

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 23, 2010

TO: THE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 26 : COSTS TO ADDRESS THE FIRE-EMS
IMPACTS OF THE WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS
SERVICE/BRAC-133

This memorandum replies to a Council inquiry on the costs to be incurred by the City in addressing the Fire-EMS impacts from the construction and occupancy of the Washington Headquarters Service (WHS), construction of which was directed by the Base Realignment and Closure-133 (BRAC-133) Plan. The information that follows is similar to that provided to the office of Representative Moran for consideration of FY 2011 Federal appropriations.

Starting in September 2011, the Department of Defense (DOD) Washington Headquarters Service (WHS) plans to move over a six-month period 6,400 employees to new facilities in the City per the BRAC-133 plan. The WHS/BRAC-133 complex is located in the busiest fire-EMS zone (or "box") of the City. This zone is also part of the busiest area of Northern Virginia in terms of demand for all-hazards (fire suppression, emergency medical services, hazardous materials, and technical rescue) fire and emergency services.

The Fire Department currently staffs eight engine companies (with three-person crews), three ladder trucks (with three-person crews), and five (5) paramedic units (with two-person crews) on a full-time, 24/7/365 basis. These units are deployed across the City's 15 square miles and answer more than 19,000 emergency calls every year. The Department also cross-staffs a number of specialized response units using cross-trained, on-duty personnel including a heavy rescue company, hazardous materials response team (in concert with Arlington County), Technical Rescue Team (in concert with Arlington County), and Marine Operations Team. These specialty units are only available when their primary response units (engine and ladder companies) are not previously committed to other emergency calls.

The Department is a Tier II signatory to the Northern Virginia (NoVa) Fire Departments' Mutual Aid Agreement and routinely responds into Arlington and Fairfax Counties (as well as Reagan National Airport with the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority

Fire Department) as part of an automatic-aid program where the closest appropriate and available units are dispatched to any emergency call. While the mutual- and automatic-aid agreement/program contemplates full reciprocity among participating jurisdictions, at present the City receives automatic-aid units (principally from Arlington and Fairfax Counties) twice as often as it provides such assistance. This situation occurs frequently in the zones west of I-395, led by the zone where the WHS/BRAC-133 complex is located.

The City's Fire-EMS units closest to the WHS/BRAC-133 complex are typically the busiest in the City and are utilized to full capacity every day. In addition, all five of the City's medic units are at maximum capacity and are often fully utilized by noon each day (i.e., all Fire Department medic units are on calls, transporting patients, or at the hospital), which is why EMS expansion is a major FY 2011 budget initiative. Due to the connectivity of the NoVa fire and emergency services system, however, this situation is not unique. The NoVa Fire Chiefs have identified a series of urgent fire and emergency services capacity issues to the NoVa Chief Administrative Officers and the NoVa Regional Commission (NVRC). In fact, there were two short-duration instances in 2007/2008 where not a single fire-EMS unit was available for emergency response in the City, Arlington County, and eastern Fairfax County.

One of these instances was the August 25, 2007 three-alarm high-rise fire in the City resulting from multiple lightening strikes where six firefighters were hospitalized. In the aftermath of this fire, the City retained an independent expert to evaluate the Department's ability to provide contemporary fire and emergency services. The resulting report (the "Routely Report") made multiple recommendations to improve the safety and effectiveness of fire and emergency services delivery by the Department including staffing, training, communications, command, coordination, and regional collaboration. At the direction of City Council, the City has embarked on a multi-year plan to implement these recommendations.

From recent meetings with WHS staff, the Department understands it will serve as the primary fire and emergency services responder to the unique WHS/BRAC-133 complex, including its remote inspection facility (RIF). Given the present and well-documented fire and emergency services capacity issues in both the City and region, and without a substantial commitment of additional resources, it will be impossible for the AFD to effectively address the impacts of WHS/BRAC-133 without degrading our ability to serve City residents, businesses, and visitors, along with further compromising our regional automatic-aid system and its ability to provide fire and emergency services throughout Northern Virginia.

Leveraging the existing capacity and proximity of the Department, and its counterparts in Arlington and Fairfax Counties, significantly reduces the cost of protecting the WHS/BRAC-133 complex, while addressing the spillover effects on fire and emergency services delivery in both the immediate area and region-wide. Alexandria Fire Department, Arlington County Fire Department, and Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department personnel are well-acquainted with the demands of protecting sensitive facilities. To their great credit, WHS staff has involved employees of the City's Office of

Building and Fire Code Administration in the design of building-related fire protection systems. The City's Office of Emergency Management is presently working with WHS to obtain appropriate security clearances for a limited number of employees. Beyond these positive steps, the AFD requires additional resources to serve the WHS/BRAC-133 complex, as described below.

The City will be responsible, using its already stretched revenues, for providing emergency services to the facility and its workers. To fulfill its mission to protect the DOD facility and its occupants, while continuing to provide the full range of fire and emergency services to the City's existing residents, businesses, and visitors, the City will require additional funding in the amount of \$2,200,000 (\$1,900,000 recurring) for:

- (1) *Dedicated Fire Suppression Company Staffing*: The closest ("first-due") fire-rescue station to the WHS/BRAC-133 complex houses an engine company, a paramedic transport unit, and a heavy rescue squad vehicle that is cross-staffed by the engine company crew (i.e., only staffed when the engine, the busiest in the City, is not already engaged). An additional fire suppression unit is needed and can be addressed by providing full-time staffing (13 positions/FTEs and \$1,600,000) for the existing heavy fire-rescue squad; and,
- (2) *Peak-Time Paramedic Transport Unit*: The availability of a paramedic transport unit to responsively serve the WHS/BRAC-133 complex can be enhanced by adding a new unit to cover peak demand times that run from approximately 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily. With the expected Monday-Friday daylight operating hours for the majority of WHS/BRAC-133 workers, this additional service demand can be met by providing a new vehicle (\$250,000) with appropriate staffing (three (3) positions/FTEs and \$400,000). These costs will be somewhat offset by fees, as most all of the WHS transports should be covered under federal government health plans.

Implementation of the BRAC-133 plan leaves the City responsible for providing emergency services to 6,400 new Federal workers without any formal recompense, as the WHS complex is exempt from City property taxes. (The City's real estate tax base was *reduced* when DOD purchased formerly privately-owned office buildings at the BRAC-133 site.) The City has proposed to its congressional delegation that Federal funds be appropriated in FY 2011 to the Department of Defense in order to pay for the additional fire suppression and emergency medical services that will be required to address incidents at the WHS facility while allowing the City to continue to provide full fire and emergency services to its residents, visitors and workers. Absent the proposed service enhancements, further stretching of existing City emergency response capability will adversely affect the WHS and City residents, visitors and workers, including the 14 other Federal agencies with facilities in the City and the approximate 30,000 Federal employees who now work within those facilities. It is not acceptable for the federal government to construct state-of-the-art WHS facilities and yet fail to fully plan for basic emergency services to the facilities and, more importantly, to the workers who will

occupy the facilities. It is reasonable, however, to expect that the Department of Defense, which is adding new high rises to the City landscape and more workers to the City's workforce, pay for provision of basic emergency services.

Enhancing the response capability of the Department will benefit City residents, workers, and visitors, as well as Fairfax and Arlington Counties that routinely dispatch into the City their engine and medic companies for mutual aid.