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September 8, 2015

Mayor Euille:

As a member of the public safety community in a neighboring jurisdiction I have long refrained from providing unsolicited comments on matters related to the Alexandria government. But as a resident for 25 years I feel compelled to weigh in on the potential changes to EMS in the City. I fully endorse and support the changes proposed by Fire Chief Robert Dubé.

I recently left my position as Fire Chief in Arlington County to accept another position in the County. Prior to that change I served as Fire Chief for 11 years and in various other capacities for almost 32 years. I have been extremely active in regional work in both NOVA and MWCOG, organizations that have fostered interagency collaboration that is envied nationwide and that provides our respective communities the highest levels of service.

Though I have not weighed into the debate until now I have previously heard the claims that the EMS delivery system in Alexandria is superior to all others; this is patently untrue. Arlington and many surrounding jurisdictions have been providing high quality EMS through cross trained firefighters and paramedics for decades. The suggestion that patient care in Alexandria exceeds that received elsewhere is inflated and I have seen no evidence that it can be substantiated.

Both Arlington and Fairfax also staff fire engines with a paramedic-firefighter such as the Chief is proposing. This is a tremendous advantage for anyone in a life threatening emergency as the fire truck often arrives prior to the medic unit. Moreover, these jurisdictions provide EMS to Alexandria citizens on an almost daily basis under the NOVA automatic agreement. I know of no complaints from recipients of these services or Alexandria leadership that suggests any inferiority.

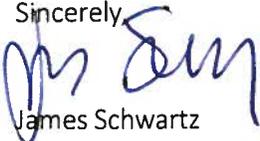
In addition to the better integration of fire and EMS, Chief Dubé's proposal will elevate suppression unit staffing to meet national standards. This has been a long time in coming as almost all of the departments in the NCR either meet the standard or have a plan in place to achieve the standard. Today, when suppression units from Arlington or Fairfax respond to assist Alexandria, their units are far more likely to be safely staffed than are Alexandria's. Chief Dubé should be commended for providing a return service on an equal level, enhancing response effectiveness and firefighter safety and doing so at a reasonable cost.

What should not be lost in all this discussion are the organizational benefits that this proposal will facilitate. It is a known reality that the fire and EMS service can sometime seem divided by members who express a preference for either fire or emergency medical services. There are a lot of reasons for this but in my experience the departments that operate with a more integrated model have greater success at teamwork, respect in the workplace and an appreciation for the contributions of all members. This in turn can result in better service to the citizen.

I am certainly aware that this is not the first time that this issue has been raised. Those that oppose an integrated approach are in most cases, I believe, well-meaning. But, in my view they are expressing concerns that are not valid and not in the best interest of those they serve. I urge you to give the Chief's proposal a full hearing and to bring Alexandria Fire/EMS in line with those systems that have proved successful here and throughout the nation.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James Schwartz". The signature is stylized and cursive.

James Schwartz

C: Mark Jinks, City Manager