



## Staff Report

November 2, 2020 Regular Meeting

Addition of 4 FTEs to CWFD 2021/2022 Budget

Presenter: Cathy Huber-Nickerson, Finance Director, Nick Swinhart, Fire Chief

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**BACKGROUND:** CWFD Station 42 has been a cross-staffed station since it was built in 2000. The recent Master Plan recommended adding necessary staff to eliminate cross-staffing at this station. The Fire Chief and Council have also indicated a desire to eliminate cross-staffing at this station. Council indicated a desire to see 4 additional FTEs added to the 2021/2022 budget.

**SUMMARY:** Cross-staffing is necessitated when there are only enough personnel to staff one apparatus at a time. With additional staffing, there will be enough personnel to staff both an ambulance and a fire engine at the same time at Station 42. This will improve response times and coverage for citizens in our response area. The City of Washougal has indicated they do not have the ability to help fund these proposed positions at this time. Providing the additional budgetary authority to add these positions will require approval of Council.



### EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS:

What are the desired results and outcomes for this agenda item?

Staff recommends this addition to the fire department budget be approved by Council during the 2021/2022 biennial process.

What's the data? What does the data tell us?

The data from previous studies show that eliminating cross-staffing at this station will improve response times and service coverage to the citizens in our response area.

How have communities been engaged? Are there opportunities to expand engagement? N/A

Who will benefit from, or be burdened by this agenda item?

The fire department's operational capacity, and by extension the citizens, will benefit from this agenda item. There is potential for burden that will be born by other city departments that may see previously budgeted items either decreased or eliminated. There will also be burden to the partnership between Camas and Washougal. This would further widen the gap between what the two cities contribute to the fire department budget.

What are the strategies to mitigate any unintended consequences?

Finance Department is working to find appropriate funding such that it will minimize impacts to other city departments.

Does this agenda item have a differential impact on underserved populations, people living with disabilities, and/or communities of color? Please provide available data to illustrate this impact. N/A

Will this agenda item improve ADA accessibilities for people with disabilities? N/A

What potential hurdles exist in implementing this proposal (include both operational and political)?

There are no operational hurdles as approval would improve operational capacity. The political hurdle is whether Council will be willing to approve this item without Washougal contribution.

How will you ensure accountabilities, communicate, and evaluate results?

We will monitor changes and improvements to department operations with the additional staffing and will report this data in our annual report to Council and the community.

How does this item support a comprehensive plan goal, policy or other adopted resolution?

Council has previously expressed a desire to see cross-staffing eliminated at Station 42. Approval of this agenda item will fulfill that plan.

**BUDGET IMPACT:** It is estimated that this will have a budgetary impact of approximately \$530,000, including salary, training, equipment, and uniforms. The ongoing cost of the filling the four positions is approximately \$480,000 annually. Council has four funding options to consider:

1. 1% property tax dedicated to CWFD      This option is similar to funding model used for a dedicated revenue stream of street preservation. In 2014, Council elected to use the banked capacity of property taxes to fund street preservation annually. The dedicated property tax is increased each year with the proportionate 1% and new construction. In this scenario, Council could choose to dedicate the 1% tax limit, this year it is approximately \$135,000. This amount would grow each year in the same manner as the street preservation dedicated property taxes. The dedicated tax does not pay for all the positions but would fund one in 2021 and the 1% in the next year could fund an additional position. The downside of this option is that the cross-staffing concern would not be remedied until 2024.
2. Utility taxes      Council could opt to establish or increase a utility tax to fund the four positions. Currently, the City has a 3% utility tax on natural gas with the exception of natural gas consumed by large industrial customers. Council have a variety of options in considering establishing a new utility tax or increase the natural gas utility tax up to 6%. This option is a stable funding source for ongoing costs of all four positions.
3. Pledge GEMT funding      Ground Emergency Medical Transport (GEMT) funding is provided by the State of Washington to help offset the gap between the difference in allowable amount received from Washington Apple Health (Medicaid) patients and the cost of transport. This funding is subject to appropriation by the Washington State Legislature. This revenue source is not budgeted currently and could be used for the funding of the positions. This option may require the City of Washougal to agree to the use of the funds for this purpose, currently the funds are considered shared revenues and offset the costs of CWFD for both cities but it would also allow Washougal to share in the costs of additional staffing. The risk in depending on this revenue source is the reliance on the State Legislature to continue to fund the program.
4. Use of fund balance      CWFD will have an increase in fund balance in 2020 with unanticipated federal funding. This revenue is not shared revenue since it was allocated from the State of Washington's Department of Commerce to the City of Camas. The use of these one-time funds could be to bridge the ongoing costs for one year while the City of Camas determines the best funding mechanism for the positions.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends this item be approved as part of 2021/2022 biennial budget process with a dedicated revenue to fund the four positions.