

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 2, 2010

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER *J*

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 32 : ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE FIRE DEPARTMENT SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET REQUEST FOR A PEAK-TIME MEDIC UNIT (TWO AMBULANCES) AND FIVE ADDITIONAL EMS STAFF

At the Public Safety work session on March 1, 2010, Council requested additional information on the Fire Department's need to enhanced EMS service by adding five Medic positions and two new ambulances. Five frontline medic units currently provide ALS service to the City on a 24/7/365 basis. The Fire Department's proposed budget requests the addition of five Medic positions and two new ambulances to improve peak-time response times. The addition of these ambulances will result in one peak-time unit on the street every day of the week.

The Fire Department's request is based on demand for EMS service, the limited availability of medic units to respond to EMS calls, and the Fire Department's continual reliance on mutual aid from neighboring jurisdictions. Increased demand and lack of available units at critical times have resulted in higher response times, which now average over seven (7)¹ minutes, as noted in the Fire Department's budget on page 14-7.

Over the past year, the following three EMS statistics led the Fire Department to propose an enhancement to the City's EMS service:

(1) **During FY 2009, Alexandria medic units responded only 62% of the time to Advanced Life Support calls within a six-minute timeframe** (first-due medic units were not available and could not respond on one out of three EMS calls during FY 2009). The six-minute timeframe is a standard that EMS agencies should reach 90% of the time. In Alexandria, this percentage has plummeted downward to an unacceptable level for reaching patients in critical condition.

¹ Average time from dispatch of an EMS unit to the unit's arrival on the scene.

(2) Ten-percent of all EMS calls were answered by Alexandria's surrounding mutual-aid jurisdictions. Last year, mutual aid was provided by Fairfax and Arlington Counties on 1,313 EMS calls, or approximately three-to-four times each day. By adding a Peak-Time Medic Unit, the City will provide heightened responses to calls and rely less on mutual aid. The latter benefit is especially crucial given potential constrictions in response vehicle availability by Fairfax and Arlington Counties due to the current economic climate. Since January, Fairfax County has discussed the impact of reducing medic transport service in the Bailey's Crossroads, Annandale, Beacon Hill, and Mount Vernon areas, which would increase service demand for Alexandria's EMS units.

(3) City medic units are reaching maximum demand levels, a point at which medic units are not available to respond to EMS calls for service. Other medic units in the EMS system will have to respond, and both response times and patients will suffer.

Unit Hour Utilization. City medic units are reaching maximum demand levels. The Unit Hour Utilization (UHU)² rate is a good measure of maximum capacity for workload of medic units. If medic units are on calls at least 25% of the time, they are considered to be at maximum capacity. Three medic units, Medics 205, 206, and 208, have almost reached maximum capacity. The below chart shows how this workload measure has increased since FY 2003, when medic units were unavailable between 14.98% and 20.70% of the time. In 2010, the utilization rate is expected to reach the 25% mark for Medic 205, Medic 206, and Medic 208.³

