



Staff Report

City Council

Item No. {{section.number}}.C

Meeting Date: May 22, 2024

From: Michael Contreras, Fire Chief

Title: Ambulance Update

RECOMMENDATION:

No action needed this is information only.

BACKGROUND:

Since the establishment of the ambulance transport program in 1988, the Cathedral City fire department has been transporting patients to the hospital. As Cathedral City has continued to grow in population and with visitors, the number of EMS calls has also increased the need for ambulance transport to the hospital by 18% over the last 3 years. This increased need for ambulance services has elevated transport commitment times by 8%, with the average ambulance incident commitment time being 54:10 minutes per call. In June of 2022, the City Council approved the purchase of a third ambulance to provide service to the city. In March of 2023, the third ambulance was placed in service. Since the third ambulance was put in service, we have seen an increased call demand for the ambulance service.

DISCUSSION:

With 77% of all fire 911 calls resulting in a need for EMS that may require transport, the fire department must look for ways to effectively and efficiently reduce the financial impact to the city while still delivering much needed transport services to the city and its citizens. In the past, the city has counted on the automatic aid system between Cathedral City and AMR to make up the difference when additional calls arise. Unfortunately, since the COVID epidemic, AMR has had fewer ambulances available for automatic aid and their overall response times have increased. As a result, many times we must wait for an available ambulance, increasing the amount of time it takes to transport patients to the hospital. Fewer ambulances available along with an increased demand for transports has also impacted “wall time” at local hospitals, increasing unit commitment time, and slowing an ambulance’s ability to get back into the city.

As a transporting agency, CCFD has some of the lowest ambulance response times in Riverside County. Adding a 4th ambulance will allow CCFD to continue to provide superior

Fire and EMS services, with reduced wait times for our citizens. The two-person ambulance is also a cost-effective way to maintain service to the community in that it may respond with just the two-person crew on calls where that level of response is appropriate. Staffing with firefighter/paramedics will improve both our Fire & EMS staffing needs and will also allow us to seek reimbursement through ambulance billing, which we are unable to do when we send a fire engine to a call. Adding an ambulance will address our needs in an innovative way. Due to the overall lack of ambulances within the Coachella Valley this service delivery upgrade is needed and will also allow us to provide automatic aid to AMR through a mutual aid agreement when their ambulances are not available. With increased call volume and fire department staff, there is a greater need for administrative oversight of the Fire and EMS programs. This proposal was presented to the resident study committee and became part of their recommendation to the Council.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The cost for the six proposed positions will be approximately \$1,000,000 annually paid from a potential ballot measure.

FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN:

None

ATTACHMENTS:

None