To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager
Submitted by: Dave Brannigan, Fire Chief
Subject: Fire Administration Financial Management and Professional Standards Enhancements

RECOMMENDATION
Approve the positions necessary to enhance the Fire Department’s ability to fund services, improve fire prevention programs, and align with the City’s strategic plan by creating grant writing capacity, improved management of billing systems, fee collection processes, and contract management.

SUMMARY
To address multiple audit findings, several Council referrals regarding fire and disaster safety, as well as to collect and maintain performance data and strategic plan alignment, the proposed staffing changes will be supported by additional revenue while adding staff capacity to meet Berkeley’s needs. To realize three sources of increased revenue opportunities in the Fire Department, we have reorganized some administrative functions, but the addition of personnel is also necessary. The revenue sources include improperly billed and uncollected fire inspection fees due to incorrect addresses & billing information, uncollected ambulance transport fees, and fire department grant opportunities.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION
Fire inspection billing is a convoluted process that requires a minimum of three data sources. The errors and inconsistencies in data across those systems must be managed by a staff person. At this time there is no position that has that responsibility or assignment. In FY 2018 the Fire Department implemented some modifications to the process and saw an increase of approximately $100,000 in collected fees over projections. Creation of an Assistant Management Analyst to manage that process and data sources at a cost to the General Fund of $142,612.59 will be offset by increased collected revenue and a reduction in billing errors and delays.

Berkeley’s ambulance fee billing is conducted by a contracted vendor, Intermedix. Medical billing is complex and requires constant quality assurance, follow up with patients, hospitals, and EMS oversight agencies. The vendor is able to handle some of that work but Berkeley must do much of the follow up on documentation and
coordination of hospital information. That responsibility currently falls on the EMS Captain who oversees the entire EMS program and an AOSIII who does some follow-up after their primary responsibility of Police payroll. Operational readiness and statutory compliance is the top priority of the EMS Captain which means revenue collection and compliance is a low priority to current staff. The creation of an Administrative Assistant at a cost to the General Fund of $140,189.39 will be offset by increased revenue projected FY 2019 to increase by approximately $100,000. The position will also provide much needed support to the EMS Division that does not currently exist.

Fire Department grant opportunities are available from many sources. Recent opportunities missed include over $5 million in grants available from FEMA in the wake of the 2017 Sonoma County fires, annual Assistance to Firefighter Grants, and UASI grant opportunities. Many grants could provide much needed help for vegetation management and fire prevention education. To fully staff the new Office of Professional Standards the Fire Department’s Associate Management Analyst (AMA) will be reassigned from the Office of Emergency Services (OES) to the Office of Professional Standards at no additional cost to the General Fund. This position research and pursue fire safety grant opportunities with the goal of increasing Berkeley’s fire protection and mitigation while also supporting the positions necessary to perform the work. To ensure continued levels of community preparedness, the AMA in OES will be replaced with a new Emergency Services Coordinator partially funded by the General fund ($148,669.57) and Measure GG ($30,315.00). The funds for all positions except the existing Associate Management Analyst will be added to the budget in the First Amendment to the FY 2019 Annual Appropriations Ordinance.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS
Currently Fire Inspectors and field personnel manage and maintain database entries resulting in inconsistent data collection, erroneous billing, and very little time to focus on inspections and violation correction. As of July 2018 there are over 10,000 unresolved fire code violations in our database due to the lack of resources to properly document and follow up on them. At the Fire Chief’s request, the City Auditor is conducting an audit of the program. This new position request is partially in response to ongoing updates from the audit team on deficiencies they are uncovering. While the final audit will not be completed for some time, this is an effort to address immediate concerns with inspections and billing practices.

Ambulance fee collection is managed by a contracted vendor. We currently have a Request for Proposal (RFP) for that service that increases the scope and complexity of the contract. The EMS Division manages that contract but has no dedicated support staff and is run by a Fire Captain. An Accounting Office Specialist III is responsible for some of the billing processes but splits her time with Police payroll and other accounting responsibilities. There is a significant portion of ambulance billing that involves working with hospitals, insurance providers, and patients that are less financial and more process and quality assurance. An Administrative Assistant will perform this specialized work along with general support for the EMS Division. Multiple audits by the City Auditor
have called for better vendor management and oversight of the ambulance billing process.

