



# Memorandum

**TO: Honorable Mayor &  
City Council**

**FROM: Councilmember  
Pierluigi Oliverio**

**SUBJECT: SEE BELOW**

**DATE: June 16, 2008**

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Approved:

Date:

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## **SUBJECT**

Approve an allocation of \$1,131,000 from the Economic Uncertainty Reserve and close the Willow Glen Library on Mondays for three years which equals \$165,000 to keep the San Jose Fire Department (SJFD) staffed at its current level and to specifically keep a fire engineer position at Fire House 6 for three years. The combined sums of \$1,131,000 and \$165,000 equal a total of \$1,296,564 which will maintain this position for three years.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Direct the Administration to use \$1,131,000 from the Economic Uncertainty Reserve and close the Willow Glen Library on Mondays for three years (which equals approximately \$165,000) and use these monies, which equal a total of \$1,296,564, to fund the fire engineer position at Fire House 6. This one-time allocation of funds will keep the SJFD's staffing at its current level and specifically keep a fire engineer at Fire House 6 for three years.

The proposed Fire House 37 is planned to open in 2011; therefore, I want to ensure this position is maintained. At that time, the City will re-evaluate staffing needs for Fire House 6 and 37.

(The Economic Uncertainty Reserve acts as a "savings account" and its monies are not attached or allocated to any type of project or staffing; therefore, this one time allocation from this fund will not interfere, defer or "take away" from any projects or staff. The reserve is replenished with funds the city receives from surplus land properties).

The Willow Glen Library will remain open Tuesday through Saturday.

## **BACKGROUND**

Almost every year, the question of keeping the hose wagon personnel at Fire House 6 becomes a political battle between city management and the fire fighter union; IAFF Local 230. As a result, I view this issue as a power struggle between city management and the union rather than an attempt to do what is best for the community. I find this situation sad and unnecessary and I am hopeful that this will be the last year we have to discuss it.

Fire House 6 is the fifth busiest single engine company fire station in San Jose and the 15<sup>th</sup> busiest fire house city-wide (out of the 33 Fire Houses in San Jose) and is located in Willow Glen.

Fire House 6 has five firefighters; compared to other stations in the City that have four or nine firefighters. The purpose for five firefighters at this station is to provide an additional person for the Hose Wagon. The Hose Wagon is a front line piece of pumping equipment. All Hose Wagons in San Jose were replaced in the 1990's except for this one. The importance of keeping the Hose Wagon is that it allows for an additional firefighter for Fire House 6, keeps a position for the SJFD and provides for an additional piece of equipment (although dated).

At a time when the City of San Jose and the Mayors message has been to support public safety; I find it contradictory that we would propose to eliminate a needed and functioning public safety position in one of the busiest fire houses in the City.

Some people argue that times have changed and that the Hose Wagon is a piece of antiquated equipment that is no longer needed. This statement is true. The Hose Wagon itself is a legacy piece of equipment and the City has updated its apparatus since the 1990's. However, although the Hose Wagon is outdated, it continues to provide public safety services as a front line piece of pumping equipment and provides personnel for one of the busiest fire department response areas in San Jose.

The hose wagon personnel, in fact, provides public safety services to the community. In fiscal year 2006-2007 the hose wagon personnel responded to 70 calls alone/solo (without the fire engine), thus, leaving the fire engine and the three person crew at the station to respond to other potential emergency calls. From these 70 calls, there were 6 times when another call came in to Fire House 6 and the fire engine (with the three firefighters) was able to tend to the second call. As a result, the fire house was able to handle two calls at the same time on six different occasions or 8.5% of the 70 calls. If the house only had four people, with one engine, then dispatch would have had to send another crew of four firefighters from another fire station (farther away) to the call, which would increase response time and take an engine company away from their specific area.

In theory, having the fifth person at Fire House 6 can be interpreted as preserving response time. For example, if another fire engine with four firefighters has to tend to a call beyond their service area, then the response time for them is longer than having a crew of three firefighters (at Fire House 6) respond to a call within their service area. Theoretically, Fire House 6 is working, in some instances, as a two engine company station with only five firefighters rather than the regular nine firefighters for a two engine company.

