

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

Agenda Date: January 17, 2012
Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Shared Fire Chief services with the City of Piedmont

REPORT BY: Beth Pollard, City Manager

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the City continue the arrangement for shared Fire Chief services with the City of Piedmont.

BACKGROUND

On March 21, 2011, the City Council approved an agreement to share a Fire Chief with the City of Piedmont, effective in April, 2011. The incumbent Piedmont Chief, Ed Tubbs, was assigned to also serve as the Albany Fire Chief. In adopting the shared arrangement, both cities agreed to review the arrangement after nine months.

The arrangement is that one full-time chief is the chief administrator of the two fire departments. Chief Tubbs is responsible for administration and oversight of the departments, personnel management and supervision, and similar related activities. It is different than two part-time assignments, as he is called upon to consider the needs of the both agencies as he manages the two departments, think strategically about efficiencies in operations, purchasing, training, etc. as well as innovations to advance service delivery, and represent both Albany and Piedmont at county and regional meetings.

This shared chief idea arose out of the retirement of Albany's former Fire Chief, and the rising trend towards sharing fire and emergency medical service (EMS) management, as well as direct services, among agencies. This trend is driven by the increasing technology, regulation, and regionalization involved in fire/EMS services.

DISCUSSION

Chief Tubbs spends approximately one-half of each work week in the two cities. He is available 24/7 by cell phone or email, and responds to time sensitive matters regardless of location.

The pros and cons of the shared arrangement were discussed with the Fire Chief, Battalion Chief, Captains, and Fire Fighter Association President. What emerged from those discussion, as well as other observations, were:

The advantages, or “pros”:

- Personnel cost savings. The savings are on target to be \$85,000 this year, as estimated.
- Joint grant opportunities. The two departments filed jointly for a grant for equipment.
- Increased leverage. A chief representing two departments is perceived to carry more weight in regional and contractual discussions. For example, the chief negotiated an agreement for full funding by Alameda County EMS, with Emergency Medical Dispatch in place for each city for the cost of hardware and software.
- Economy of scale/shared programs: There is information that the chiefs of both departments need to know and meetings that both need to attend; there is efficiency in sharing this overhead. There is also an efficiency on developing programs and training that can be implemented in both cities. For example, the departments are working on a home fire safety inspection program and form that can be used in both cities. The departments are also working on sharing more information of classes and materials; as well as to see what it will cost to get both cities on the same time schedule.
- Shared equipment. Albany’s SCBA bottles are filled every few weeks at Piedmont, at a modest savings to Albany.

The disadvantages, or “cons”:

- Focused and strategic attention. There are activities in both departments that require the attention of the chief. Consequently, there is some perception of there being a longer lead time for becoming familiar with Albany and the community for initiating innovations.
- Fair share. There is some concern about inequity in the City organization if the fire department is the only department with a shared department head.

Other consequences:

More delegation. The Chief has delegated some tasks and responsibilities that were previously performed by the former full-time chief; for example, line item tracking of certain expenditures. On the one hand, this expands understanding and accountability further out to the personnel, and is one element to succession planning. On the other hand, it requires use of employees’ time, which can be at the expense of other activities.

When discussing the idea of a shared chief last year, the Council Members and public comment noted the importance of this arrangement not compromising response times for

Albany's fire/EMS personnel. There has been no increase in response time since the shared arrangement began.

Chief Tubbs will be present at the January 17 City Council meeting and will be available to answer any questions. The next opportunity for review and discussion will be whether to consider renewal of the contract in April 2012.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The cost savings to Albany for the position itself is approximately \$85,000 for a 12-month period.