City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 14, 2009

TO: THE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 105____: RESPONSE TO FOUR QUESTIONS
            ABOUT THE FIRE DEPARTMENT'S BUDGET METRICS AND
            ACTIVITIES

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This memorandum is in response to Councilman Krupicka and Councilman Wilson's questions about the Fire Department's budget metrics and activities.

Since three Shift Safety Officers were added for FY 2009, can better metrics for those positions be added in the Fire Department's Health and Safety Division?

The Fire Department is currently tracking data and will set up new metrics for the proposed FY 2011 budget. On staff for just six months, the new Shift Safety Officers currently track the following information: Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) compliance requirements; number of employees attending infectious disease refreshers and OSHA's 10-hour Industry Classes; root causes of accidents; and initiatives to establish a "culture of safety" for all fire-response and fire-training activities. From these data, Fire Department sStaff will select the best performance metrics to evaluate and add to the proposed FY 2011 budget.

Will the Site Safety Survey activity, which is currently "under review," be completed prior to budget adoption?

The Site Safety Survey data will not be completed for the FY 2010 Approved Budget but will be documented for the Fire Department's Proposed FY 2011 Budget. With Site Safety Surveys underway, Fire Officers and Firefighters are identifying target hazards and collecting site-specific information, which can be used for effective short-term and long-term planning. As a result, information from this Site Safety Survey activity is now a priority that has been incorporated into the Department's strategic planning process. Two Fire Department's strategic planning teams will use Site Safety Survey information to address Fire Department's focus areas of readiness and community engagement.

What would be the public safety and financial implications of eliminating the Marine Operations Team, which is currently stood down to correct some deficiencies?

On February 26, 2009, the Fire Department reconstituted its Marine Operations Team (MOT), after assessing program needs, reassigning staff, and initiating a new training program to ensure safe boat operations.

The public safety implication of either reducing or eliminating MOT would significantly increase response time along Alexandria's Waterfront, which is one of the City's busiest and most popular attractions. Each day, hundreds of people travel on the water taxi, sightseeing cruise boats, and lunch/dinner ships;, and sixty boats of various sizes can be are docked, all at once, along piers. The closest fireboat, located at National Harbor, is only staffed from 7:00 A.M. until 5:00 P.M., and response times from other fireboats in the District of Columbia or Fairfax County are lengthy—from ten to thirty minutes to respond to Alexandria's Waterfront. In addition, Alexandria's fireboat provides the primary water supply to Woodrow Wilson Bridge, a service obligation signed by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), which states that ". . . Virginia . . . shall provide service for any fire protection systems on as much of the Bridge as is possible."

The financial implications over the next 2-3 years include the upgrade of the Fire Boat at $191,930, which includes the purchase of two new engines, and the purchase of two new inflatable boats for in-land water rescue at $34,000. This last item (inflatable boats) is budgeted in the Fire Department's equipment replacement fund in the proposed FY 2010 budget (an Internal Services Fund expenditure). In addition, the MOT needs personal protective equipment totaling $52,000 and water rescue training totaling $162,000.

Aside from the $34,000 for purchasing inflatable boats from the equipment replacement fund, there is no additional funding for upgrading the MOT in the FY 2010 proposed budget. Such funding should be considered for future budgets in the context of the Fire Department's strategic plan and overall multi-year operational and capital funding needs.

What progress has been made in achieving some of the recommendations addressed in the Routley incident report, such as Fire Department staffing and a more regional approach to Fire Communications?

For FY 2010, a Fire Department discretionary budget supplemental proposes the addition of four personnel in Fire Communications to immediately address the resource and training shortages, along with continuous in-house training sessions for emergency communications technicians and back-up personnel who work in both the Fire and Police Departments. Recently, the Fire Department was awarded a Federal SAFER grant, which will provide $325,000 over the next four years to cover the cost of hiring three additional Firefighters to staff one engine company as a four-person apparatus (rather than a three-person apparatus).

The Department's strategic planning team is focusing its resource needs on key priorities to ensure the most effective use of the Department's resources. Using strategic planning,

in a series of small "moves," the Fire Department is planning to do the right things, at the right time, and in the right direction.

Regionally, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) Fire Chiefs' Subcommittee is evaluating several options for establishing a regional operations center, but multi-jurisdictional planning will be a lengthy process, albeit a necessary requirement, to do it right. Incremental steps, however, are already underway, such as the NOVA Fire Chiefs group pilot approach for the Regional Operations Control Center (ROCC), which was used, for the first time, during the FY 2009 Presidential Inauguration. In addition, continued regional participation is demonstrated in the CAD-2-CAD project, a sub-regional CAD interface that recently received funding as part of the Federal Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) program for the National Capital Region (NCR). Specifications for the CAD interface were development by the regional information technology group, and a purchase request for Alexandria's interface was recently sent to Fairfax County, the jurisdiction coordinating this project.

The Fire Department will continue to work with surrounding jurisdictions to design and develop a regional communications system that will be a "best-fit" for the region and to explore potential Federal and State funding opportunities for this 24/7/365 operation.

How do Alexandria's staff levels for the Emergency Communications System (TENS) compare to others in the region?

Comparing staffing levels in Alexandria's Fire Communications Division, which receives 120,000 calls each year, with other jurisdictions is challenging, since comparisons have to be made with mostly combined centers that provide Fire and Police emergency and non-emergency call taking. Although Arlington County receives 459,000 call per year, their cost per call at $13.78 is close to Alexandria's estimated cost per call at $15.76, including expenditures for the (proposed) addition of four positions for FY 2010. The cost per position, or FTE, including technical equipment and overhead costs, is slightly lower in Alexandria at $111,000 than in Arlington at $112,000. With the addition of four Emergency Communications Technicians (ECTs), the number of calls answered per FTE in both jurisdictions will be approximately the same.