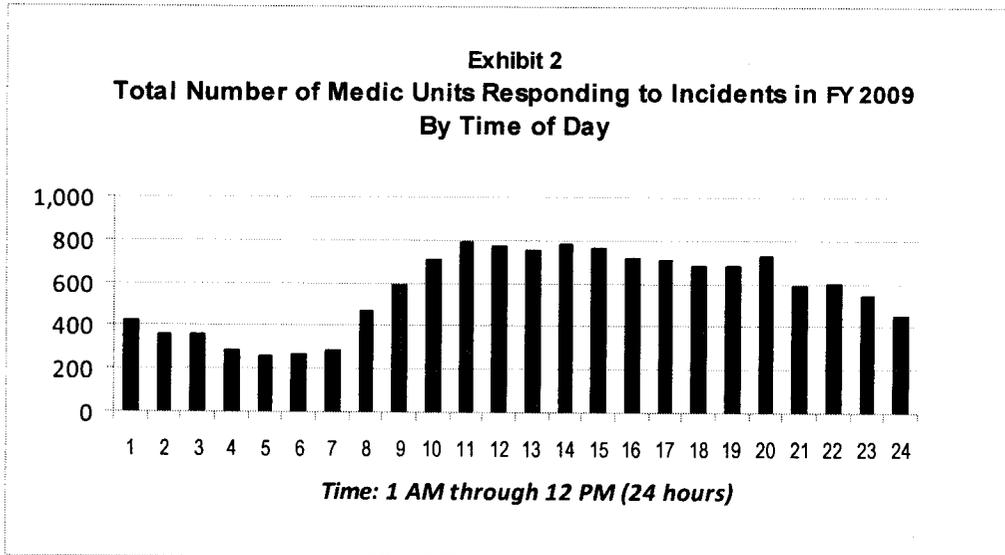
Exhibit 1								
Fire Department's Utilization of Medic Units (% of Time Spent On Calls)								
Unit	Address	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009
Medic 202	213 E. Windsor Ave.	17.48%	18.83%	18.25%	18.00%	19.20%	21.56%	20.96%
Medic 205	1210 Cameron St.	20.70%	21.89%	21.55%	21.91%	22.14%	23.66%	24.44%
Medic 206	4609 Seminary Rd.	18.84%	18.74%	20.15%	20.35%	22.28%	23.61%	23.75%
Medic 207	3301 Duke St.	14.98%	16.08%	16.21%	18.36%	19.18%	21.21%	21.11%
Medic 208	175 N. Paxton St.	18.29%	19.20%	19.11%	18.98%	21.63%	23.47%	23.92%
City Average		18.06%	18.95%	19.05%	19.52%	20.89%	22.70%	22.84%

Proposal for a Peak-Time Medic Unit. Last fall, when the Fire Department submitted its proposed budget, an effort was made to present a plan that was both efficient and effective and that would budget resources specifically to areas where EMS services are needed the most. A Peak-Time Medic Unit was proposed to address peak-time hours for

² UHU measures the percent of a unit's time in service that is spent running calls. Excluded are time for training, maintenance, other preparedness-related functions and public education.

³ The percentages included in Exhibit 1 do not include additional time required for medic units to return to their primary response areas. If these data were included, the UHU percentages would be higher for four medic units.

EMS responses between 09:00 A.M. and 10:00 P.M daily, as shown on the next page in Exhibit 2.



The availability of a Peak-Time Unit will also address current coverage “holes” within the City, especially in the Station 203/North Ridge area of the City and in the City’s West End. Demand for Medic Units in the West End will also increase, as the Department of Defense consolidates functions under BRAC, which is scheduled for completion by FY 2012 in the Mark Center area of the City’s West End.

In the event of a regional severe weather condition, such as back-to back snow storms experienced last month, or any man-made catastrophe, the City will have a better capacity to respond to the needs of its citizens. For example, the City has already experienced the unavailability of transport units when all medic units in the region were occupied with incidents within their respective jurisdictional boundaries.

Less reliance on mutual-aid transports and more reliance on City transports will result in a modest increase in ambulance transport revenues. These revenues, estimated conservatively at \$70,000 for FY 2011 and \$95,000 in subsequent years, will partially offset the cost of adding five EMS employees and two new ambulances.

The five frontline medic units currently used by the Fire Department were acquired between FY 2007 and FY 2010, and the average age is approximately three years. The useful life of a frontline medic unit is approximately 6-7 years. Three additional medic units comprise EMS’s medic-unit reserve fleet, which temporarily replaces frontline medic units when preventive or corrective maintenance is required. The medic-unit reserve fleet is also used during inclement weather, such as this winter’s snow storms, when additional medic units were added. These three reserve medic units, which were originally frontline medic units, were acquired by the City in FY 2000, FY 2002, and FY 2003.