



Council Agenda Report

From: Ken Johnson, Fire Chief

Subject: CityGate Associates Gap Analysis of the Department of Emergency Services, and Next Steps

Date: November 15, 2016

Facts

1. The City Council commissioned a thorough and external assessment of emergency medical, fire suppression, and rescue services in 2000. The resulting document, known as the *City of El Paso de Robles Growth Management Plan*, addressed inadequate service levels, community desires for service improvement, and needs to address future growth. The plan detailed those steps necessary to improve and maintain services through the year 2020.
2. Based on the plan, a major community commitment was made to fix the identified and significant emergency service delivery problems. These changes included staffing a second fire station, employing two 4-person engine companies, initiating Paramedic level service, and adding two Battalion Chief positions over the first six years of the *Growth Management Plan*. A staffing high of 28 persons included 24 firefighters, 2 Battalion Chiefs, 1 Administrative Assistant, and the Fire Chief. The City Council also approved 3 additional firefighter positions, which would have driven staffing to 31 persons.
3. Fire Station #2 was permanently staffed 24/7 with a paramedic engine company and hiring began over the next several years to increase engine company staffing at both stations. The City also hired a second Battalion Chief to assist in the support and management of department service delivery.
4. Pre-recession staffing and deployment levels were in-line with *Plan* recommendations, with the department employing 28 personnel in 2008 and having Council authorization to hire an additional 3 firefighters (for a total of 31 authorized FTEs).
5. Due primarily to the recession, progress has not been made over the past eight years in meeting the needs identified in the *Plan*, and staffing has decreased. Vacated positions were not filled, including the loss of 1 Battalion Chief and 3 firefighters (reducing staffing to a total of 24). The 3 additionally approved firefighters were never hired.
6. From 2008 to the present, Emergency Services has operated with 21 firefighters evenly distributed over 3 shifts with a minimum daily staffing level of 6. Incident call volume in 2008 was 2,821, and is on track to exceed 3,700 for 2016. Fire suppression has remained constant at over 100 fires annually. A Fire Chief and single Battalion Chief perform and supervise department operations, conduct non-emergency work, enforce fire codes, and maintain after-hours response and operational support.

7. Given the slow financial recovery, opinions have varied on the resources needed and their timing to ensure a reasonable response for medical, fire, and rescue emergencies. The City has undertaken no comprehensive or independent effort since 2000 to address these needs.
8. Since the start of the recession, the population of Paso Robles has increased from 29,500 in 2008 to 31,580 in 2015, a 6.7% increase. Calls for service increased nearly 31% during the same timeframe. The recent and projected spate of hotels and other large structures, with concentrations of people, requires increased service capabilities. The organization is at a crossroads with operational challenges of continued reliability, maintenance of response times, and supervisory support.
9. As the current Council had no involvement in guiding the study or discussing/adopting the Plan, and recovery from the recession has been slow, opinions have varied on the resources needed and their timing to ensure a reasonable response for ongoing fire, medical, and rescue emergencies.
10. In August 2016, the City contracted with CityGate Associates, LLC, a private consulting firm with an expertise in fire service delivery, to review Emergency Services' operations. This included review of the 2000 *Growth Management Plan*, the General Plan Safety Element, current response and deployment data, incident call types, and performance indicators. CityGate also met with Councilmembers, Department staff, and other key stakeholders. CityGate has experience with cities throughout the U.S., and is current on trends and innovations.

Options

1. Take no action.
2. Direct staff to:
 - a. Give financial priority to reestablishing needed near-term staffing levels; and
 - b. Begin the process of contracting for updating key portions of the current strategic plan to address long-term service demands and options for addressing.
3. Direct an alternative approach to meeting emergency service needs going forward.

Analysis and Conclusions

CityGate will present the results of its analysis and its conclusions to the Council at the November 15 meeting. Initial findings reveal both immediate (more personnel) and long-term (a written and agreed strategy) needs to address organizational and service shortfalls. Once Council direction has been provided, specific strategies and actions can be readily developed.

Fiscal Impact

Potentially significant, dependent on Council direction. Substantial fiscal analysis may be required to identify the funding mechanism for agreed-upon improvements.

Recommendation

1. Direct the City Manager to develop:
 - a. near-term service level goals for existing staffing, to include, among others: the full-response timeline; fire-containment parameters; and paramedic care goals.
 - b. a funding plan for up to 3 Firefighters, a second Battalion Chief, and half-time office support, returning to Council with a complete proposal at the earliest possible opportunity.
2. Direct the City Manager to return with a contract for an outside expert to update the City's current strategic plan, including the steps required to maintain emergency services at a prescribed level, including, among others: mid- to long-term service levels, staffing, and stations; and revenue strategies to support the master plan.