

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

Agenda Date: March 7, 2011  
Reviewed by: BP

**SUBJECT:** Shared Fire Chief services and continuation of temporary services

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

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

- 1) That Council consider sharing a Fire Chief with the City of Piedmont, on a trial basis, and agendaize a City Council action item to authorize entering into a contract with Piedmont for a trial period.
- 2) Approve Resolution No. 2011- 14, authorizing continuation of a contract with Marc McGinn to provide part-time Fire Chief services on a temporary, hourly basis.

**BACKGROUND**

In 2009, the City conducted an organizational analysis of City departments which produced recommendations that the City take steps to venture or consolidate with other fire agencies in the East Bay. This report by Citygate Associates noted inefficiencies of small fire agencies in areas such as training, administrative services, and command staffing, the rise in Federal and State safety regulations, and increasing technology and complexity. (Fire Department excerpt attached).

With the retirement of Albany Fire Chief Marc McGinn, last fall the City Council authorized and directed staff to explore future alternatives for management of the Fire/EMS Department, including partnership(s) with other fire services agency/agencies. Staff has discussed various options with other city managers, fire chiefs, and county officials in the region, as well as with Albany Fire Department personnel. The only viable shared fire chief arrangement option at this time to emerge from that exploration is to consider sharing the services of Piedmont's Fire Chief.

**DISCUSSION**

The idea of a shared fire chief with Piedmont is not a new idea; it was raised about 15 years ago, but not pursued. In the meantime, there is increasing regulation, technology, and regionalization involved in delivering fire and emergency medical services today, and into the foreseeable future. More and more agencies are joining forces in a variety of

ways to benefit from each others' expertise, training, equipment, regional relationships, management, etc.

Examples of shared chief arrangements in the Bay Area include San Bruno and Millbrae, and San Mateo and Foster City. Staff has spoken with officials from those agencies, who report positively on their success. In San Bruno, which experienced the gas transmission line explosion and fire last year, officials spoke favorably that the shared chief arrangement worked during that disaster, and strengthened the mutual aid response because of the familiarity between departments.

Several small to medium sized cities in Alameda County either have a shared arrangement or are embarking on that path. The cities of Livermore and Pleasanton have a shared/consolidated fire department. The cities of Union City and Newark recently moved to a contract with County Fire, which also serves San Leandro and Dublin in addition to unincorporated areas; unlike Albany at this time, these cities have greater proximity to other County fire service areas. The City of Emeryville recently hired Citygate Associates to conduct a standards-of coverage study and is exploring alternative arrangements to a stand-alone fire department.

For Albany, excellence in quality and speed of response to members of the community is very important. Voters have approved special taxes to support the City's paramedic and transport services. Therefore it is important to consider how a shared chief can continue to advance the department's pursuit of excellence, innovation, and community responsiveness.

## **ANALYSIS**

The proposal is for one full-time chief to be the chief administrator of the two fire departments, on a trial basis. The current Piedmont Chief, Ed Tubbs, would serve in this role. Chief Tubbs would spend approximately one-half of each work week in the two cities. He would be responsible for administration and oversight of the departments, personnel management and supervision, and similar related activities.

The arrangement is different than two part-time assignments, as he would be considering the needs of the both agencies as he manages the two departments, thinks strategically about efficiencies in operations, purchasing, training, etc. as well as innovations to advance service delivery, and represents both Albany and Piedmont at county and regional meetings.

The proposal is to enter into a contract for a trial period of 12 months, with a review after 9 months, and a 60 day termination clause for either party to withdraw if there is dissatisfaction that cannot be rectified.

## Commonalities/Differences

Piedmont and Albany have common characteristics, including:

- 1) Community desire for high quality and responsive fire and emergency medical services. Both communities have been willing to pass tax measures to support local government services, and residents expect excellence in service delivery.
- 2) Albany and Piedmont are two of the four fire departments in Alameda County that directly provide paramedic transport to hospitals; the others are Berkeley and Alameda. In the other areas of Alameda County, fire departments are the first responders who provide initial emergency medical service, but a private ambulance contracted through Alameda County assumes care of the patient for transport to the hospital. Fire Departments that provide transport have greater involvement in the care of patients, are subject to additional regulations and requirements, and generally have a higher level of commitment to and responsibility for emergency medical services.
- 3) Both cities have a one-station fire department with a population under 20,000. Piedmont's population is 11,000 while Albany's is 17,000.

Dissimilarities between Albany and Piedmont include:

- 1) Piedmont is primarily a single-family residential community, while Albany has a larger number of commercial and multi-family residential properties, and higher call volume. Albany conducts more property inspections, and has a greater demand for building plan check and fire marshal services. Associated with this dissimilarity, Albany has a Battalion Chief/Fire Marshal position, while Piedmont does not.
- 2) Piedmont has a higher minimum number of required personnel on shift (7 than Albany (6)).

