

UNIVERSITY CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION
5th Floor of City Hall
6801 Delmar
September 24, 2018

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

The City Council Study Session was held in the Council Chambers on the fifth floor of City Hall, on Monday, September 24, 2018. Mayor Crow called the Study Session to order at 5:30 p.m.

In addition to the Mayor, the following members of Council were present:

Councilmember Steven McMahon
Councilmember Paulette Carr
Councilmember Jeffrey Hales
Councilmember Tim Cusick
Councilmember Stacy Clay
Councilmember Bwayne Smotherson

Also in attendance were City Manager, Gregory Rose; City Attorney, John F. Mulligan Jr., and Fire Chief, William Hinson.

2. CHANGES TO REGULAR COUNCIL AGENDA

Mr. Rose suggested the following amendments:

- That Item No. 2 under the City Manager's Report be removed, and
- That Item No 1 under the Consent Agenda be moved to the first item under the City Manager's Report.

Councilmember McMahon moved to approve the agenda as amended, seconded by Councilmember Carr and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Emergency Medical Services (EMS)Transport

Requested by the City Manager

Mr. Rose stated significant dialogue was exchanged regarding the Fire Department's EMS Transport during the presentation of the approved Work Plan, and tonight, Chief Hinson will provide Council with information about the financial impact of moving the City back to performing its own EMS transport.

Mr. Rose stated on Friday, the City learned that it had been awarded the SAFER Grant in the amount of 1.9 million dollars; the potential impact of this grant has been factored into the presentation

Fire Chief, William Hinson, stated he would like to send a big thanks out to Matt Pagano, whose hard work resulted in the receipt of this grant, which if implemented, will bring the Fire Department back up to its previous level of staffing.

- **FISCAL EVALUATION - YEAR ONE**

- **Without the SAFER Grant**

- Personnel Cost = \$1,112,787.84
 - Ambulance Cost = \$393,739.00
 - Medical Equipment = \$130,161.87

- Total - \$1,609,687.87
 - EMS Billing Revenue = \$800,000
 - Projected Total Cost = \$809,687.87

- **With the SAFER Grant**

- Personnel Cost = \$336,681.84
 - Ambulance Cost = \$393,739.00
 - Medical Equipment = \$103,161.03

- Total - \$833,581.87
 - EMS Billing Revenue = \$800,000
 - Projected Total Cost = \$33,581.87

- The SAFER Grant is broken down into a three-year program with the City's financial obligation being 25% year one; 25% year two, and 65% year three, and the Federal Government's portion being 75% year one; 75% year two, and 35% year three.
 - The City's ambulances and associated equipment were outdated and slated for replacement at the time they were taken out of service.
 - Two of the City's three ambulances will be replaced.
 - Replacement of ZOLL Cardiac Monitors and related equipment.
 - New software will be purchased to write EMS Reports, create a more efficient billing system, and enhance the EMS revenue stream.

- **YEAR TWO**

- **Without the SAFER Grant**

- Personnel Cost = \$1,055,360.16
 - Ambulance Cost = \$ 256,182.00
 - Medical Equipment = 33,651.43

- Total - \$1,345,193.59
 - EMS Billing Revenue = \$ 800,000
 - Total = \$545,193.59

- **With SAFER Grant**

- Personnel Cost = \$279,254.16
 - Ambulance Cost = \$ 256,182.00
 - Medical Equipment = \$33,651.43

- Total = \$569,087.59
 - EMS Billing Revenue = \$ 800,000
 - Total = +\$230,912.41

- Replacement of the third ambulance.

