



# City of Sebastopol FIRE DEPARTMENT

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## SHORT AND LONG TERM PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE SEBASTOPOL FIRE DEPARTMENT

### Background:

The City Council Fire Ad-hoc Committee has been exploring options for the Fire Service delivery system of the city. The Committee has requested proposals from the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (GRFPD) and the Sonoma County Fire Protection District (SCFPD) as options to delivering fire and emergency services. The direction also included developing a proposal for the city continuing to deliver service through its existing fire department. Included with this memo are the proposals as requested.

Both the GRFPD and SCFPD proposals are based on the fire districts annexing the parcels within the city limits and thus applying the districts special tax fees to the parcels as a method of generating revenues to fund proposals. Both proposals provide estimated costs for fulltime staffing, but otherwise acknowledge that an in-depth cost analysis is required to provide an accurate total cost for the proposal. Both district proposals also are clear that the estimated cost would not be covered by the districts parcel tax measures and additional funding would be required from the city. The Sebastopol Fire Department plan offers a phase-in approach to achieving a high-level of staffing and addressing station and equipment requirements. While as indicated, a deep financial analysis must occur, however a high-level overview of the costs for comparison is as follows:

	SCFPD	GRFPD	SFD – Phase I and II
<b>Response Staffing</b>	\$2-2.5 million	\$1.1 million	\$207,000
<b>Operational</b>	\$1.5 million*	\$1.5 million*	\$1.3 million
<b>Apparatus Replacement</b>	More analysis required	More analysis required	More analysis required
<b>Temporary Crew Quarters</b>	\$1.5 million*	\$1.5 million*	0
<b>Implementation and Execution Costs</b>	\$100,000*	\$100,000*	0
<b>Fire Station</b>	More analysis	More analysis	More analysis

<b>Remodel</b>	required	required	required
<b>Total Estimated Cost:</b>	\$5,100,000-\$5,600,000	\$4,200,000	\$1,507,000

\*Not included in the proposals by the Fire Districts but will be a cost required in the execution of a proposal. This cost will be burdened by the city.

**State of the Sebastopol Fire Department:**

The Sebastopol Fire Department is staffed by a fulltime Fire Chief, 1 fulltime 40-hour Fire Engineer and use of stipend firefighters but is otherwise a volunteer fire department as has been the case since its inception in 1902. The current staffing and delivery system provides acceptable response time standards and meets the mission of providing fire and emergency response services by maintaining a well-trained, well equipped volunteer force. To that however, it is becoming increasingly challenging to maintain this model for the foreseeable future. This report identifies a strategy to meet these challenges moving forward.

The department responds to approximately 1250-1300 Calls for Service annually. The department also provides fire inspection, fire prevention, community support activities and EOC operations.

The department is a full-service fire department. The services provided include:

- Fire suppression responses
- EMS responses with trained Emergency Medical Technicians
- Special operations including heavy rescue operations, swift water and flood rescue, rope rescue, trench rescue, animal rescue, hazardous materials response, and auto extraction to name a few
- Comprehensive volunteer training program ensuring personnel are well trained and well equipped
- Fire Inspections
- Fire Prevention activities
- Community support programs
- Management of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

The current fire department budget is \$1.35 million and represents approximately 11% of the City’s general fund. Comparable cities to Sebastopol in the state spend approximately 20-24% of general fund revenues for fire and emergency responses illustrating that the current model is the most cost-effective model for these critical services provided to the citizens of Sebastopol.

The Fire Chief and City Staff perform administration and other administrative functions. The Fire Chief provides the direct leadership for the organization. The Fire Chief serves at the direction of the Council under the supervision of the City Manager. Duties of the Fire Chief include, but are not limited to, performing fire prevention duties and responsibilities, performs all administrative functions of the department, leads and

manages the Volunteer Firefighters, takes part in the EOC operations, serves as the liaison to the community and community organizations (such as CERT, MYN, SNCU).

The 40-hour Fire Engineer performs various administrative support functions, fire station and equipment maintenance and most importantly, improves the reliability of daytime staffing for emergency responses. Stipend paid firefighters are also used to close the daytime staffing gap.

The volunteer force maintains an approximate 25-person roster of volunteers that responds from home to the stations at the time of emergency responses. Volunteers also attend weekly training sessions and are involved in other support functions.

### **Challenges:**

As discussed, the department is providing an adequate service level meeting minimum response and service standards, is generally meeting equipment and apparatus requirements, and provides quality training to the volunteer staff. As presented to the council in the fall of 2021, the department has challenges with this current model and must address the following:

- Develop and fund a compressive apparatus replacement plan
- Funding and purchasing plan for large equipment replacement (i.e., SCBA's, Hoses, and Radio's)
- Plan and fund station improvements and address handicap, gender, and 24 hours staffing accommodations.
- Enhance and fund a comprehensive volunteer recruitment, training, and retention program.
- Address current staffing challenges by providing an adequate response of volunteers to daytime calls. (The complete reliant on volunteers being a sustainable model is not likely.)