## Opportunities/Challenges

Opportunities for Albany from the shared arrangement include:

- 1) Cost savings to the City of Albany for the position of Fire Chief. The initial savings is approximately \$85,000 in the cost of the Fire Chief position itself for the initial 12-month trial period. Each city would pay one-half the cost of compensation for the position. The Chief would receive his existing salary provided by Piedmont, plus 10% in consideration for the increased responsibility and anticipated additional time commitment. There would be additional savings in the Chief's training, travel, membership and meeting expenses, and overhead costs budgeted for the position.

- 2) Exploration of alternatives to save additional funds through shared expertise, training, equipment, purchasing power, and other economies of scale or cost sharing. The two departments currently conduct shared training; department staff has noted that there may be increased savings potential in a variety of areas that emerges from a shared chief working with both departments.
- 3) Leveraging the size of the population served through one administrative head for applying for and obtaining grants. Granting agencies often consider the potential among departments to share the equipment, materials, supplies, or services funded by the grant, and also consider the size of the population served.
- 4) Potential for savings in fire personnel time if there is a smoother flow of communication as well as, shared skills, knowledge, and experience between and among members of the department. As the chief becomes familiar with the needs and strengths of each department and individual employee, there would be opportunities to share information and time.

Challenges for a shared position include:

- 1) The physical distance between the two cities, which is about 9 miles and about a 20 minute drive. Other shared fire chief arrangements are between cities adjacent to one another.
- 2) Meeting the duties, responsibilities and scheduling for two cities and the associated time commitment adjustment for the Chief; this could be a particular challenge during an initial orientation phase
- 3) Differentiating between two sets of personnel rules and regulations, memorandums of understanding, cultures, and protocols, as well as serving two City Councils, reporting to two city managers, and being part of two management teams; again this could be a particular challenge during an initial orientation phase.
- 4) Being comparably visible in and committed to both communities and organizations. Both City Councils meet on the first and third Monday, which will require advance agenda and schedule planning.

### Compatibility

We arranged for leadership from the Albany Fire Department, the Albany Fire Fighters Association (AFFA), and others to meet with Chief Tubbs so as to advise on any issues of concern. The reports back from all the meetings were favorable, and there is an openness and even some enthusiasm to try out something different. This communication with the staff would continue through the trial period to help in the City's monitoring of the feasibility of the arrangement.

Likewise, Chief Tubbs has expressed his enthusiasm to embark on a trial arrangement, and a commitment to investing the time to make it successful. Council members have had the opportunity to meet him for an initial review of his abilities and compatibility with Albany. He would be available to attend an open session Council meeting prior to Council action on the matter, should Council decide to pursue.

Analysis Conclusion

On balance, staff believes that the potential benefits from cost savings, shared expertise, and mutual commitment to service excellence are worth trying a shared chief arrangement with the City of Piedmont on a trial basis. If the trial period does not prove successful, the City of Albany can consider other arrangements at that time.

Chief Marc McGinn

In discussions with other fire agencies about shared arrangements, a common message was the high regard there is for the Albany Fire Department and its staff. Credit goes to Chief Marc McGinn for developing such an outstanding Fire and Emergency Medical Services agency. He personally is highly respected in his field for his commitment to fire prevention and employee safety. Through his 17+ years as Albany Fire Chief, he has brought many initiatives to the department. He deserves much credit for finding new ways to recover costs and raise revenues to deliver quality services. He recently achieved international fame when he brought an ordinance to the City Council to require photoelectric rather than ionization smoke detectors because they are faster and more accurate in detecting smoldering fires, thereby helping fire prevention efforts locally and beyond.

Chief McGinn has been working on a contract, part-time hourly basis, for salary only (no benefits) for the past six months as the City has explored fire chief options. He has nearly exhausted the 960 hours he is allowed to work on contract, given the rules of the California Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). Staff is recommending that he continue to serve while the City Council determines whether to try the shared chief arrangement; this extension requires Council adoption of the attached resolution to submit to PERS.

Chief McGinn has been an advocate for trying out a shared fire chief arrangement with Piedmont. He will be present at the meeting to answer any Council questions.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Shared Fire Chief

The City of Piedmont would be the employing agency, the two cities would enter into a contract for the services, and each city would pay one-half of the total compensation for the position. The Piedmont Chief would receive a 10% salary increase for the expanded responsibilities and time commitment to serve both cities.

The total annual cost, reflecting current benefit rates, for a shared chief is \$266,751, or \$133,376 per city.

	Salary	Benefits Cost	Total	Albany Cost
Albany Fulltime	157,462	60,544	218,746	217, 821
Shared Chief	176,000	90,751	266,751	133,375

In addition to compensation, there will be other savings to Albany in sharing training, travel, membership dues, and other related expenses, in addition to savings in overhead such as workers compensation. The estimated cost savings to Albany for the position itself is approximately \$85,000 for the next 12 months. The exact cost savings in compensation is somewhat speculative, as it would depend on the compensation package needed to attract and hire a new Chief. For cost comparison purposes, staff is using the current budget for the Fire Chief position.

There is the potential for further cost savings as the two departments work together on joint purchasing or other expense reductions.

Extended Contract for Hourly Services

The contract with Marc McGinn is for an hourly rate of \$75.70, for approximately 24 hours per week.

Attachments

1. Citygate report excerpt
2. Resolution No. 2011-14