



Staff Report

File #: 24-100

Version: 1

Date: 3/25/2024

Item #: 5.c.

TO: Mayor and City Council

THROUGH: Keith Stahley, City Manager

FROM: Mike Niblock, Fire Chief

SUBJECT:

Federal Emergency Management Agency's Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG).

Ward(s): All Wards

Councilor(s): All Councilors

Neighborhood(s): All Neighborhoods

Result Area(s): Safe and Healthy Community

SUMMARY:

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) program aims to improve public and firefighter safety by offering financial support to qualified fire departments. This funding is intended to acquire resources to enhance firefighter safety, health, and operational effectiveness. Specifically, it will be allocated towards purchasing three ground ambulances to support the implementation of the new Ambulance Operator (AO) Model, ensuring enhanced efficiency and response capabilities in emergency services.

ISSUE:

Shall the City Council authorize the City Manager to apply for and, if awarded, accept the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) for purchasing three ground ambulances to support the implementation of the new Ambulance Operator (AO) Model?

RECOMMENDATION:

Authorize the City Manager to apply for and, if awarded, accept the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) for purchasing three ground ambulances to support the implementation of the new Ambulance Operator (AO) Model.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

The Salem Fire Department is at a pivotal juncture regarding its ambulance service provision. Currently, the department maintains three aging ambulances, with two additional units recently ordered through bond funds. However, under the proposed Ambulance Operator Model, eight front-line ambulances are required, necessitating the purchase of four additional ambulances for reserve use. This need arises as the City of Salem revisits its ambulance service strategy, transitioning from the past two decades of reliance on contracted private ambulance services to internal management by the Salem Fire Department, a model last seen in operation before 2005.

The department estimates purchasing the three ground ambulances will cost \$1,164,000. Should the FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) be granted, the City must provide a matching contribution of \$105,819. This matching amount will be sourced from the Emergency Medical Services Fund.

BACKGROUND:

Over the last two decades, the City of Salem has depended on a private ambulance service for its community transport needs, a shift from the Salem Fire Department's direct provision of these services before 2005. Economic pressures largely influenced this transition, notably the low reimbursement rates from Medicaid and Medicare at the time.

However, in recent years, the private provider has struggled to meet the contract's required service levels, leading to an expenditure of \$3.3 million in overtime since November 2021. These challenges have necessitated a critical assessment of the current service model, with a proposed shift back to the Salem Fire Department taking on the mantle of the primary ambulance service provider. A few key developments bolster this move: introducing higher service fees, access to Ground Emergency Medical Transports (GEMT) funds - a benefit available only to public entities like the Fire Department - and integrating specialized medical personnel within the department.

The need to critically evaluate and enhance Salem's ambulance fleet is underscored by the private ambulance service's repeated challenges to meet its contractual obligations over the last two years. With the impending contract expiration, the city is poised for a significant overhaul in its ambulance services. It aims to transition from three reserve ambulances to a robust lineup of eight front-line and four reserve ambulances. This expansion is essential for Salem to assume full responsibility for Advanced Life Support (ALS) transportation, a vital component of this financial and operational strategy.

Adopting a city-led ALS transport model represents a comprehensive approach to expanding the ambulance fleet and improving the quality, reliability, and timeliness of emergency medical services provided to Salem's residents. This strategy addresses the deficiencies observed with the private ambulance service, demonstrating Salem's commitment to public health and safety. The acquisition of additional ambulances is critical to this endeavor, ensuring Salem can deliver prompt, efficient, and superior medical transport services.

MIKE NIBLOCK

FIRE CHIEF

Attachments: