

**CITY OF ALBANY  
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA  
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: September 20, 2010

Reviewed by: BP

**SUBJECT:** Alternatives for management of Fire/Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

**REPORT BY:** Beth Pollard, City Manager

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

That the City explore future alternatives for management of the Fire/EMS Department, including partnership(s) with other fire services agency/agencies.

**BACKGROUND**

Fire Chief Marc McGinn has served the City of Albany for more than 32 years, with more than half of those years in his current position as Chief. During his service, he has overseen many advances in services to the community, most notably the expansion of the paramedic program and enhanced fire prevention efforts. Albany residents benefit from less than 4 minute response time to calls, paramedic transport to the hospital, and professional care. The City's fire codes are strong on prevention, and most recently Chief McGinn launched a significant effort to improve smoke detection in households through the promotion of and ordinance requirement for photoelectric smoke detectors.

Chief McGinn is retiring from the City of Albany. In July, 2010, the City Council authorized the City Manager to negotiate a contract for his services for a limited term. The term of the contract runs until mid-February, 2011, with option to extend upon mutual agreement. The contract is for salary only at the approved Fire Chief level, without benefits, with a reduction to 30 hours per week beginning mid-November.

**DISCUSSION**

As the City's 2009 organizational analysis noted, fire and emergency medical services provided by Fire Departments have been experiencing an increasing amount of regulation, standards, training, technology, and technical requirements. As a result, more and more fire agencies have or are looking to combine efforts to achieve economies of scale. This trend is particularly prevalent among smaller agencies that wish to spread their management and other overhead costs across more than a few or less fire stations.

The City of Albany has one fire station, where three shifts of six each provide 24/7 fire and emergency medical service (EMS) response, as well as Basic Life Support and Advanced Life Support transport to the hospital. The other personnel are the Fire Chief, and a Battalion Chief that serves as the City's Fire Marshal, Disaster Preparedness officer, and other various functions.

Examples of fire management changes that have occurred in just the past few months in the Bay Area include the cities of Union City and Newark moving to a contract with the Alameda County Fire Department, and the cities of Foster City and San Mateo moving to a shared fire chief. The City of Emeryville is currently studying alternative fire service delivery.

## **ANALYSIS**

With the retirement of the Fire Chief comes an opportune time to explore alternatives for fire management services in the City of Albany. Alternatives include a shared chief, contracting for chief services, and/or other regionalization options such as a joint powers authority.

My recommended goals for the exploration are to:

- Maintain the excellent fire and emergency medical service and responsiveness that the department provides to the community
- Consider that Fire and EMS services are becoming increasingly technical, regulated, and regionalized
- Recognize the trend for one-station departments to explore partnership opportunities
- Look for ways to save the City money, especially during these tight economic times and projected budget deficits

Fire Chief McGinn and the Albany Fire Department staff will be integral in helping the City identify, analyze, and evaluate alternatives. Staff will contact other cities and fire agencies in the region and report back to the City Council on possible alternatives for further consideration. I anticipate reporting back to the City Council by the end of the calendar year on the results of the exploration and the viability of alternatives for further exploration and discussion.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT**

N/A

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

None at this time. If there are viable alternatives, there may be costs associated with more detailed analysis. If the City moves forward with any changes, there may be initial costs associated with developing agreements, but those should be offset by savings from the partnership arrangement.

## **Attachments**

Excerpt, Citigate organizational study re: Venturing with Other Agencies for the Future