

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 12, 2013

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #15: ALTERNATIVE REDUCTION OPTIONS FOR THE ALEXANDRIA FIRE DEPARTMENT

The purpose of this memorandum is to address a question from Councilman Wilson on the alternative options proposed and considered for reduction by the Alexandria Fire Department and Public Safety cluster and the reasons why they were not chosen. This memo describes the initial reduction options in greater detail, their estimated impacts to service levels, and the circumstances in which alternatives were proposed and ultimately selected.

Initial Proposed Reduction Options

As part of efforts to close the FY 2014 budget gap, I created cluster groups of departments aligned by function and assigned each cluster reduction targets of about 4% of their FY 2013 budget amount. Each cluster approached these targets in different ways in order to meet them. However, they were all based on the idea of deciding as a group which options were least likely to affect the progress towards achieving the goals set forth in the City's Strategic Plan. In order to meet the target for the Public Safety cluster, the Alexandria Fire Department (AFD) proposed several options to meet their share of the reduction amount.

Those options included closing Fire Station 201 and shutting down one fire engine from Fire Station 204 but redeploying personnel assigned to those stations to other stations throughout the City. Since the affected personnel would be re-deployed throughout the City, it would reduce the need to spend overtime resources to maintain minimum staffing levels.

Impacts to Service Levels

As part of any reductions put forward by departments, I requested each department to submit impact statements of how these reductions may affect City residents or the community. To estimate the impact on response times if these reductions were taken, AFD looked at historical response times for incidents in the areas served by Station 201 or Engine 204 by other Fire/EMS units who are not the "first due" or primary unit assigned to these calls for service.

These proposed reduction options would have an impact on providing Fire/EMS services to the citizens of the City, most notably in the area of Old Town. Response times for the area currently served primarily by Station 201 were projected to increase from 6.0 minutes at the 90th percentile currently to 8.1 minutes at the 90th percentile. Additionally, the reduction of Engine 204 would leave Station 204 with some apparatus available for incident response, but reduce the working capacity of the station and could result in increased response times in its response area of 6.5 minutes at the 90th percentile currently to over 8.7 minutes at the 90th percentile. In addition, response times in other areas of the City would also likely increase as these engines “cover for” other units when they are out on a call. Hence, a reduction in engines may result in higher response times beyond just the “first due” areas.

Recommended Reduction Options

Several weeks after these items were proposed, but prior to a decision on the options, AFD was informed that Fire Station 210’s construction completion date had slipped 3-4 months from January/February 2014 to April/May 2014. As part of the FY 2014 base budget, AFD had been funded for 12 Firefighters and 8 Medics for that new station for the entire fiscal year. However, the Firefighters are scheduled to complete training in April/May 2013, leaving them without a station to staff for most of FY 2014. Additionally, the medics would not need to start in April 2013 to be ready by the station’s completion a year later. Given this, a decision was made by AFD to re-submit additional options for consideration that would use the Firefighters for Station 210 to maintain minimum staffing and reduce overtime expenses until the station opens. AFD would also delay hiring the medics as long as possible (until November 2013) but allow for enough time to be trained by Station 210’s completion date.

These new options that were considered and ultimately included as part of the proposed budget, would allow AFD to maintain current levels of Fire/EMS service in all areas of the City, while still capturing sufficient cost reductions to meet the AFD reduction target that was given to each cluster group. It should be noted that the options are one-time reductions and AFD will not be able to claim these savings again for FY 2015.