

Council Business Meeting

February 16, 2021

Agenda Item	Approval of Interim Staffing Plan for Ashland Fire & Rescue	
From	Adam Hanks	City Manager Pro Tem
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SUMMARY

With the retirement of Chief Shepherd and two unsuccessful attempts of securing an Interim Fire Chief from outside the organization, staff is seeking approval from Council to pursue a new approach for filling the vacant Fire Chief on an interim basis using existing staff.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED

2019-2021 City Council Goals & Priorities

- Essential Services – Fire
- Value Services: Higher Priority - Emergency Preparedness
- Value Services: Moderate Priority – Reduce Wildfire and Smoke Risk

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION

At the [September 1, 2020 Business Meeting](#), staff provided an update on the Fire Chief recruitment process in the City Administrator Report agenda item. This update highlighted staff discussions with Fire District #5 on potential enhancements to the existing mutual aid relationship that could address Fire Chief needs for the City of Ashland.

At the [September 15, 2020 Business Meeting](#), Council moved to recommend pursuing a recruitment for a Limited Duration Appointment (one to three years) of a Fire Chief.

At the [November 2, 2020 Study Session](#), staff presented an update on the recruitment process that included an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between the City and Jackson County Fire District #3. The IGA would have resulted in a jointly selected candidate to serve as the appointed Ashland Fire Chief for up to three years, with options for a longer-term appointment as a City employee.

At the [November 17, 2020 Business Meeting](#), Council approved and authorized the Interim City Administrator to execute an IGA with Jackson County Fire District #3 consistent with the concept discussed and agreed upon at the November 2, 2020 Study Session. Note: The intended and agreed-upon candidate subsequently informed the City Administrator of his decision to remove himself from placement in the position.

At the [January 5, 2021 Business Meeting](#), Council approved and authorized the City Manager Pro Tem to utilize the Western Fire Chief's Association to place a highly qualified Interim Fire Chief for a specified period.

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Consistent with the voter-approved Charter change in May 2020 (effective January 1, 2021), Department Heads' selection is the City Manager's responsibility and authority. However, because the current City Manager is serving as the interim (Pro Tem) City Manager, the selection of Department Heads (and the City Manager) rests with the City Council.

Staff has pursued several options to hire an Interim Fire Chief without success – both through an intergovernmental agreement with Jackson County Fire District #3 and through direct placement with the Western Fire Chief's Association. As discussed previously, an Interim Fire Chief allows the Council flexibility to consider options for Ashland Fire & Rescue's (AFR) long-term fiscal stability without committing to a long-term Fire Chief. However, the viability of bringing someone in from outside the organization has diminished as time has elapsed. After exploring other options, staff asked Acting Chief Sartain about his willingness to serve as Interim Fire Chief. Chief Sartain has agreed to serve in that capacity through the end of 2021, allowing the Council time to hire a new City Manager, complete the budget process and make other critical decisions regarding AFR. In a collaborative effort with Chief Sartain and the Ashland Firefighters' Association, staff has a plan for the Council's consideration:

Ashland Fire & Rescue Interim Staffing Plan

- Formally appoint Ralph Sartain as Interim Fire Chief. He will retain the Administrative duties and legal powers of the Fire Marshal.
- Contract up to 12 hours per week with Kleinberg Tech for fire protection systems plan review, land development, pre-applications, and construction site inspections until the end of June, revising the contracted hours necessary to meet workload demand for inspections.
- Temporarily re-open the Deputy Fire Chief (Operations) and conduct an internal process to select an existing IAFF employee to fill the Interim Deputy Fire Chief's role. The union has expressed a willingness to sign an memorandum of understanding (MOU) to allow a union member to work out-of-class for more than six months if necessary.
- Rotate the current candidates who have passed the Battalion Chief exam to move into the vacant battalion Chief position on a three-month rotation. The Battalion Chief rotation will allow a captain promotional and engineer promotional employee to move up in three-month rotations while a Battalion Chief fills the Deputy Fire Chief role. The plan enables four tiers of in-house succession planning and an availability to work in the positions without a full-time change in status to determine if this is the path they wish to pursue.
- Hire one full time equivalent (FTE) position from the recent testing process to make all three shifts staffed with ten employees. The additional FTE would help reduce overtime (OT) by creating a floating position to backfill all scheduled OT and cover absences on a specific shift. Alternatively, this plan could be implemented without hiring any additional staff, but it risks increased overtime on the shift that is staffed at nine if employees on that shift take vacation or sick leave.

While this plan has many moving parts, it effectively uses current staffing resources while hiring one new FTE at the lowest level in the Department. If bringing an Interim Chief from outside had gone according to schedule, it would have allowed time for the new Chief to arrive before the budget process. Getting a new Chief on board and helping them learn the organization in the middle of the budget process and an ambulance financial analysis study would strain Chief Sartain far more than if he continues to carry the load himself and redistribute workload to existing staff.

FISCAL IMPACTS

The Fire Chief position has funding and existing appropriations available. The proposal before the Council represents a savings from the appropriated budget for the Department. Ralph Sartain has been serving in a temporary acting capacity as significantly less than Chief Shepherd's salary at retirement. By contracting for a portion of the Fire Marshall duties, the City realizes savings over having Ralph in that position full-time with full wages and benefit costs. The resulting savings from making Ralph the Interim Chief and backfilling a portion of his Fire Marshall duties will fund Battalion Chief backfills (regular salaries and

overtime). This proposal requires hiring one additional staff member at the entry-level to balance the shifts and prevent costly overtime by having one shift without full staffing.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Council direct the City Manager Pro Tem to formalize Ralph Sartain's employment arrangement, making him the Interim Fire Chief, and implementing the internal staff move-ups as proposed.

ACTIONS, OPTIONS & POTENTIAL MOTIONS

- 1) I move to direct the City Manager to pursue an employment contract that would make Ralph Sartain the Interim Fire Chief and enact move-ups within the Department to ensure adequate staffing for Ashland Fire & Rescue.
- 2) I move to initiate a Fire Chief hiring process and instead utilize existing City staff resources and third-party contracts to maintain the Fire Department's current operations.

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

None