



**CITY OF WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS**  
**Committee of the Whole Agenda Communication**

**Meeting Date:** November 11, 2019

**Prepared By:** Ray Forsythe, City Administrator

**Agenda Item:** SAFER Grant to the Washington Fire Department

**Explanation:** The Washington Fire Department has applied for a Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant to assist with the hiring of 6 full time Fire Fighter/Paramedics. The Grant would cover a portion of the costs for a 3-year period. The cost of the positions would be 100% local after the Grant Period.

**Fiscal Impact:** Year 1: Grant – \$275,094 Local Match - \$91,698  
Year 2: Grant – \$275,094 Local Match - \$91,698  
Year 3: Grant – \$128,378 Local Match - \$238,414  
Year 4 + Local - \$366,792 (plus cost of living increases)

**Recommendation/**

**Committee Discussion Summary:** N/A

**Action Requested:** Direction for future Fire Department Contract Commitments

The Fire Department constantly looks for outside grant and foundation funding to assist with operations and equipment. Several months ago, the Fire Chief and Board submitted a Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant. They have been notified that funding to expand the professional full-time staff has been conditionally approved. The multi-year grant has a sliding scale match that decreases the Federal Funding each of 3 years and increases the local funding.

Because the Washington Fire Department (WFD) must officially accept the grant on November 13, 2019, I will be seeking direction from the City Council at the Committee of the Whole Meeting on November 11<sup>th</sup>. The challenge is the long-term commitment to keeping staff after the grant period ends. Our mutual goal is to provide the best services to the residents of Washington and build a sustainable program. Being reliant on volunteers is becoming more challenging, however, shifting to a professional department is a financial commitment which extends long past the grant period. My goal is to find a balance of grant funding/local match that is sustainable after the grant ends in 3 years or look at other options for solving the staffing issues.

**Fire Challenges:** Fire Challenges at the Washington Fire Department include adequate staffing for daytime operations in the event of an involved fire incident (excluding CO alarms/false alarms/calls for service) due to low availability of qualified volunteers. Daytime hours present a challenge to nearly all volunteer fire departments due to work schedules/hours, but particularly in Washington because almost all volunteers work outside of town.

**EMS Challenges:** EMS challenges include the growing elderly population of Washington along with the three assisted living facilities (Moehle/Villas of Hollybrook/Morningside), one memory care facility (Reflections), one full-service nursing home (Washington Christian Village), OSF URGO, Methodist Express Clinic, Methodist Family Clinic, OSF St. Clare Family Clinic and Ilini Family Medicine. Each of these daytime operating facilities add call volume to WFD ambulance services.

I have reviewed the financials of the Fire Department including projections for future years. Members of the Fire Department and Board Members have indicated that the match for the Grant could be achievable for the first year with minimal impact to the existing budget by utilizing reserves and an increasing need for additional revenue in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and all future years. The current WFD/City of Washington Contract ends in October of 2020 which is during the first year of the potential grant. The outlying years would be addressed in a new contract which will be negotiated next summer. The Fire Department could also utilize reserve funds set aside for vehicle replacement; however, this is not advisable as ambulances, fire apparatus and other vehicles/equipment have a finite life.

Below is information on the current staffing.

**Fire  
Staffing**

<b>Times</b>	<b>Firefighters</b>	<b>Chief</b>	<b>Engines Staffed</b>	<b>Staffed Quick Response Vehicle (non-Suppression)</b>
07:00- 15:00	0*	1	0*	1
15:00- 07:00	0*	1	0*	1

\* Fire Response dictated by volunteer and Chief availability

**EMS Staffing (Monday-Friday)**

<b>Times</b>	<b>Paramedics</b>	<b>Staffed Ambulances</b>	<b>Staffed Quick Response Vehicle (Non-Transport)</b>
07:00-19:00	3	1*	1
19:00-07:00	2	1	0

\*EMS Coordinator is able to create a second ambulance response in event of consecutive calls.

**EMS Staffing (Saturday -Sunday)**

<b>Times</b>	<b>Paramedics</b>	<b>Staffed Ambulances</b>	<b>Staffed Quick Response Vehicle (Non-Transport)</b>
07:00-19:00	2	1	0
19:00-07:00	2	1	0

\*EMS Coordinator is able to create a second ambulance response in event of consecutive calls.

**Washington Fire Department Staffing Numbers (11/7/2019)**

<b>Staffing Type</b>	<b>Number of Staff</b>	<b>Fire Chief</b>	<b>EMS Coordinator</b>	<b>Category Total</b>
<b>Full Time Firefighters</b>	0	1	0	1
<b>Volunteer Firefighters</b>	29	0	0	29
<b>Full Time Paramedics</b>	3	1	1	5
<b>Part Time Paramedics</b>	13	0	0	13
<b>Volunteer Paramedics</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Full Time EMT Basics</b>	1	0	0	1
<b>Part Time EMT Basics</b>	1	0	0	1
<b>Volunteer EMT Basics</b>	7	0	0	7

The SAFER Grant would increase the Full-Time employees by 6 that would be split between 3 shifts perday which would be assigned to the Fire Engine team.

Options:

1. Accept the grant as submitted at a cost of \$421,810 over 3 years and then an additional \$366,792 (plus cost of living increases) in all future years.
2. Seek an Amendment to the grant to reduce the commitment from 6 to 3 which would reduce the commitment by half.
3. Look at other options to expand volunteer and full time staffing to meet the needs of the Washington Fire Department which do not rely on grant funds.

In addition to the personnel costs covered by the Grant, improvements to the Fire Station for housing and other necessities as a result of adding full time employees would need to be added to annual budgets.

The Fire Department has been very fiscally responsible and has a healthy reserve and Vehicle Replacement Fund. The City has made improvements/repairs to the facilities, and will be working on a Capital Improvement Plan with the Chief to ensure that the facilities remain viable for operations.

It is my opinion that the Council commit to work with the Washington Fire Department on a comprehensive funding plan to ensure that adequate staffing, vehicle and equipment replacement funding is in place as well as a sound Capital Improvement Plan for facilities is developed for the short and long term.

While grant funds are often beneficial to an organization for equipment purchases and other capital improvement needs, it is often difficult for short term staffing grants if a long-term sustainable plan is not in place to ensure adequate funding. I do not believe the City is in a position to commit to professional staffing without more due diligence and planning.