

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: Fire Ad Hoc Committee
Responsible Department: City Administration
Subject: Consideration of Council Approval to Initiate the Recruitment Process for Fire Captain Positions; Funding for Positions to be Funded through the Measure H Funds in the amount of \$117,217 for Remainder of FY 24-25 (Hiring is expected April 2025) and approve Resolution for Budget Amendment for Two Fire Captain Positions Salary and Benefits and Related Costs

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the City Council approve the recruitment of two (2) full-time Fire Captains, which are to be funded from Measure H sales tax revenues; and
2. Approve Resolution for Budget Amendment of \$117,217 for Two Fire Captain Positions Salary and Benefits and Related Costs for Remainder of FY 24-25; **or**
3. That the City Council approve opening recruitment for three positions, with the plan to hire two until the fiscal situation for the Fire Department becomes more clear in the coming months as reorganization proceeds.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Hiring Fire Captains strengthens fire station operations by providing skilled leadership, supervision, and critical decision-making during emergencies. Captains coordinate resources, mentor less experienced firefighters, and uphold safety protocols, ensuring rapid, efficient responses and a structured approach to incident management. Their immediate response leadership enhances operational effectiveness and reduces delays in waiting for a volunteer Captain during critical situations.

In the current Fiscal year 24- 25 budget, the City budgeted revenues from Measure H in the amount of \$300,000. However, the City of Sebastopol now anticipates receiving approximately \$810,000 in Measure H funds. Initiating the recruitment and hiring of two Fire Captains aligns the use of these funds with their intended purpose of enhancing public safety. During the April 16, 2024, Sebastopol City Council Meeting, the Council directed staff to move forward with merging the Sebastopol Volunteer Fire Department with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (GFD). Addressing this staffing need now begins to better align the City’s staffing model with the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

The department provides emergency response, fire inspections, fire prevention, fire investigation, and community support services to the citizens and businesses of Sebastopol. The Sebastopol Fire Department (SFD) is staffed by a contracted Fire Chief from the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, two full-time 40-hour Fire Engineers supported by a stipend volunteer firefighter to provide day-time coverage, volunteer Captains for weekend shifts, and one-half of an Administrative Assistant. The contracted fire chief provides supervision as there is no first-line supervisor beyond five volunteer captains.

Fire Captains are mid-level managers responsible for both operational and administrative tasks. This rank serves as the designated company officer on emergency response units by leading firefighting teams during emergency operations and ensuring their response's safety, efficiency, and effectiveness. Additionally, the Fire Captain position will provide direct supervision and accountability for both volunteer and paid firefighters, enhancing

coordination, adherence to protocols, and overall performance within the department. These Captains will strengthen the department’s leadership structure and improve operational readiness.

The Fire Captains are anticipated to be hired in April 2025, depending on the recruitment process, or potentially sooner. The City’s Measure H funds will cover the costs associated with this process. Of Note, Measure H funds can be invested into six program categories which include, but are not limited to: wildfire prevention, preparedness, emergency response and vegetation management; recruitment and retention of local firefighters; updates to essential equipment and facilities; transfer of funds among designated local agencies or entities; implementation costs; and countywide expenditures. The tax proceeds must be spent for the purposes authorized in this Expenditure Plan and may not be used for other purposes. The revenues collected from the tax shall be used only to supplement existing services and shall not be used to pay for existing operations.

The City is negotiating an agreement to reorganize, or consolidate, with Gold Ridge. We anticipate that the reorganization could take effect as soon as July of this year. The reorganization will include economies of scale and other benefits that will likely allow for the hiring of a third captain. However, because the reorganization is not completed, there is the possibility that Sebastopol will retain an independent Fire Department for some time. The amount of time will be dependent upon the outcome of the LAFCO process. Dependent upon that timing, it is less clear that funding will be sufficient to hire three captains on a permanent basis, and fund other needs (such as capital expenses and debt service). Thus, staff is recommending retaining some of the Measure H funds until the future of reorganization becomes clearer.

One of the reasons we face this situation is that Sebastopol is not receiving funding from Measure H comparable to most local agencies. When Measure H was being developed, Sebastopol’s Fire Chief at the time requested funding for two full time staff to always be available, assuming that one volunteer firefighter would always be available. Other agencies obtained funding for three full time firefighters, leaving Sebastopol at a disadvantage. The General Fund is not in a financial position to fund these enhanced fire services, so the primary source will have to be Measure H funds. At an upcoming meeting the Council will be considering entering an agreement with County regarding the distribution and reporting of Measure H funds. Because our allocation is part of the Measure, the agreement with the County will not provide an opportunity to re-visit the allocation of Measure H funds.

Fire Ad Hoc Committee Recommendation:

The members of the Fire Ad Hoc Committee (Vice Mayor McLewis and Councilmember Hinton) support the hiring of 3 captains, however, due to the consideration of the city’s financial situation, would recommend the immediate recruitment for hiring of 2 captains and requests the council consider at a future meeting discussion of hiring of a third captain once the City has more definitive information on the consolidation.

