

# ***Lompoc City Council Agenda Item***



**City Council Meeting Date:** January 8, 2013

**TO:** Laurel M. Barcelona, City Administrator

**FROM:** Kurt Latipow, Fire Chief  
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**SUBJECT:** Authorization to Accept a US Department of Homeland Security Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant for Six (6) Firefighter Positions

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## **Recommendation:**

Staff recommends the City Council:

- 1) Accept a US Department of Homeland Security Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant for six (6) Firefighter positions; and
- 2) Adopt Resolution No. 5817 (12), accepting US Department of Homeland Security SAFER Grant EMW-2012-FH-00213 and authorizing Supplemental Appropriations.

## **Background/Discussion:**

From September 1986 until July 2011, the department operated with 24 full-time paid, front line Firefighters (3 Battalion Chiefs, 6 Captains, 6 Engineers, and 9 Firefighters), responding from two (2) stations. Reduced tax revenues, as a result of the depressed economy, has reduced General Fund resources available for the Department's operational budget to the point of causing a reduction in our staffing level.

In July 2011, the City froze three (3) Firefighter positions that were vacated through attrition, in order to reduce operational costs and meet budget shortfalls. That reduced our force from eight (8) to seven (7) Firefighters per shift. The result of those reductions means the number of on-scene Firefighters arriving at emergency calls has been reduced below 1986 staffing levels. In 1986, the population was 29,924. Today, 26 years later, the department is protecting an additional 13,360 residents, a 30 percent population increase, without any additional personnel.

Our staffing reduction for financial reasons, which has resulted in additional overtime, can potentially attribute to greater risk of fire loss. In addition, we are unable to perform the same level of fire safety inspections or to provide resources for our myriad requests for public education training, both of which are vital components of our community's

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overall fire protection system. Simply stated, we touch our citizens less because we have less people to do so.

Our personnel strive to successfully fill the gap left by the staffing reduction, by filling vacancies with overtime, and while the use of overtime can be a cost-effective means to temporarily fill a vacancy, a fire department's long-term dependency can result in performance issues due to increased duty hours of existing personnel.

An effective means to improve our staffing shortage and improve service delivery, would be the acceptance of the SAFER Grant to fund six Firefighter positions. The addition of those positions will provide us the flexibility to increase our engine company staffing level, and when appropriate, activate an additional response unit, such as a quick attack multi-use vehicle. The additional staffing will enable us to provide the minimum number of first-alarm Firefighters needed to better protect our critical infrastructure, consisting of residential (approximately 1,200 hotel/motel rooms and 13,621 housing units), office, strip, commercial, and light industrial occupancies, along with City-owned and operated water and electric utilities, and numerous underground natural gas transmission lines, all of which provide vital services to citizens.

On December 28, 2012, the Department was notified that our grant application submitted under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Grant Programs Directorate FY 2012 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Program has been approved (Award Package attached).

The SAFER grant will fund the six Firefighter positions for a term of two years. The grant does contain a provision that in the event we hire qualified military veterans, the grant funding for those individuals could, upon approval by FEMA, be extended to three years.

Staff recognizes recommending the Council authorize the acceptance of this grant will cause concern regarding if the City is required to continue the funding when the grant expires. The grant does not require the City to guarantee the positions continue to be funded past the grant period. While the grant does not require the positions be continued once the grant expires, Fire Department management and labor are committed to working together to identify means by which the positions could be retained at the end of the grant period.

**Fiscal Impact:**

The grant fully reimburses the City for all salary and benefit costs, including overtime directly attributable to the six Firefighter positions. As such, there is no fiscal impact for the operational costs of hiring the six Firefighters as a result of the award of the SAFER grant. The SAFER grant does not reimburse the City for the necessary costs to outfit a

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new Firefighter. Those costs include uniforms, work and related safety equipment, furnishings and other one-time recruitment costs, such as background screening and evaluations.

The City anticipates the SAFER grant will reimburse the City \$1,050,000 over the term of the grant. If accepted by FEMA and the City hires qualifying military veteran Firefighters, then the reimbursement could be as high as \$1,600,000 over the term of the grant.

The associated Resolution No. 5817 (12) provides for the addition of the necessary accounts and supplemental appropriations to properly account for the activities under the SAFER grant for the remainder of the 2011-2013 Biennial Budget. As City staff is currently working on the 2013-2015 budget, it will incorporate the revenues and costs associated with the SAFER grant for the remainder of the term of the grant.

**Conclusion:**

Maintaining staffing of the Department is core to the Department's goals of enhancing and maintaining public safety, as well as adhering to CAL/OSHA rulings and regulations. The entire Department is committed to those goals, as well as the others adopted by the City Council, and in our opinion, while the SAFER grant is not a permanent fix, it provides an opportunity to restore jobs and enhance protection to our community.

Staff is requesting the Council authorize acceptance of the SAFER Grant.

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Kurt Latipow, Fire Chief

**APPROVED FOR SUBMITTAL TO THE CITY COUNCIL:**

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Laurel M. Barcelona, City Administrator

- Attachment: 1. [Resolution No. 5817 \(12\)](#)  
2. [SAFER Grant Award Package](#)