

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL  
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: January 7, 2025

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**To:** Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers  
**From:** Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, and City Administration  
**Subject:** Consideration for the Authorization to Implement Volunteer Firefighter Stipend Policy

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

The City Council approve the implementation of 24-hour volunteer coverage of the City fire station. The estimated cost of 24-hour volunteer coverage from January to June 2025 is \$101,360, which is within the current estimated stipend budget of \$124,000 for the same period.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

On December 17, 2024, the City Council approved a new Volunteer Fire Stipend policy which provides a mechanism to reimburse volunteer firefighters for 24-hour service. It is recommended that the City Council approve the implementation of 24-hour volunteer coverage at the City fire station. Such action will enhance operational efficiency, decrease response times during overnight hours, and strengthen daytime staffing. This initiative reflects the City’s dedication to public safety, community resilience, and enhanced preparedness. Under the contractual agreement with the GRFPD, the City of Sebastopol will manage the performance and pay administration for the volunteers.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Sebastopol Fire Department (SFD) is staffed by a contracted Fire Chief from GRFPD, two full-time 40-hour Fire Engineers, stipend volunteer firefighters, and one-half of an Administrative Assistant. SFD provides emergency response, fire inspections, fire prevention, fire investigation, and community support services to the citizens and businesses of Sebastopol.

Currently, the City’s 40-hour Fire Engineers work four 10-hour shifts, overlapping on Thursdays to form a two-person engine company. On other days, a volunteer firefighter partners with the Fire Engineer to provide two-person coverage. However, nights and holidays remain unstaffed.

While calls are most frequent between 9:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., residents depend on the 9-1-1 system around the clock, including overnight hours when SFD relies solely on volunteer responders. Establishing 24/7 coverage is expected to save valuable minutes in response times, which can make a critical difference during emergencies.

**DISCUSSION:**

At the City Council meeting of December 17, 2024, the Council approved the City of Sebastopol Volunteer Firefighter Stipend Policy. At this time, it is requested that the City Council permit the fire department to utilize volunteer firefighters on a 24-hour basis, pursuant to the approved Stipend Policy, to improve response times and help meet community expectations for continuous fire and emergency services. Additionally, 24/7 coverage aligns with best practices in fire service standards, promoting a safer environment for residents and providing peace of mind that the department is always prepared to respond.

**ANALYSIS:**

Staff recommends approving the transition from 10-hour volunteer coverage to 24-hour volunteer firefighter coverage.

**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 before the scheduled meeting date.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The current FY 24/25 budget for Volunteer Firefighter Shift Stipends is \$165,000. Staff anticipates spending \$41,000 of this budget in the first half of the fiscal year (July-December), leaving a balance of \$124,000 for January through June 2025.

With the current 40-hour Fire Engineer schedule of 7:00 am to 5:30 pm, achieving three-person staffing (3/0 staffing) around the clock would require 2.33 stipends daily: two 24-hour stipends (\$240 x 2) and one "Sleeper" (\$80), totaling \$560 per day. If the new stipend policy begins on January 1, 2025, the six-month cost would be \$101,360, leaving a balance of \$22,000 for use as needs arise.

Implementing the New Stipend Policy January 1 through June 30, 2025: \$124,000 stipend funds available			
Stipends	Per Day	Total Cost (Est)	Balance
2.33 Stipends per day	\$560/day	\$101,360	\$22,640

Thus, the transition to 24-hour coverage will have no impact on the 2024-2025 budget.

**ATTACHMENT:**

City of Sebastopol Volunteer Firefighter Stipend Policy

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval: Dave Bray

Approval Date: 12/16/2024

CEQA Determination (Planning):

Approval Date: 12-30-2024

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

Administrative Services (Financial)

Approval Date: 12-30-2024

Costs authorized in City Approved Budget:  Yes  No

Account Code (f applicable) Duty Shift 100-31-02-4413 \$85,000

Expanded Coverage 100-31-02-4416 \$80,000

City Attorney Approval: Kerrie McNally

Approval Date: 12/16/2024

City Manager Approval:

Approval Date: 12/30/2024

ATTACHMENT 1:

**City of Sebastopol  
Volunteer Firefighter  
Stipend Policy**

**1.0 Background:**

The City of Sebastopol requires the services of volunteer firefighters to provide emergency response services to the community. Volunteer firefighters provide critical support during times of need for services. They provide initial responses to emergencies and other requests for services.