Budget Committee Recommendation:

The members of the Budget Committee have provided their recommendations below:

Mayor Zollman: Supports hiring two captains, depending upon hearing from the Fire Chief at the Council meeting about the need for the Captains and starting recruitment at this time to improve coverage.

Councilmember Maurer: Supports recruiting and hiring two captains now.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

Local governments are expected to begin receiving Measure H revenue in early February 2025. It will be paid in quarterly installments, approximately quarterly. Measure H funds are designated for Sebastopol to support full-time staffing and to meet other fire-related needs. Adding two career Fire Captains is a significant step toward meeting the intent of these funds. Staff recommends proceeding with the hiring of two Fire Captains which will be the first steps to achieve the requirements of permanent staffing as required by Measure H.

Comments from Gold Ridge Fire Chief: If two Captains are hired we will lose the benefits of a Captain 1/3 of the time. The shift without a Captain will be led by an Engineer. Hiring two Captains will require a Stipend Volunteer 2/3 of the time to achieve a two-person engine company, hiring three Captains would reduce the dependency on Stipend Volunteers down to 1/3 of the time to achieve a two-person engine company.

Hiring three Captains will cost more than hiring two but could have a modest reduction in the Contract Services cost category in the budget as the number of days relying on Stipend Volunteers would be reduced. Additionally, the value of consistent leadership should not be understated. I believe there will be greater efficiency in the daily operation and use of the volunteers, potentially resulting in cost savings.

Hiring two Captains is absolutely a tremendous first step towards improved public safety. The Fire Department has gone through more changes in the last two years than it has in the previous 15 years so a slow approach may be appropriate. Hiring two Captains is also a good step towards utilizing Measure H Funds and will improve the leadership and supervision on a semi regular basis.

Ultimately my recommendation is that the consolidation process is completed at which point we will have sustainable revenue to achieve a three-person engine company 24/7. This results in greater efficiency, leadership, and management of the fire and emergency services in the city of Sebastopol. Through the staffing planned outlined in consolidation, the improved service model will lead to a safer, better served, and protected community.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

This item has been noticed per the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours before the scheduled meeting date.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Sebastopol is projected to receive \$1.08 million annually from the county-wide sales tax Measure H, with an estimated \$810,000 allocated for Fiscal Year 2024-2025. The Sebastopol Fire Department is under contract for a new Type-1 fire engine, scheduled for delivery in 2026, which will be funded using Measure H proceeds. This fiscal year’s budget includes a payment of \$238,050 toward the fire engine and \$60,000 for the Fire Station Assessment, leaving a balance of \$511,950.

This remaining balance is sufficient to fund two Fire Captains for the fourth quarter of FY 24/25 at \$117,217. This calculation is based on their total compensation of \$203,856 annually plus 15% overtime (\$30,578) for a total cost of \$234,434, for each position, divided by four quarters (\$58,608.50 per position per quarter) or \$117,217. The remaining balance in FY24/25 Measure H funds would be \$394,733. Measure H money can be accumulated for use on future expenses such as major one-time projects or purchases.

In Fiscal Year 2025-26, after accounting for the final fire engine payment of \$238,050, \$841,950 in Measure H funds would be available. This would fully cover the annual cost of the two captain positions at \$468,869, including a 15% overtime margin, leaving \$373,081 available for other uses. The following table illustrates the estimated Measure H fiscal activity for Fiscal Years 2024-2025(partial year of Measure H) and 2025-2026(first full year of Measure H) with two captain positions and the other assumptions discussed previously.

Note: Measure H funding for Sebastopol is based on the assumption of 2.0 paid staff and 1.0 volunteer firefighters, with limited and likely insufficient funding for capital expenses and debt service, which could be significant. Other Fire agencies were allocated Measure H funds sufficient to fund higher levels of paid staff.

The following tables compare the fiscal impacts of hiring two or three fire captains this Spring:

Hire Two Fire Captains			
Items	FY 2024-25	FY 2025-26	Cumulative Total
Estimated Measure H Proceeds	\$810,000	\$1,080,000	\$1,890,000
<i>Estimated Measure H Allocations:</i>			
Type 1 Fire Engine Lease Payment	\$238,050	\$238,050	\$476,100
Fire Station Assessment	\$60,000	\$-0-	\$60,000
Fire Captain Total Cost for two positions (FY 25 cost for fourth quarter only)	\$117,217	\$468,869	\$586,086
Remaining Measure H proceeds to address building and capital needs	\$394,733	\$373,081	\$767,814
Total Estimated Measure H Allocations	\$810,000	\$1,080,000	\$1,890,000
Unallocated Measure H proceeds	\$-0-	\$-0-	\$-0-

