

Council Business Meeting

January 5, 2021

Agenda Item	Fire Chief Recruitment Update	
From	Adam Hanks	City Manager Pro Tem
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SUMMARY

With the retirement of Chief Shepherd and the unsuccessful attempt of securing a Fire Chief through an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with Jackson County Fire District #3, Council direction is requested to pursue the placement of a Fire Chief for the City of Ashland.

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

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 its 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 existing mutual aid relationship that could address Fire Chief needs for the City of Ashland.

At its [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 its [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 with a jointed selected candidate to serve as the appointed Ashland Fire Chief for up to a three year period with options for longer-term appointment as a City employee.

At its [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

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Summaries and links detailed above provide significant background information on this matter. With the time that has elapsed in the course of pursuing the IGA solution to the placement of a Fire Chief, clear direction from Council on the desired process to be utilized to secure the services of a Fire Chief for the City is needed. Options include:

- 1) Open recruitment for a Fire Chief utilizing “in-house” method, which would be lead by the City Manager and the Human Resources Director. (3-4 months)

- 2) Open recruitment for a Fire Chief utilizing a recruitment firm to enhance the candidate pool and add resources and expanded reach to the process. (4-6 months)
- 3) Utilization of the Western Fire Chief's Association for the placement of a highly qualified Interim Fire Chief for a specified period of time. Staff recommends six months as a minimum. (3-6 weeks)
- 4) Continue with the Acting Fire Chief with agreement and understanding that backfilling of critical Fire Department Administration activities will occur, such as Fire Marshal, training and EMS functions. (N/A)

FISCAL IMPACTS

The Fire Chief position was and remains fully funded with existing appropriations available.

Option #1- Minimal direct expenditures but will consume considerable HR staff resources.

Option #2 - Reduced HR staff involvement to some degree (20-40%) and does have direct contracting costs of \$20,000-\$30,000.

Option #3 – Ongoing costs of 10% of Fire Chief wages for the duration of the interim appointment (approximately \$1,000/month)

Option #4 – Costs include potential Battalion Chief backfills (regular salaries and overtime), contract services for Fire Marshal functions and other potential third-party contract work. This option does include salary savings as no permanent staff would be hired. If this option is chosen, staff can provide a more detailed plan and more specific cost and savings estimates.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Council direct the City Manager to engage the Western Fire Chiefs Association to pursue a contract placement of an interim Fire Chief. This accomplishes the immediate goal of additional Fire Department administrative and management support that is of high importance. Additionally, this provides staff and Council with (limited) time to make longer-term decisions relating to the longer-term employment of a Fire Chief for the City of Ashland with this Interim Chief supplying and additional qualified, objective voice in that conversation as it moves forward.

ACTIONS, OPTIONS & POTENTIAL MOTIONS

- 1) I move to direct the City Manager to pursue the immediate placement of an Interim Fire Chief through engagement with the Western States Fire Chiefs Association or similarly qualified entity.
- 2) I move to direct the City Manager to initiate an open recruitment for the Fire Chief position utilizing internal staff
- 3) I move to direct the City Manager to initiate an open recruitment for the Fire Chief position utilizing a contract recruitment firm to enhance and expand the recruitment efforts.
- 4) I move to not initiate a Fire Chief hiring process and instead utilize existing City staff resources and specific third-party contracts to maintain the current operations of the Fire Department

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

Western Fire Chiefs Association website – www.wfca.com