### **Proposal for the City to continue to maintain its own Fire Department and overcome presented challenges:**

This proposal is a multi-phase proposal of first maintaining the current most cost-effective staffing model and addressing budget funding specific to apparatus, equipment, and volunteer recruitment and retention. The proposal then would establish the path to achieve the long-term goal for the City is to:

- Reach a staffing level of a Fire Chief, 40-hour Fire Captain, and a minimum 2 fire suppression personnel on duty 24 hours a day,
- Maintain a strong volunteer force to ensure the staffing of technical apparatus (ladder truck, rescue equipment, and mutual aid staffing)
- Provide Battalion Chief coverage in the absents of the Fire Chief
- Develop an enhanced comprehensive recruitment program
- Fortify, fund and execute an apparatus replacement plan
- Make necessary station improvements to accommodate 24-hour staffing.

### **Phase I:**

- Add 1 additional fulltime paid Fire Engineer to the current staffing model and continue to maintain a strong volunteer force to serve as the primary method of staffing equipment and responding to emergencies. (\$130,000)
- Commitment to apparatus replacement schedule meeting the NFPA or industry standards as presented to the council ad-hoc committee. (\$40,000)
- Develop a station improvement needs analysis and calculate the costs of identified improvements (\$25,000)
- Enhance the volunteer staffing model by using stipend firefighters to ensure the integrity of a reliable response for service. This includes potential night shifts depending on signs of burnout of late-night volunteer responses. (\$10,000)
- Fund and develop a robust volunteer recruitment, retention, and training program (\$15,000)
- Evaluate municipal funding mechanisms and options to fund station and staffing improvements in phase II and III. This would include allocation of existing funds, potential sales tax increase, property tax initiatives to fund these future phases.

### **Phase II:**

As phase I indicates, phase II is the phase in which municipal funding mechanisms, including allocation of existing funds, potential sales tax increase, and property tax initiatives, to fund future phases. The key actions of phase II are:

- Determine the method to gain a greater commitment to the fire budget from general fund revenues (at least to a minimum 20%)
- Project the costs of an improved staffing model (ultimately a minimum 3 persons on duty 24/7)
- Evaluate the successes of funding the key components of Phase I and address any shortfalls from Phase I in this phase
- Work with citizens committees and pollsters to develop possible tax initiatives to bring forward to the voters and taxpayer of the citizens of Sebastopol \$25,000
- Evaluate staffing and response challenges and adjust as necessary including the potential of hiring additional fulltime employees (\$20,000-150,000)
- Execute a possible tax initiative as recommended from the findings of the citizens committee and pollsters. (The city at this point cannot be involved in the campaign process)

### **Phase III:**

- Implement/execute station improvement plan (\$ 2 million)
- Evaluate new funding sources that have been identified or implemented

- Evaluate staffing and response challenges and adjust as necessary, including the potential of hiring additional fulltime employees to a potential of a minimum 2 personnel on duty 24/7 (potential \$1.25 million)

**Summary:**

The benefit of this proposal are as follows:

- Maintains all control of the fire department within the city’s governance system
- Continues to maintain a high level of service to its citizens with a phased-in approach to improve levels of service in terms of a reliable, sustainable Standards of Cover
- Continues to provide the greatest economy to value
- Provide for a method to propose potential tax initiatives that are voted on by the citizens of Sebastopol
- Addresses maintaining a strong volunteer firefighting force that is well trained and well equipped
- Addresses equipment, apparatus replacement and fire station improvements
- Maintains the strength and leadership of maintaining the Fire Chief position

**BUDGET DEMAND BY PHASE:**

PHASE I OBJECTIVES	PHASE I COSTS	PHASE II OBJECTIVES	PHASE II COSTS	Phase III OBJECTIVES	PHASE III COSTS
1 Fulltime paid FF/Engineer	\$130,000	Continued budget commitment to address apparatus, equipment replacement	Requires further analysis	Execute fire station remodel**	\$2 million
Down payment for replacement Rescue Squad	\$40,000	Tax initiative and pollster consulting	\$25,000	Hire staffing to achieve 24/7 up to 2-person staffing **	\$1.25 million
Architect for fire station remodel consulting	\$25,000* (one time cost)	Increased staffing to meet response demands as required	\$20,000-\$150,000	Increased stipend shift to achieve 3-person staffing	\$220,000
Increased stipend shifts if needed	\$10,000				
Volunteer recruitment, retention, and training program	\$15,000				
Annual anticipated budget during phase I budget years	\$1.35 million	Annual anticipated budget during phase II budget years	\$1.57 Million	Annual anticipated budget during phase II budget years	\$2-2.5 Million

<b>Total Funding Demand Through Phase I</b>	<b>\$1,570,000</b>	<b>Total Funding Demand Through Phase II</b>	<b>\$2-2.15 Million</b>	<b>Total Funding Demand Phase III</b>	<b>\$5,470,000</b>
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\*\* Contingent on the successful passage of a voter approved tax measure