Hire Three Fire Captains			
Items	FY 2024-25	FY 2025-26	Cumulative Total
Estimated Measure H Proceeds	\$810,000	\$1,080,000	\$1,890,000
<i>Estimated Measure H Allocations:</i>			
Type 1 Fire Engine Lease Payment	\$238,050	\$238,050	\$476,100
Fire Station Assessment	\$60,000	\$-0-	\$60,000
Fire Captain Total Cost for three positions (FY 25 cost for fourth quarter only)	\$175,826	\$703,304	\$879,130
Remaining Measure H proceeds to address building and capital needs	\$336,124	\$138,646	\$474,770
Total Estimated Measure H Allocations	\$810,000	\$1,080,000	\$1,890,000
Unallocated Measure H proceeds	\$-0-	\$-0-	\$-0-

As the preceding table reflects, Measure H funds would cover the costs of a third permanent captain position. However, staff is concerned with the sustainability of using funding for a third captain position given that the funds will also be to cover debt service and capital expenditures, which could be significant.

Hiring the captains could result in some savings from less use of stipends, helping to off-set some of the costs of the positions. However, it is hard to predict the amount of any savings until the positions are filled and the Department has experience with them.

The open recruitment of these positions has an estimated fiscal impact of \$8,000 - \$10,000.

Note that funding for the positions is available in the Measure H budget. Staff is requesting a proposed budget adjustment of \$117,217 for the remainder of FY 24-25, along with approximately \$10,000 for related outside recruitment expenses. These amounts are to be amended as identified in the financial system in various salary and benefits accounts in Measure H fund 248 and 248-31-02-4230 for the anticipated recruitment costs.

OPTIONS:

The City could hire a third fire captain at an estimated cost of approximately \$58,600 for the fourth quarter of the current Fiscal Year, and approximately \$234,500 per year for FY 2025-26 and for future years, depending on the recruitment market. This would, however, reduce funding available for capital and other fire-related needs. The benefit is that a third fire captain would improve fire services. A revised resolution for budget amendment for third position would be required and could be returned to the next City Council Meeting.

The City could also approve opening recruitment for three positions, with the plan to hire two until the fiscal situation for the Fire Department becomes more clear in the coming months as reorganization proceeds.

ATTACHMENTS:

Budget Amendment Resolution

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval: Approval Date:

CEQA Determination (Planning): Approval Date:

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 N/A

Account Code (f applicable) _____

City Attorney Approval: Approval Date:

City Manager Approval: Approval Date: December 29, 2024

RESOLUTION NUMBER: XXXX-2025

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEBASTOPOL AUTHORIZING A BUDGET AMENDMENT FOR TWO FIRE CAPTAIN POSITIONS SALARY AND BENEFITS AND RELATED COST

WHEREAS, the Sebastopol Fire Department (SFD) is staffed by a contracted Fire Chief from the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, two full-time 40-hour Fire Engineers supported by a stipend volunteer firefighter to provide day-time coverage, and one-half of an Administrative Assistant; and

WHEREAS, Fire Captains are mid-level managers responsible for both operational and administrative tasks. This rank serves as the designated company officer on emergency response units by leading firefighting teams during emergency operations and ensuring their response's safety, efficiency, and effectiveness; and

WHEREAS, hiring Fire Captains strengthens fire station operations by providing skilled leadership, supervision, and critical decision-making during emergencies; and

WHEREAS, the Fire Captains are anticipated to be hired in April 2025, depending on the recruitment process, or potentially sooner. The City's Measure H funds will cover the costs associated with this process; and

WHEREAS, Sebastopol is projected to receive \$1.08 million annually from the county-wide sales tax Measure H, with an estimated \$810,000 allocated for Fiscal Year 2024-2025; and

WHEREAS, Funding for two Fire Captains for the fourth quarter of FY 24/25 will be at \$117,217. This calculation is based on their total compensation of \$203,856 annually plus 15% overtime (\$30,578), resulting in a total cost of \$234,434 per position. Dividing this by four quarters gives \$58,608.50 per position per quarter, totaling \$117,217 for both positions; and

WHEREAS, the proposed budget adjustment for this request is \$117,217 for the remainder of FY 24-25, along with approximately \$10,000 for related outside recruitment expenses.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Sebastopol does hereby approve a budget amendment as identified in the financial system in various salary and benefits accounts in Measure H fund 248 and 248-31-02-4230 for \$10,000 for the anticipated recruitment costs.

The above and foregoing Resolution was duly passed, approved, and adopted at a meeting by the City Council on the 7th day of January, 2025, by the following vote:

I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was duly adopted by the City of Sebastopol City Council by the following vote:

VOTE:

Ayes:

Noes:

Absent:

Abstain:

APPROVED:

Stephen Zollman, Mayor

ATTEST:

Mary Gourley, Assistant City Manager/City Clerk, MMC

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Alex Mog, City Attorney