- **YEAR THREE**

- **Without SAFER Grant**

- Personnel Cost = \$ 1,055,360.16
 - Ambulance Cost = \$0
 - Medical Equipment = \$ 33,651.43

- Total - \$1,0898,011.59
 - EMS Billing Revenue = \$800,000
 - Total = \$289,011.59

- **With SAFER Grant**

- Personnel Cost = \$685,984.10
 - Ambulance Cost = \$0
 - Medical Equipment = \$ 33,651.43

- Total - \$719,635.53
 - EMS Billing Revenue = \$800,000
 - Total = +\$80,364.47

- **CURRENT EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES**

- **ZOLL Cardiac Monitor:**

- Replacement of two @ \$67,264.60; \$33,632.30 each, needed ASAP

Medical Supplies:	Averaging \$30,000 a year, will increase by \$35,000 yearly.
Oxygen:	Averaging \$3,000 a year, will increase by \$4,000 yearly.
Medical Waste Disposal:	Averaging \$10,550 a year; currently negotiating price with a target of approximately \$2,000 a year/
EMS Reporting Software:	\$13,000 yearly subscription. This software connects to surrounding Fire. EMS, hospitals utilizing this system, as well as the Mo Bureau of EMS. It simplifies billing and eases the collection of patient information.
EMS Billing:	Previously handled by Mediclaims and the Department is recommending that this service be resumed. Mediclaims charges 5% of what they collect on billable runs. Zero start up cost. Zero maintenance fees. They set up and maintain all contracts with Medicare/Medicaid.

- EMS Reporting Software goes directly to Mediclaims, eliminating countless man-hours associated with producing claim forms.
- Missing patient information can now be obtained by linking into the hospital's software system.

- **CURRENT AMBULANCES**

1. 2009 Chevrolet Medtec Ambulance; *(move to back up position and replace in 2nd year)*
2. 2011 International Osage Ambulance; *(remount box to new Freightliner Chassis for a savings of approximately \$80,000)*
3. 1999 Freightliner Medtec; *(complete replacement due to age and condition)*
 - ❖ *See packet for further details.*

- The Freightliner Medtec averages 20 years of service.

Mr. Rose stated the following represents the actions he intends to take unless otherwise directed by Council.

- **NEXT STEPS**

1. Acceptance of the SAFER Grant; Submitted on Oct. 8th Council Agenda.
2. Amend Capital Improvement Program to reflect needed Capital Purchases; shifting the \$250,000 allocated for FY19 and FY20 for the purchase of a pumper truck, to the purchase of an ambulance.
3. Amend the City Staffing Plan for additional firefighter/paramedics.
4. Open Formal Discussion with Gateway Ambulance and Chief Hinson to initiate a Transition Plan.
5. Periodic Council updates on the progress.

Councilmember McMahon asked if there would be two paramedics in every ambulance? Chief Hinson stated the grant will bring staffing levels up to the national standard which have not been met since 2015 because Gateway's personnel could not be used as firefighters. The standard requires that each department have fifteen people on the scene of an emergency situation within 8 minutes. Therefore, if approved, each crew will consist of fifteen people with two ambulances, each manned by two paramedics. And since all of their personnel are firefighter/paramedics, there will be paramedics on every fire truck. Councilmember McMahon asked if U City would regain its full mutual aid support from surrounding communities? Chief Hinson stated mutual aid will automatically assist both EMS and Fire. Councilmember McMahon asked if the software being proposed transferred the patient's data and medical condition to the destination hospital? Chief Hinson stated the new cardiac monitors transmit information to the software program, which in turn, transmits it to the hospital prior to the patient's arrival. This also allows hospitals to assist with a patient's medical care while in transit.

Councilmember Carr stated it was her understanding that the Department had supplied Gateway with several of their 911 radios, and wondered if they also needed to be replaced? Chief Hinson stated that Gateway had purchased their own radios and returned all of them back to the Department.

Councilmember Clay asked if the City was contemplating an early termination of Gateway's contract? Mr. Rose stated although it is being contemplated, a more definite timeframe will be contingent upon what the Transition Plan entails once it is completed. And the only thing we are sure of today is that the City must hire and train twelve firefighter/paramedics, and purchase a significant amount of capital equipment. Councilmember Clay asked Mr. Rose for the length of time remaining on Gateway's contract? Mr. Rose stated that their contract is scheduled to expire in roughly two years; August 31st of 2020.