The City desires to recognize the value of the volunteers by providing them with equipment, support and training to allow them to make meaningful contributions to the City and the community.

Volunteers are not considered nor intended to be employees of the City, but rather individuals donating their time for public service with humanitarian objectives without expectation of pay and are therefore subject to different policies and procedures from those applicable to regular full-time employees.

**2.0 Volunteer Program**

**2.1 Definitions**

For the purposes of this Volunteer Firefighter Stipend Policy, the following definitions shall apply:

- **24-Hour Service Stipend:** When a volunteer provides continuous service for 24-hours, the volunteer will receive a stipend of \$240.00 per 24-hour period of service.
- **Block Stipend:** When a volunteer provides continuous service for a designated block of 3 hours, the volunteer will receive a stipend of \$40.00 per 3-hour block.
- **Call Stipend:** When a volunteer responds to an incident or provides station standby coverage, the volunteer will receive a stipend of \$20.00 per call.
- **Drill Stipend:** When a volunteer attends a designated training at the fire house for more than one hour, the volunteer will receive a stipend of \$20.00 per training/drill.
- **Nominal Fee:** The sum of all stipends provided to a volunteer in a calendar year that does not exceed twenty percent (20%) of what the City would provide as a base salary to a full-time engineer on Step C of the City's approved salary schedule.
- **Sleeper Stipend:** When a volunteer provides continuous service for a 8, the volunteer will receive a stipend of \$80.00 per 8-hour block.
- **Volunteer or Volunteer Firefighter:** An individual who performs a service for the City without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation for services. Volunteers may receive a nominal fee for their services and as reimbursement for their expenses. Services must be offered freely and without pressure or coercion, direct or implied. Services provided by a volunteer may not be of the same type which the individual is employed to perform for the City. Volunteers respond to calls for service or provide coverage at the firehouse. While at the firehouse, volunteers maintain a "Constant State of Readiness," prepared to respond to any emergency within one (1) minute.
- **Weekend Stipend.** When a captain-ranked volunteer is assigned and provides "on-call" services during a between 5:00 p.m. on Friday and 7:00 a.m. on Monday, the volunteer shall receive \$500.00 per weekend period. This stipend shall expire and no longer be offered or provided to volunteers effective June 30, 2025.

## **2.2 Rationale.**

As described herein, the City provides a nominal fee/stipend to volunteers as reimbursement for approximate out-of-pocket expenses incurred by a volunteer that are incidental to providing volunteer firefighting services, including, but not limited to:

- Cost of meals
- Transportation expenses
- Uniform expenses (including reasonable cleaning expenses and replacement expenses)
- Tuition expenses
- Books, supplies, and other materials essential to volunteer training

## **2.3 Policy**

Volunteers may receive the established stipends (24-Hour Service Stipend, Call Stipend, Drill Stipend, or Sleeper Stipend) to help offset volunteer expenses. Stipends are provided to volunteers who are ineligible to receive a regular salary or compensation in exchange for their services. Volunteers may not obtain regular employee status or benefits solely by volunteering with the City as a firefighter.

### **2.3.1 Stipend Limitations.**

**2.3.1.1** On an annual basis, no volunteer shall receive a nominal fee that exceeds twenty percent (20%) of a base salary to a full-time engineer on Step C of the City's approved salary schedule

**2.3.1.2** Volunteers are not eligible to receive more than one stipend for services provided at one time. For example, a volunteer who receives a 24-Hour Service Stipend and attends a Drill during the same 24-hour period, will not receive a Drill Stipend. A volunteer who provides 3-hour block services and receives a Block Stipend and also responds to a service call during the same time period, will not receive a Call Stipend. A volunteer who receives an on-call weekend stipend is not eligible to receive any other stipends during the correlating weekend period. These examples are demonstrative and do not constitute a comprehensive list of potential scenarios wherein a volunteers stipends would be limited.

## **2.4 Workers' Compensation Insurance**

The City will provide Workers' Compensation Insurance for all volunteer firefighters, per applicable State and federal laws.

## **2.5 Reporting**

All stipends will be reported to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) on a Form 1099.

## **2.6 CalOES or ABH Services**

Volunteers may be paid as temporary, hourly employees, without losing their volunteer status, on an occasional or sporadic basis for infrequent, irregular events on an emergency basis, such as a CalOES or ABH event. At the conclusion of the emergency event, the impacted individual's employment shall be terminated and volunteer status reinstated.