

ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT
For the Special Meeting of March 10, 2021

To: Board of Directors
From: Jason Weber – Fire Chief
Subject: **Receive report on the submittal of an application for the FEMA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant due March 12, 2021 and direct staff, as appropriate**

RECOMMENDATION

Receive report on the submittal of an application for the FEMA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant due March 12, 2021, schedule for discussion/consideration at a future meeting, and direct staff, as appropriate.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of the SAFER Grant Program is to provide funding directly to fire departments to assist with increasing the number of firefighters to help communities meet industry minimum standards, to attain 24-hour staffing to provide adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards, and to fulfill traditional missions of fire departments.

To achieve this purpose, the SAFER Grant Program is a competitive, discretionary grant program that provides federal financial assistance to help fire departments hire new firefighters or change the status of part-time or paid-on-call firefighters to full-time firefighters. The goal is to improve fire department staffing levels to ensure that an adequate number of personnel respond and safely perform at incident scenes and provide protection from fire and fire-related hazards within communities.

The grant is a three-year term to assist fire departments by paying a portion of the salaries and benefits of the SAFER-funded positions. Only the salary and associated benefits (actual payroll expenses) for the SAFER-funded positions are eligible. Costs are reimbursable only if they are included as a part of the standard salary and benefits package available to all operational firefighter positions and are contractually obligated. In addition, only the salary and benefit costs for regularly scheduled and contracted operational shift hours are eligible for reimbursement (no unplanned overtime) with SAFER Grant Program funding.

The federal portion of grant funds for years one, two, and three is based on the usual annual cost of a first year (i.e., entry-level) firefighter in the department at the time the grant application was submitted. "Usual annual costs" includes the base salary (excluding non-FLSA overtime) and the standard benefits package (including the average health cost, dental, vision, FICA, life insurance, retirement/pension, etc.) offered by fire departments to first year (i.e., entry-level) firefighters.

Historically, the amount of Federal funding provided to a recipient for hiring a firefighter in any fiscal year was as follows:

- In the first and second years of the grant, up to 75% of the usual annual cost of a first-year firefighter employed by that department at the time the grant application was submitted; and
- In the third year of the grant, up to 35% percent of the usual annual cost of a first-year firefighter employed by that department at the time the grant application was submitted.

In cases of demonstrated economic hardship, and upon the request of the recipient, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator may waive or reduce the cost-share, position cost limit, minimum

budget, or supplanting requirements. The SAFER Grant Program Hiring of Firefighters Activity grant recipients may apply for the available waivers.

The 2020 SAFER Grant program has waived all matching funds for the entire three-year period. SAFER Grant Program award recipients are under no obligation to retain the SAFER Grant Program-funded positions after the conclusion of the period of performance.

DISCUSSION

The topic of the SAFER grant was raised at RVFD Board meeting and briefly discussed. At that time, staff indicated we thought the grant deadline would be extended and, thus, there would be ample time for the Board to discuss/consider the issue of what to do when the grant expired after three years. Specifically, the considerations of the grant would have been evaluated by the Management-Labor Sub-committee (Sub-committee) as part of its efforts to explore options and opportunities surrounding staffing and deployment, as well as challenges and issues of budget and fiscal impacts of the COVID19 caused recession.

Given the March 12th deadline and, in order to keep the options open for the Board, staff is drafting a grant application to fill one position at one station with a total of three personnel. At the meeting, staff can provide additional information on the grant application. We are not recommending an in-depth discussion of the impacts of the grant at this meeting.

Staff recommends the Board discuss and consider impacts of the grant application at a future meeting. Prior to that Board meeting, the Sub-committee will also meet to discuss the impacts of the grant. At the future meeting, your Board may choose to continue with the grant as submitted, withdraw from the grant process, or defer the discussion until FEMA informs us of their decision.

During the grant period of performance, recipients of the FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program Hiring of Firefighters Activity are required to maintain the level of budgeted (filled and vacant positions) operational staffing that existed at the time of application, in addition to filling and retaining the SAFER Grant Program-funded positions. Currently RVFD has 30 budgeted operational positions, this grant would increase that to 33.

Considerations associated with the decision to pursue the grant opportunity will be discussed in depth at a future RVFD Board meeting. Some of these considerations are, but not limited to:

- Financial and operational impacts with sustaining the additional staffing after the 36-month grant period.
- Approximate annual costs are \$600,000 with associated annual increases in personnel costs including pension and other benefits.
- Enhancement of service levels
- Impacts related to the Station 18 decision in Ross.
- Location of additional staffing to meet service demands.

FISCAL IMPACT: n/a

ATTACHMENT

SAFER Grant FAQ's