Councilmember Clay asked if the new software system would allow the City to capture billing that perhaps, it had been unable to capture before, and result in increased revenues? Chief Hinson stated a vast majority of the problems associated with billing, was the ability to obtain sufficient patient information prior to their release because once a patient arrives at the hospital various privacy regulations; such as HIPPA, are invoked. So yes, the new software program will provide the Department with any information the hospital has on file and greatly minimize previous issues associated with billing.

Councilmember Clay stated since year three indicates that the City will be paying more and therefore, receiving less revenue, will we find ourselves getting into a challenging situation in year four if we are unable to receive another grant? Mr. Rose stated the answer to that question is dependent upon what you view as the role of local government in this area. So, while by no means does he want to insinuate that he believes long-term the revenues collected will be more than enough to cover the cost of Fire, he would not characterize year four as challenging, since he does not believe this is a financial issue.

Instead, he views it as more of an issue about the core service that local government provides. He stated that a good example; which he would suggest that the officers present take with a grain of salt, would be contracting out the City's Police Department to the County. If you simply look at it from a financial perspective, the associated cost would be far less than employing a full police force. But U City doesn't do that, because most, if not all of you believe this is a core service that local government should be providing. And he holds the same belief as it relates to the Fire Department.

Mr. Rose stated the reality is that Gateway's employees are typically not from U City, which has some rather unique issues associated with accessing various neighborhoods. So, if they go down the wrong street it could take them an additional 5 to 10 minutes to get back on track. Now you might say, well if they only get lost once or twice a year, that's not a big deal. But it is a big deal when it's you, your family or a friend, because in a life or death situation seconds matter. U City firefighters know this City, and that factor makes the likelihood of them going down the wrong street extremely unlikely. So that is another reason why he will be recommending that Council approves the SAFER Grant and revert back to the City's previous practice of providing EMS services for its residents.

Councilmember Smotherson stated the difference between Fire and Police is that the Police Department does not bill for services rendered. And what this administration realized prior to Gateway is that the City was approximately 1 million dollars in debt as a result of uncollected fees. So, if Council elects to revert back to the previous practice, what mechanisms will be in place to ensure that the City does not incur this same liability? Mr. Rose stated albeit these two departments may be different in that aspect, they are similar in that both departments provide public safety that deals with life or death situations.

He stated should Council decide to move forward with this proposal, policy decisions regarding exactly what the City should be billing for services will also have to be considered. Medicaid and Medicare have a predetermined price structure for ambulance services, so should the City bill in excess of that amount? The intent is to be smarter and more aggressive in collecting funds, but by no means does this proposal mean that the City's revenues will be lessened. U City is increasingly becoming an older community and a part of that aging process necessitates the need for more frequent hospital visits.

Councilmember Smotherson questioned how many fires had occurred in the last two years that had even met the fifteen firefighter requirement? Chief Hinson stated while he is uncertain of the exact number, another requirement of NFPA is the 17-10 standard which dictates that for every two people actively engaged in putting out a fire there must be two people outside with the truck. So, when he sends a fire truck out it must have four to five firefighters onboard in order to meet that standard. He stated at the end of the day, it's not about how many fires they've had because from their perspective it only takes one fire to put someone's home or family at-risk. You don't go to a different family physician every visit, and his department views the services they provide in the same manner; this is their town and they are here to take care of you, so they take pride in ownership.

Chief Hinson stated when you know you're going to be working in the same place every day; you're going to do your very best because you'll see those same people tomorrow. And that's simply not true with contract services.