As we know, data and statistics have told us that the response time for the area between Fire House 6 in Willow Glen and Fire House 9 in Cambrian is poor. Therefore, voters passed a bond measure approving a new fire house between Fire Houses 6 and 9. This proposed fire station is currently known as proposed Fire House 37. This is important to note because, hypothetically speaking, with five firefighters (at Fire House 6) then, the area between fire stations 6 and 9 have at least three engines that can respond, if need be. Whereas, if we cut a position, which equals an engine, then this area that is already suffering from low response times, could experience increased poor emergency response times.

With all this said, the data and statistics from fire management are interpreted differently by some people and as a result, tell two different stories; which is why this issue is being discussed today. Some individuals argue that the data is not sufficient to keep the hose wagon personnel at Fire House 6 because the use of the extra person has diminished. On the other hand, many feel that the hose wagon personnel are providing a valuable service to the community and that maintaining service levels at Fire House 6 is important.

The nature of the SJFD calls of service has changed. Over 80% of the 9-1-1 calls the SJFD receive are medical related and in this community (the service area of Fire House 6) the average is slightly higher with medical 9-1-1 calls being in the 85% range. Therefore, my ultimate goal for Fire House 6 is to have a Supplemental Transport Ambulance Resource (STAR) Car located there instead of the Hose Wagon and keep the 5 crew personnel. Therefore, once we have a STAR Car located at Fire House 6, I will ask the council to amend the Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) to state that Fire House 6 will continue staffing with at least five firefighters, a STAR Car and an engine.

It's also important to take into consideration that Willow Glen has (specifically within the boundaries of the Fire House 6 service area) an increasing population, subdivisions/infill housing occurring at a high rate, is home to over 4 senior living facilities (with another senior living facility under construction within a ½ mile radius from Fire House 6), the Willows Senior Center, a large population of people over the age of 65, over 1000 units of housing currently under construction with additional housing that has already been entitled within Fire Station 6 service area.

It is no secret that I am critical of many of the decisions the City has made with regards to how it chooses to spend its money. In addition, I am concerned about the influence unions have over budgetary decisions.

For example, last year the council decided to hire 7-10 full time permanent positions in the Parks Department with only three years of reserve funding, although we knew there was not enough in the budget to pay for these positions after three years. However, city management did not object and even supported the recommendation from their department. In addition, past decisions have shown that the City has spent well over the amount budgeted for the PeopleSoft implementation (7 million was suppose to be the amount; however, currently we have spent over 15 million), millions of dollars on general lease bonds (which includes two of three city subsidized golf courses which are costing the city millions of dollars each year) and there has not been a proactive effort of finding ways to deliver services more efficiently (in my opinion). However, the administration is asking for us to cut a fire fighter position in the fifth busiest fire house in the city.

Let me not leave out the other group that causes me concern; the public safety unions, both IAFF Local 230 and the Police Officers Association (POA). Over half of the city's General Fund monies go towards funding public safety employees and the public safety departments. Perhaps if the City did not have to pay so much in salaries, overtime hours and pensions, we would be in a better position to hire more police officers and firefighters and keep current positions. Maybe, if the police and fire unions would take smaller raises, we could use the money saved to increase both police and fire staffing. The City will not be able to give raises and increase staffing in the future; even if we wanted to, we just can't afford to do both.

Public Safety is the core service of any local government; therefore, San Jose should not cut firefighter staffing. At a time when San Jose's population is increasing and especially when public safety is the number one service residents want and expect most; we need to keep the public safety staffing we already have.

Fire House 6 sits in the middle of the City of San Jose and in the middle of the power struggle between city management and IAFF Local 230. The power struggle needs to stop. Either the City of San Jose chooses to fund the fire engineer position or the City chooses not to.

With that said, I respectfully request that my colleagues support my request to keep the SJFD staffing at it's current level which includes keeping Fire House 6 staffed at five people. Once and if Fire House 37 opens, the City will re-evaluate the staffing needs at Fire House 37 and Fire House 6.

Thank you for your consideration.