Atascadero City Council
Staff Report – Fire Department

Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant

RECOMMENDATION:

Council approve and accept the SAFER Grant.

DISCUSSION:

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is responsible for the implementation and administration of the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants. SAFER grants provide financial assistance to community fire departments by increasing the cadre of frontline firefighters or to rehire firefighters that have been laid off. The goal is to assist local fire departments with staffing and deployment capabilities while responding to emergencies when they occur, thereby assuring their communities have adequate protection from fire and related hazards. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, Congress appropriated a total of $420 million to DHS for SAFER grants.

Overview:

The City has been selected to receive a SAFER grant. The grant covers the cost of salaries, taxes and benefits for an additional firefighter for a period of two years. There is no required City cost-share or match for this grant and the City does not have to commit to retaining the SAFER-funded firefighter position after the two year grant period has expired.

There are three categories for the rehiring of firefighters. Listed in order of funding priority, they are: rehiring of laid-off firefighters, retention of firefighters facing possible layoffs, and filling of positions lost through attrition. SAFER grants are awarded directly to combination (paid & reserve or volunteer) and career (all paid) fire departments by enabling a restoration of original staffing levels to attain a more effective level of response and provide a safer emergency scene. Grants for rehiring firefighters provide fire departments with funding to pay 100 percent of the salaries and benefits (exclusive
of overtime) and have a two-year period of performance. There is no requirement of grantees to retain the SAFER-funded firefighter(s) after the two-year performance period.

Grantees must maintain their staffing at the level that existed at the time of award as well as the SAFER-funded staffing for the two-year period of performance unless the grantee has been afforded a waiver of this requirement. The layoff of firefighters during the two-year period of performance will result in the termination of the grant award.

If a SAFER grantee loses a firefighter for any reason (such as attrition or termination) during the two-year period of performance, the department must fill the position or lose funding for the position until the vacancy is filled. The only exception is for grantees that receive waivers from FEMA for the vacated positions that have been lost due to documentable economic hardship.

Current fiscal projections indicate that the City would not be able to support an additional firefighter in 2013. This would mean that the position would be eliminated at the end of the two-year period through attrition or layoff. Adding this position is not intended as Council policy to increase fire department staffing.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

Addition of $206,737 in grant revenues and addition of $206,737 in firefighter salary and benefit expenditures. Although there is no net fiscal effect on the General Fund bottom line, the City will be receiving the services of an additional firefighter for two years providing a service gain for the City.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

The City Council may refuse the grant.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

None