



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Date: August 7, 2017
Agenda Item #: 7c

TO: Mayor and Town Council
FROM: Kevin Dempsey, Fire Chief
THRU: Susan Parker, Town Administrator
TITLE: Fire Department Staffing Proposal

Summary

The North Carolina State Legislature adopted House Bill 445 entitled “An Act to Modify Brunswick County’s Fire Protection Fees” to provide increased funding for the Fire Districts within the County. Staff proposes increasing the Fire Department staff by four (4) full-time positions to minimize the public safety risks to employees and improve service levels to the community.

Background Information

Call Volume:

The Sunset Beach Fire Department responds to each and every call received. Those calls include, but are not limited to fires, fire alarms, medical emergencies, lifting assistance, vehicle accidents, hurricane response, home inspections, lock outs, elevator problems, animal rescue, animal bites/stings, water rescue, boating accidents, missing persons, power line issues, hazardous material incidents, and propane issues. The firefighters train constantly to keep up-to-date with all the different types of incidents. The firefighters are ready to respond 24 hours a day. The following is the Sunset Beach Fire Department’s annual call volume since 2011 including the number of fulltime employees per shift:

Year	Calls	Full Time Personnel Each
2016	1558	4
2015	1348	4
2014	1400	4
2013	1241	4
2012	1033	4
2011	1022	4

1. **Fire** – Our current response procedures for fire related calls involves the response of an engine from station 1 with two firefighters and an engine from station 2 with two personnel. With this strategy, our tactics on arrival are not effectively deployed. The company officer must establish incident command and create a strategy for the incident. The firefighter will be concentrating on setting up the apparatus for suppression operations, which would include establishing a water supply. With only two firefighters on that first engine, an aggressive attack or search and rescue operation cannot be initiated safely. With this level of initial staffing, we fail to meet the guidelines set forth by OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134(g) (4). In order to be more effective, and operate based on OSHA and NFPA guidelines, we would need to respond with a minimum of four personnel on the initial engine company, which means we need four firefighters on both fire trucks.
2. **Medical** –Our current response procedures for medical related calls involves the response of an engine from either station 1 or 2 depending on the location of the call. A second engine would only respond if the incident were a cardiac emergency or rescue where more personnel are needed.
3. **Water Rescue** – (beach related incidents) the current response procedures involve the response of a pickup truck with a boat in tow from station 1 with both personnel. Station 2 responds to station 1 and standbys with the other rescue boat. The station 1 crew arrives on scene, assesses the situation, and advises if the other crew needs to respond. In all cases where a rescue boat launches, the second boat responds to the scene. These incidents leave the Town the most vulnerable, because all fire personnel are dedicated to the beach strand.

Effectiveness:

The International City Managers Association (ICMA) performed a study involving staffing issues in fire departments nationwide. They concluded the following:

1. Fire suppression operations have three basic functions: (1) rescue operations; (2) work involving ladder, forcible entry, and ventilation; and (3) the application of water. To raise ladders, ventilate, search, and rescue simultaneously takes quick action by at least four and often eight or more firefighters, with each company under the supervision of an officer.
2. If about 16-trained firefighters are not operating at the scene of a working fire within the critical time period, then dollar loss and injuries are significantly increased, as fire spread.
3. As firefighting tactics were conducted and judged for effectiveness:
 - Five-member companies were 100% effective
 - Four-member companies were 65% effective
 - Three-member companies were 38% effective

The District Chief’s Technical Advisory Committee (DCTAC) conducted a study of the Houston Fire Department, which determined that fire apparatus staffing is an even greater citizen safety issue than a firefighter safety matter. Fire ground effectiveness may be compromised when staffing falls below four firefighters per company. Tests conducted with the Houston Fire

Department indicated that staffing below a crew size of four could overtax the operating force and lead to higher losses. The report termed the understaffing situation (a crisis that demands immediate intervention.) When the number of firefighters on an apparatus is below standard, without eliminating any of the tasks fire departments are to accomplish, causes the department to delay some of the required tasks or to try to perform all tasks unsafely with inadequate staff, according to the study.

The study also noted the following:

- **“Firefighters working in understaffed environments are too often expected to perform beyond their capabilities.”**
- **Inadequate staffing creates “a cumulative effect” caused by combined delays and lost functions of crews resulting in an even greater loss of overall effectiveness.**
- **Understaffing increases physiological stress on firefighters, as they try to compensate.**

Recommendation:

Staff proposes for the Town Council to approve an increase of Fire Department staff by four (4) positions. The added monies from the increase in fire fees approved by the state and county will cover the cost of adding staff. Over the last year, we have increased our volunteer numbers slightly. This staffing increase would in no way effect our continued efforts to entice solid volunteers to serve their community. Volunteers however, are not always available, many still work and have other commitments.

The cost to add a position is \$36,900 plus fringe benefits; four positions are \$222,500. Uniform cost is \$2,500 per position.