Councilmember Smotherson stated his understanding is that the practice within the Department has been that new employees are assigned to operate the ambulances. So he was curious to know whether the SAFER Grant requires new hires to rotate on the trucks, as well as ambulances? Chief Hinson stated they have already started to put together a program where the twelve new hires will receive on-the-job training eight hours a day, Monday through Friday. So current employees understand that some form of rotation will be necessary in order to get these people trained. Councilmember Smotherson asked what tasks would be assigned to the new employees at the conclusion of their training period? Chief Hinson stated he had never encountered an issue with how the rotation works, but if there is one, he would be willing to look into it. Councilmember Smotherson stated his real concern is whether a rotation even exists and if there is one, whether employees are given the opportunity to opt out of driving an ambulance? Chief Hinson stated that seniority bumps an employee up the line, so if somebody below you is off or out on vacation, then you could be dropped down to operating an ambulance. He stated when he started 25-years ago there was no rotation. The City had two ambulances and the primary ambulance that ran every call was at House 2. So, for his first five years, he ran every call that came in and loved it.

Councilmember Smotherson asked if the City had a certified emergency medical dispatch? Chief Hinson stated as far as he knows, it does not. Councilmember Smotherson questioned whether one was required in order to restore the City's EMS transport service? Mr. Rose stated one option could be to expand or combine the City's existing dispatch with police. And another is to look at the type of service other cities are utilizing. He stated while he thinks the better option is an expansion of both police and fire dispatchers, here again, much of this will depend on what the Mayor and Council are amenable to as staff delves into the Transition Plan.

With respect to rotation, one of the challenges often experienced in the Fire Department today; that is different than fifteen years ago, is that people leave. So if you couple that fact, with the Class and Compensation Study currently taking place, he suspects that the ability to be more competitive in the market will produce a more stable environment not only in the Fire Department but throughout the entire organization. And if that can be established, then the likelihood of rotation occurring simply because someone has left will be minimized. Councilmember Smotherson stated what he is referring to with respect to rotation, is a system that employs both senior and low-ranking firefighter/paramedics in the operation of an ambulance. Because if the argument is that Gateway employees don't know this City, wouldn't the same be true of the City's younger recruits being assigned to the ambulance that obviously, have less experience? Mr. Rose stated although that argument may be true today, he would ask Council not to consider the organization as it currently exists, but how it will be in the future.

Once U City becomes more competitive, the new definition for a young recruit might be someone who has been on board for seven years. That's the way the Department used to look like fifteen years ago, and that's what this City needs to bring to fruition again.

Councilmember Cusick questioned whether participating in mutual aid meant that U City was obligated to assist other communities? Chief Hinson stated that it did. Councilmember Cusick questioned whether the possibility existed that both of the City's ambulances could be needed to assist another community at the same time? Chief Hinson stated as far as he can recall, that has never happened. Councilmember Cusick asked whether U City was obligated to assist Richmond Heights? Chief Hinson stated that it was. Councilmember Cusick asked what northern communities would typically respond if the City's ambulance was not available? Chief Hinson stated the communities that assist on a routine basis are Olivette, Ladue, Clayton, Richmond Heights, and Brentwood. And in extreme cases when every unit is needed, mutual aid can come from Creve Coeur or Chesterfield. Councilmember Cusick questioned whether the City's ambulances could go as far as Creve Coeur or Chesterfield? Chief Hinson stated while it could happen, it's not the norm.

Councilmember Cusick asked what the \$800.00 EMS billing revenue was based on? Mr. Rose stated it was based on past receipts which range from \$700,000 to \$900,000, depending on the number of calls received. Councilmember Cusick stated if Mediclaims charges 5% would the average EMS billable revenue be decreased to \$760,000? Mr. Rose stated while the City could end up collecting more or less, that's a good estimate. Councilmember Cusick stated if Council decides to go this route, would it be possible to get information on Mediclaims' success rate and references from some of the other communities they work with? Mr. Rose stated that the City could incorporate those types of requests in Mediclaims' contract. Chief Hinson informed Councilmember Cusick that Mediclaims was a large company based out of Oklahoma who handles EMS services nationwide.

Councilmember Hales asked whether the medical waste cost of \$80,000 was from when the Department previously provided EMS transport? Chief Hinson stated that it was. But at the time that contract was executed they were the only game in town. Today, there are about six companies and that competition has driven the price way down. So staff is currently in negotiations with this company in hopes of terminating that contract.

