

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 7, 2014
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
THROUGH: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER 
FROM: NELSIE L. SMITH, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET 
SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #5: RESPONSE TO COUNCIL QUESTIONS

Every Friday, the Office of Management & Budget will issue Budget Memos to answer questions posed by members of City Council. We will prepare the memos in a question and answer format. Below are answers to some of the questions posed thus far:

FIRE DEPARTMENT: (J. Wilson)

Question: “Can you please provide information on the Fire Department’s radio project included as part of the Proposed FY 2015 Capital Improvement Program (CIP)?”

Response: From FY 2012 – 2014, a total of \$850,000 was provided through the Capital Budget to the Fire Department to replace their existing operational radios. This included \$30,000 in FY 2012 for four radios to be used as a pilot for this project. In October 2013, with \$820,000 available, the Department was able to take advantage of a price discount from the vendor and purchase 140 radios. This provided enough radios to outfit all daily Suppression, EMS and Fire Marshal vehicles and apparatus with an ergonomically correct radio as well as have a cache available for spares in the event the Department needs to deploy additional staff. The Fire Department intended, as part of the FY 2015 Capital Budget development process, to request additional funding in FY 2015 to supply a radio to each Suppression employee (with enough spares in the event of calling in additional personnel for emergency situations) instead of having the radios associated with specific vehicles and apparatus. Funding for the additional radios was not programmed in last year’s Approved CIP, so additional resources would have needed to be identified to complete the purchase.

During the development of the FY 2015 Capital Budget, the Fire Department made a decision to move away from issuing each Suppression employee an individual radio as a cost saving measure. The implementation plan for ergonomic performance was the critical reason for the project all along and that will be met on a vehicle and apparatus basis. Given FY 2015 budget constraints, the Department altered its deployment plan.

What is included in the FY 2015 Capital Budget is the cost of firmware to ensure compatibility with other regional systems; however most importantly, the firmware ensures that the programming of all Fire Department radios is the same to ensure consistent deployment and usage. This cost of firmware is \$394,000, and is the only funding included in the Fire Radios project for FY 2015.

On page 14-22 of the Proposed CIP document, the first paragraph of the project description noted the purchase of 170 radios. This was an oversight and should have been noted as the purchase of 140 radios and required firmware. The project description will be updated in the Adopted CIP document.

LIVING WAGE: (Mayor W. Euille)

Question: "What would it cost to provide a living wage adjustment in the FY 2015 budget?"

Answer: The City maintains a living wage, which is frozen at the FY 2009 level of \$13.13/hour. If allowed to float, the rate would be calculated at \$15.32 (estimated) for FY 2015.

The City's Living Wage Ordinance provides that the City's living wage shall be adjusted annually effective on July 1. As a result of overall fiscal constraints, Council adopted a separate ordinance, effective September 2009, which froze the living wage at \$13.13/hour. The rate will remain at \$13.13 until further action is taken by Council to adjust the rate.

To determine the living wage, the City uses a formula which takes into account the average poverty threshold for a family of four (updated annually by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services) and the average cost for the provision of health insurance (as determined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). To bring the City to the estimated FY 2015 living wage level of \$15.32, City Council would need to add an estimated \$516,000 in funding to the Proposed Budget.