



Staff Analysis

Shared Fire Station Alerting System to Improve Fire Rescue Response Times

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CITY OF GAINESVILLE STAFF ANALYSIS

Legistar No:**Title:** Fire Station Alerting – County Participation**Sponsor:** Gainesville Fire Rescue**City Staff Contact:** Jeff Lane, Fire Chief

Summary of Issue

This item requests the City Commission invite Alachua County to join the Fire Station Alerting project at substantial initial savings to the County and to jointly fund the system thereafter.

The City Commission has approved expenditures of \$488,160 on a base Fire Station Alerting system. Previous grant requests and capital improvement study anticipated a single system to be shared by Gainesville Fire Rescue (GFR) and Alachua County Fire Rescue (ACFR). The grant requests were for substantially higher amounts for more capable systems; however, the project is now a scaled-down first phase design. This base-system includes the minimum equipment (re-using most existing GFR Fire Station equipment), first-year software license and warranties with remote support.

There is an opportunity for ACFR to connect to this base-system purchased by the City. There would still be costs for the County to buy equipment for each Fire Station brought online with the new system.

Not taking advantage of a single or compatible Fire Station Alerting System will over time result in increasing failure of the County's older system and station components until the platform is unsustainable with limited support options. The lack of compatibility with ACFR and Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) will prevent efficiencies and interoperability gains that reduce emergency response time for County units, (including ambulances) responding to City incidents.

History/Background Information

The Fire Station Alerting System is used to notify first responders of calls for service. A dispatcher at the Combined Communication Center (CCC) receives the incident information from the CAD system and sends an alert to the required station/units. The current City system was installed nearly a decade ago as a requirement to maintain GFR's Public Protection Classification by the Insurance Services Office (ISO). ACFR's system dates to the early 1980s technology, and relies on antiquated analog radio "beeper" equipment.

The City Commission has authorized the City Manager or designee to negotiate a contract to replace GFR's Fire Station Alerting System. However, to reduce response times and function

most efficiently, GFR and ACFR must use modern and compatible systems or preferably the same platform for effective Fire Station Alerting.

GFR and ACFR agree and continue to advocate for a stable and effective fire station alerting system. The use of the same platform and the economy of sharing system maintenance for non-station expenses seems the most efficient approach. Another advantage to a single system is later phases of the project and improvements can be more easily addressed and less costly to deliver than two stand-alone or incompatible systems can achieve independently.

In anticipation of technological improvements and limited service life for the electronic equipment and software, GFR and ACFR jointly began submitting applications in 2013 for Federal grant funding for replacement of the aging system; however, none of the applications were funded. With the number of outages rising and the increased need to lower response time the City has agreed to fund a phase I system that will meet our minimum needs and is preparing to move forward. It is optimal in planning the implementation to address the County's participation.

Options

A. Encourage the County to join the Fire Station Alerting project by bringing all County Stations online and jointly sharing the on-going expenses of the base system.

Pros – Provides optimal integration and maximum effectiveness of the system, lowering response time county-wide.

Cons – Expense for County Fire Station equipment.

B. Encourage the County to join the Fire Station Alerting project by bringing Urban Stations online and jointly sharing the on-going expenses of the base system.

Pros – Those stations with the most impact on City responses and with highest incidents will benefit from improved response time. Provides the opportunity for a phased approach and reduced County expense for a new system.

Cons – Partial implementation will require maintenance of two systems and not resolve suburban or rural response delays.

C. City continues on course and implements a new Fire Station Alerting project for GFR only;

Pros – City will replace its system as planned to provide improved reliability to maintain low dispatch time for City Stations.

Cons – City incidents that require automatic aid from ACFR units will experience exposure to slower, less reliable alerting system.

Staff Recommended Option

Staff recommends the options in successive order as listed, however Option B provides for those units most often called to City incidents. Staff recommends that the City Commission authorize the Mayor to send a letter to the Chair of the County Commission supporting the County's participation in the Fire Station Alerting Project.