

**SOPHIE HAHN**

Berkeley City Council, District 5  
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CONSENT CALENDAR

April 25, 2017

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
From: Councilmember Sophie Hahn, Mayor Jesse Arreguin, and Councilmember Kriss Worthington, and Councilmember Ben Bartlett  
Subject: Comprehensive study of Emergency Services Call Center, Staffing and Deployment Systems

RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the City Manager to work with the Berkeley Fire Department and Berkeley Firefighters Association to investigate the Department's current practices and determine the feasibility of implementing a criteria-based dispatching system that allocates staffing based on need and risk, ensures that calls are prioritized based on acuity, and more efficiently delivers the appropriate allocation of resources to every 911 call.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff time to prepare the report. There may also be savings or costs should recommendations generated through study be implemented.

BACKGROUND

Over the past two decades, the City of Berkeley has seen significant population growth (adding nearly 15,000 people between 1994 and 2010), as well as a corresponding and significant shift in the physical and structural density of the built environment of the city, including more high rise apartment buildings. Berkeley has become a dense urban center, which presents challenges to the Berkeley Fire Department (BFD) in providing effective service and resources for fire, medical, and other emergencies. A recent Fire Department Deployment Report undertaken by the Berkeley Firefighters Association found that over that same time period, the Fire Department has seen a dramatic increase in call volume, from 6,300 calls for service in 1995 to 14,000 calls for service in 2014. This number is expected to increase to 16,000 calls for service by 2018, a number that far exceeds the Department's current resources.

The BFD has, over time, been tasked with responding to a wider diversity of incidents and emergencies than it was originally designed to accommodate. The Berkeley Fire Department must be staffed, equipped, and trained to deal with any type of emergency. A key finding of the Deployment Report was that while the scope of the BFD's responsibility had increased significantly over the past two decades, there had not been any corresponding increases in personnel or budget, or any changes to resource deployment methods to meet this increased responsibility. More simply, the BFD receives calls reflecting a diversity of incidents typically found in metro-sized cities, but must respond with the financial and personnel resources of a much more lightly staffed department. The report also suggests that while Berkeley is comparable to peer jurisdictions in the call volume it receives, it is by far the busiest in terms of calls per transport unit.

The current method of dispatch could be improved to prioritize calls for service or provide pre-arrival medical instruction to callers, resulting in less costly deployments. The current system deploys the *highest trained personnel to respond to every call received, as fast as possible, regardless of an incident's severity*. This type of deployment strategy can exhaust expensive resources, and often results in a higher level of service being deployed than is needed for specific calls. A more efficient system would respond to service requests with less than a full system activation for every call, tailoring deployments to the size and severity of the incident.

We therefore recommend that the City Manager, Berkeley Fire Department, and Berkeley Firefighters Association investigate the Department's current practices and determine the feasibility of implementing a criteria-based dispatching system that allocates staffing based on need and risk, ensures that calls are prioritized based on acuity, and more efficiently delivers the appropriate allocation of resources to every 911 call. A number of peer jurisdictions in the state of California employ successful deployment systems, and the most successful and efficient systems are built on priority dispatch centers.

The primary goal of this report would be to identify ways to streamline the efficiency of the provision of emergency services in the City of Berkeley, and to ensure that the Fire Department is meeting local, state, and federal guides, as well as community expectations for providing services. More specifically, the study would examine staffing and deployment of resources for the Berkeley Fire Department, in order to:

- Better adapt to meet the changing built environment of the City;

- Better triage emergency medical service calls at time of dispatch;
- Meet increased demand for service secondary to an aging population;
- Provide appropriate supervision of existing and proposed resources;
- Provide adequate support staff to ensure a high-functioning organization;
- Create an organization that will have the capacity to stay on the cutting edge of healthcare reform, leveraging opportunities and anticipating threats;
- Create an organization that will plan strategically and better adapt to future environmental changes

A number of areas could be impacted should the recommendations of the subsequent report be adopted, including: dispatch procedures, station placement and staffing, job classifications and duties, training facilities, and support staff. Undertaking such reform at this time will assist the Fire Department in becoming more cost-efficient by building a scalable model of resource allocation that can adapt to population changes, future changes in the built environment of the City, and medical care policy changes at local, state, and federal levels.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Minimal

#### CONTACT PERSON

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