

Response to Questions on the FY 2010 Advertised Budget Plan

Request By: Supervisor Herrity

Question: What would the impact on the Fire and Rescue Department (FRD) be if they reduced the number of battalions from seven to six? What would the cost savings be?

Response: In order to provide administrative oversight, timely operational direction, and effective span of control, the department's 37 Fire and Rescue Stations are divided into sub-areas used for the assignment of resources, also known as "battalions." Each battalion is assigned a Battalion Management Team consisting of a Battalion Chief and an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Captain II. The Battalion Chief is responsible for daily personnel administration, field training, and tactical command and control at emergency incidents. The EMS Captain provides quality oversight at EMS emergencies, manages multi-casualty incidents, and trains EMS personnel as part of a continuing medical education program. The EMS Supervisor also serves as a command team member on the incident scene addressing accountability and safety issues.

Fairfax County is divided into seven Fire and Rescue Battalions. The seventh battalion was established in FY 2007 to ensure appropriate oversight, management, and control of the increasing complement of field personnel and to lower the station-to-battalion ratio, both of which had grown since the creation of the sixth battalion in FY 1996 due to the opening of two new Fire and Rescue Stations.

The desired level of station-to-battalion ratio is less than six stations in a battalion and is consistent with surrounding jurisdictions. Any ratio larger than this creates span of control issues leading to inadequate capability for operational and management oversight and support. The creation of the sixth battalion was done in conjunction with the opening of the Kingstowne Fire and Rescue Station and brought the station-to-battalion ratio to 5.67 with 167 personnel per battalion. The department operated at this level for five years until the opening of the North Pointe Station in FY 2001, which increased the ratio to 5.83 with 172 personnel per battalion. The opening of Fairfax Center Station in FY 2005 and the Crosspointe Station in FY 2006 increased the ratio to over six stations per battalion and close to 200 personnel. In response to the increase of the station-to-battalion ratio, to be further compounded with the opening of the Wolftrap Fire and Rescue Station, the seventh battalion was created, thus lowering the station-to-battalion ratio to a more manageable level of 5.29. This ratio will increase to 5.43 with the opening of the Wolftrap Fire and Rescue Station.

In addition to causing significant span of control issues, the elimination of the seventh battalion also negatively impacts the department's goal to have a command officer on the scene of a structure fire within 10 minutes. Currently this goal is only met within 15 minutes 90 percent of the time. A reduction in the number of battalions will place the response of a command officer outside accepted industry standards.

When operating on the scene, command officers oversee the strategic and tactical management of emergencies using incident command system - a standardized, on-scene, all-hazards incident management concept followed in the United States. This includes situational assessment and accountability of crews operating on the incident. Without the presence of the Battalion Management Team, these responsibilities fall to a company officer who has to be pulled from his assigned crew, creating an understaffed company. Having the Battalion Chief operate as the incident commander coordinates the efforts of assigned personnel to maximize operational efficiency and safety.

If eliminated, the seventh battalion would result in a reduction of \$793,715 and six uniform positions.