Fire Department grant opportunities as well as the need for data analysis and performance measurement to keep in alignment with the Strategic Plan and to make future department decisions based on reliable data, prompted the Fire Department created an Office of Professional Standards, consisting of a Fire Captain and an Associate Management Analyst.

This Office of Professional Standards reports directly to the Fire Chief and has the following responsibilities:

1) Grant research and writing
2) Statistical based performance analysis
3) Strategic plan alignment
4) Public Record Act request processing

Of the five major areas of responsibility tasked to the Office of Professional Standards, only Public Record Act request processing is done regularly in the Fire Department. As a result, any efforts to perform those duties is taken on voluntarily by field personnel who are interrupted by calls, training, inspections, scheduling, and any number of critical life safety activities. As such, none are regularly performed or maintained at a level that are required of a modern, functional fire department.

BACKGROUND

Fire Prevention
On July 14, 1992 the City Council approved the creation of the Fire Prevention and Preparedness Assessment District. This $50 per parcel fee provided funding for three additional full time fire inspectors, evacuation and red zone planning, the chipper and debris bin programs, and increased fire patrols. The passage of Proposition 218 in 1996 prompted the City to end the Assessment District and no additional funding was sought. Shortly after, the three inspector positions were eliminated and the continuation some of the program were absorbed by existing budgets or reassigned to first responders. In addition, staffing in fire prevention has been reduced over the last 20 years. To make up for the reductions, on-duty firefighters are tasked with doing hundreds of inspections annually. With the number of emergency responses increasing by more than 50% since 1996, and the level of training required of firefighters and paramedics increasing, the fire prevention program as it exists is unsustainable and fails to complete the necessary inspections, documentation, and billing required.

Emergency Medical Services Billing
Audits in 2007 and 2017 of ambulance billing collections identified areas in need of significant improvement including controlled substance accountability and billing
improvements. The EMS Division is run almost entirely by a Fire Captain with no dedicated support staff and an Assistant Chief who also manages the Division of Training. All other management is on-duty Paramedic Supervisors who work on ambulances and fire engines, and handle other aspects of equipment maintenance, supplies, training and many other duties. An outside vendor, Intermedix, is contracted to process all ambulance billing. Council and City staff have often considered more aggressive billing practices including collections but have chosen not to pursue that option. There are other ways that involve collaboration with hospitals, insurance companies, and improving documentation that would yield improvements in revenue if there were staff to focus on it.

Grants
Berkeley Fire in the past occasionally has been awarded grants. Most recently in 2005 we were awarded a FEMA Assistance to Firefighters grant that provided new self-contained breathing apparatus bottles required for all firefighters. Since then, grants have been periodically applied for but often written by line personnel with no experience in the process. As such, we have not been awarded any grants in over a decade.

Strategic Plan
Adoption of the City of Berkeley strategic plan and the ensuing project to create Result Based Accountability and performance measures will give the public and the Fire Department an opportunity to create and track measures to improve our service delivery and efficiency. Fire department infrastructure, response plans, resource deployment, and staffing levels are not regularly tracked or analyzed. For the department to plan and adapt to a growing and changing city, reliable statistical analysis from the Office of Professional Standards will provide the basis for long-term planning and staffing.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
The potential for grants focused on fire fuel mitigation will lead to a more sustainable, fire-safe wildland urban interface in Berkeley and its adjoining agencies. Improved fire prevention billing, ordinances, and enforcement will also lead to healthier vegetation management.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION
The mission of the Berkeley Fire Department is to protect life, property and the environment through emergency response, prevention and community preparedness. While our front line crews still manage to respond and protect, the base and systems needed to support that mission is severely eroded. Given the multitude of needs in Berkeley, the plan to add FTE to support the mission of the department is tied directly to sources of revenue that will fund those positions. To ensure an efficient, data driven response and prevention model for the City’s Fire Department, the reorganization and improvement of administrative services is important.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED
The Fire Department could continue with a minimal reorganization and still expect to respond effectively to 9-1-1 emergencies. However if left unaddressed, fire prevention
and mitigation efforts will suffer leading to increased fires and fire risk throughout the City, revenue will decline, and the other components of the department will continue to degrade.