Councilmember Hales stated he is a little concerned that all of the ambulances will be due for replacement at the same time, and wondered if there was any way to extend the timeframe for replacing the third ambulance now planned for year two? Chief Hinson stated since the grant money would cover personnel costs, staff believed this would be a good time to invest in new equipment. So yes, they could stretch it out, but it's been in mothballs for three years, sitting outside on the parking lot, and they have no idea what kind of shape it's in.

Mayor Crow stated his assumption, is that trying to find twelve qualified people to fill these positions is going to be somewhat challenging? Chief Hinson stated they get applications on a daily basis even when there are no openings, so there seems to be a lot of people that live in St. Louis County who would love to work in U City. The unfortunate aspect is that, Pattonville just passed a tax increase to bring their staffing up to the 17-10 standard, so there are going to be several districts who will be hiring in mass.

Mr. Rose stated Council will be given the opportunity to decide what the class and compensation should be for U City employees, and once that is completed it will allow this City to be much more competitive. He stated he also thinks the level of activity for the City's police and fire departments is much greater than you would experience in other cities, so their compensation should reflect that.

Mayor Crow asked if there were any additional steps to be taken, once the Transition Plan is in place, to establish mutual aid? Chief Hinson stated once mutual aid has been established there is nothing else that needs to be done.

Mayor Crow stated collectability has been a challenge for this community the entire ten years he's been a member of Council. And while he always hopes for improvement, everyone should be cognizant of U City's socio-economic condition as opposed to some of the surrounding communities with higher collection rates. But, as the City Manager indicated, this is a core service he also believes should be provided to residents, in spite of the reality that the financial aspect of implementing this service may not get a whole lot better.

Councilmember Smotherson stated since diversity is constantly being touted as one of the key characteristics of U City, he's curious to know the racial makeup of the Fire Department as it stands today? Mr. Rose stated although he would have to provide that information to Council at a later time, he can share a couple of his thoughts regarding diversity throughout the entire organization.

A project that he and Chief Hinson will be discussing, and he and Chief Hampton have already discussed, is reestablishing the Cadet Program. In his opinion, there are barriers that hinder entry into both professions, and this program would be designed to provide greater exposure to women and minorities and assist them in becoming qualified for these public safety positions. Mr. Rose stated what he believes this City should be doing is creating programs that open doors and enhances the existing pool of applicants. But on the other hand, while these things are very important, the one insight that cannot be overlooked is the need to always pursue the best-qualified candidate. Because as an officer or firefighter my issue is not what color an individual is, but whether that individual can shoot straight or knows how much pressure to put on the pump, so that no one is endangered by their inadequacies.

Chief Hinson stated what he can say, and it can be verified by Ms. Howze, is that his department recognizes the need for diversity and is doing their very best to satisfy that need. But a large part of the problem is that county-wide everybody is doing their best to improve diversity within their population. And the vast majority of these districts pay a lot more money. In fact, he has had captains leave to become a private somewhere else because it pays more.

Councilmember Smotherson stated his understanding is that there are no African-American paramedics, and yet, we are a diverse community. So he hopes this is something the Fire Department and this administration, does not give up on.

Mr. Rose stated both Departments, Fire and Police, share these same challenges, and he does not believe it is something they are going to give up on. Unfortunately, as it stands today, the criteria that deems someone qualified for these positions is out of the City's control. But what it can do is create programs that mentor, coach, and provides exposure to women and minorities.

Councilmember Hales stated he does not believe there is a member on this Council that does not share these same values. But, as it stands today, the City has no control over who Gateway hires, so he would welcome that control. And as we observed this past spring, the City Manager clearly heard Councilmember Smotherson when he raised this same issue with respect to companies the City contracts with to perform various concrete and street repairs. Because when it came time for some of this work to be done, the crews absolutely reflected the diversity of this community.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Crow thanked everyone and closed the Study Session at 6:19 p.m.

LaRette Reese
City Clerk

