

# REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

City of Nevada City  
317 Broad Street  
Nevada City CA 95959  
[www.nevadacityca.gov](http://www.nevadacityca.gov)

June 10, 2015

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**TITLE: Continuity of Nevada City Fire Department Operations**

**RECOMMENDATION:** Pass a motion 1) authorizing the use of Measure L funds to hire two limited-term firefighter positions and eliminate the rotating brown-out of the Fire Department's "C" shift through June 30, 2016, and 2) authorizing the sending of a City Manager letter to that effect to Joint Operational Area partners.

**CONTACT:** Mark Prestwich, City Manager; Sam Goodspeed, Fire Chief

**BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION:** For more than 13 years, the City of Grass Valley Fire Department, Nevada City Fire Department and Nevada County Consolidated Fire District (NCCFD) have successfully shared operational resources in a Joint Operational Area (JOA) providing excellent medical, rescue and response to a large part of western Nevada County. For over 11 years, this sharing included Nevada City and NCCFD co-staffing Fire Station No. 54 on Providence Mine Road with three firefighters each.

In April 2015, NCCFD ended their joint-staffing relationship with Nevada City at Station 54. "Future shortfalls within the District's fiscal budget" and "ensuring financial sustainability" were cited as reasons why the decision was made to remove three firefighters. This left the City with the challenge of how to operate the fire station with only half the necessary personnel.

As a result of direction provided by the City Council in November 2014, City staff met with the Fire Chiefs of each JOA agency to evaluate potential operational staffing models, analyze service level impacts, and develop options for the continuity of City and JOA fire and emergency services. These meetings contributed to the development of options presented to the City Council on January 22.

At the January meeting, the City Council unanimously approved long-term and short-term strategies to keep Fire Station 54 open given the essential emergency services it provides and to guard against a deterioration of response times for fires and other emergency events requiring a second engine response. The City's approved long-term strategy consists of placing a revenue measure on the June 2016 ballot to secure the sustainable funding necessary to replace the positions NCCFD previously funded (a 48% increase to the Fire Department budget is necessary in order to operate the station without brown-outs). The City's short-term strategy consisted of two parts: submitting a federal grant

proposal for three temporary replacement firefighters on March 6 and requesting NCCFD postpone the withdrawal of their staff until it was determined whether the City was awarded a grant (notification is expected before September 30). NCCFD did not act on the City's request, effectively declining it.

As a result, City staff once again consulted with JOA Fire Chiefs and affected City fire personnel to discuss optimal staffing strategies post April. Rather than redistribute remaining staff to other JOA stations and close Station 54 as previously envisioned, it was mutually determined by the Chiefs that the JOA would be least impacted if the City could hire an additional firefighter so that it could operate two of the three 48-hour shifts, with the third shift browned-out. The City agreed with this suggestion and has reduced an administrative position to part-time status temporarily in order to fund the 4<sup>th</sup> firefighter position. This adjustment has resulted in some service level impacts at City Hall.

The above operational decision was announced by letters to JOA agencies on March 30 and April 1. The rotating brown-out of Station 54's 48-hour "C" shift commenced April 23 and Nevada City is grateful for the assistance provided by NCCFD and the City of Grass Valley. Since implementation of the rotating brown-out, NCCFD has provided an average of approximately 1 call for service on each of the 14 brown-out days within the Nevada City limits that Station 54 would have responded to had it been operational. To date, the City of Grass Valley has provided an average of approximately 1 call for service every three brown-out days for calls Station 54 would have responded to had it been operational.

Due to safety concerns related to the extended drought conditions, as well as the City's preparedness entering an anticipated dangerous fire season, it is recommended the City hire two limited-term firefighters thru June 30, 2016 in order to eliminate the existing rotating brown-outs and restore Station 54 to full-time operation which also provides added protection to the City and JOA partners. It is also advantageous to maintain the City's current Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating and mitigate any potential rating downgrade which could result in possible insurance cost increases to Nevada City residents and business owners.

It is recommended the positions be funded by postponing the necessary \$221,000 Pioneer Park swimming pool rehabilitation project that was anticipated to be partly funded by Measure L. The Pioneer Park pool, built in 1935 and last renovated in 1983, has experienced surface cracking and is in need of a comprehensive rehabilitation project. However, diverting the funds from the pool rehabilitation project will allow the City to eliminate rotating brown-outs of Fire Station 54 through June 30, 2016.

If the City is awarded the federal grant funding for three temporary replacement firefighters, then the City's use of Measure L revenue would be reduced. The City anticipates being able to hire the two additional firefighters by July 1.

It's important to note that if sustainable funding to pay for the three replacement firefighters is not secured by June 2016, it is likely the City will need to evaluate contracting for fire services resulting in the closure of Fire Station 54, possible insurance cost increases, and a deterioration of emergency readiness and Nevada City service response levels.

**ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:** Not applicable.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The estimated cost of hiring two limited-term firefighters thru June 30, 2016 is approximately \$100,000. This would be the maximum to be used from Measure L revenues if the federal grant is not earlier received. Approval of this plan will divert funds from planned pool expenses to the Fire Department. The City will continue to seek alternative funding for the needed pool project.

**ATTACHMENTS:** None.