CONTACT PERSON
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Attachments:
1: Current Organizational Chart for FY2019
2: Proposed Organizational Chart
DEPARTMENT OF FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES

Authorized FTE: 149

Office of the Chief
Authorized: 2.0 FTE
General Fund
Fire Chief
Administrative Secretary

Administrative and Fiscal Services
Authorized: 7.0 FTE
General Fund
Administrative & Fiscal Services Manager
Accounting Office Specialist III (4)
Office Specialist II (2)

Fire Operations
Authorized: 1.0 FTE
General Fund
Deputy Fire Chief

Fire Prevention
Authorized: 7.0 FTE
General Fund and Permit Service Center
Fire Marshal
Deputy Fire Marshal
Fire Prevention Inspector EMT
Fire Prevention Inspector (Civilian) (2)
Fire and Life Safety Plan Examiner (2)

Special Operations
Authorized: 1.0 FTE
Measure GG
Assistant Fire Chief

Fire Suppression
Authorized: 6.0 FTE
General Fund
Battalion Chief (3)
Fire Captain (27)
Fire Apparatus Operator (13)
Firefighter EMT (5)

Training
Authorized: 3.0 FTE
General Fund and Measure GG
Assistant Fire Chief
Fire Captain
Office Specialist III

Emergency Medical Services
Authorized: 57.0 FTE
General Fund, Paramedic Assessment Fund,
1st Responder Life Support, and Measure GG
Fire Captain
Paramedic Supervisor I (6)
Firefighter - Paramedic EMT (50)

Office of Emergency Services
Authorized: 3.0 FTE
General Fund and Measure GG
Associate Management Analyst
Emergency Services Coordinator (2)
DEPARTMENT OF FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES

Authorized FTE: 152

Office of the Chief
- Authorized: 2.0 FTE
- General Fund
- Fire Chief
- Administrative Secretary

Office of Professional Standards
- Authorized: 2.0 FTE
- General Fund
- Fire Captain (reclassified)
- Associate Management Analyst (missing)

Administrative and Fiscal Services
- Authorized: 7.0 FTE
- General Fund
- Administrative & Fiscal Services Manager
- Accounting Office Specialist III (4)
- Office Specialist II (2)

Fire Operations
- Authorized: 1.0 FTE
- General Fund
- Deputy Fire Chief

Fire Prevention
- Authorized: 5.0 FTE
- General Fund and Permit Services Center
- Fire Marshal
- Deputy Fire Marshal
- Fire Prevention Inspector/EMT
- Fire Prevention Inspector (Civilian) (2)
- Fire and Life Safety Plans Examiner (2)
- Assistant Management Analyst

Special Operations
- Authorized: 1.0 FTE
- Measure GG
- Assistant Fire Chief

Fire Suppression
- Authorized: 6.0 FTE
- General Fund
- Battalion Chief (3)
- Fire Captain (27)
- Fire Apparatus Operator (33)
- Firefighter EMT (9)

Training
- Authorized: 3.0 FTE
- General Fund and Measure GG
- Assistant Fire Chief
- Fire Captain
- Office Specialist III

Emergency Medical Services
- Authorized: 5.0 FTE
- General Fund, Paramedic Assessment Fund, 1st Responder Life Support, and Measure GG
- Fire Captain
- Paramedic Supervisor I (6)
- Firefighter - Paramedic EMT (49)
- Administrative Assistant

Office of Emergency Services
- Authorized: 3.0 FTE
- General Fund and Measure GG
- Emergency Services Coordinator (1)