

COUNTY OF ALBEMARLE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AGENDA TITLE: Fire/Rescue Personnel Over-hires	AGENDA DATE: December 1, 2010
SUBJECT/PROPOSAL/REQUEST: Authorize the Department of Fire & Rescue to Over-hire Up to Two Full-Time Firefighter/EMTs	ACTION: CONSENT AGENDA: ACTION: X INFORMATION:
STAFF CONTACT(S): Messrs. Tucker, Elliott, Davis, Mr. Eggleston; and Ms. Kim	ATTACHMENTS: No
LEGAL REVIEW: Yes	REVIEWED BY:

BACKGROUND:

During the Board's October work session on local government's base line budget, core services and future funding challenges, the Albemarle County Department of Fire Rescue (ACFR) indicated that it has been experiencing significant overtime expenditures due to its inability to meet minimum daytime staffing levels for the six volunteer stations located throughout the county that have previously requested County staff coverage. These overtime expenditures are driven by a lack of a sufficient number of trained personnel available to provide this requested coverage thereby forcing the Department to "call-back" personnel and pay significant overtime wages. The challenge of maintaining daily staffing is mainly due to factors such as: light duty, vacation, illness, family medical leave (FML), and regular vacancies.

ACFR indicated to the Board during this work session that it was working in conjunction with the Department of Human Resources to identify a method for alleviating the excessive overtime worked by firefighters/EMTs in order to maintain required minimum staffing levels. Staff's research determined that "over-hiring" additional FTEs would reduce excessive overtime and could be accomplished in a cost-neutral manner. Staff briefly shared the concept of over-hiring with the Board during last month's work session and is now bringing the issue before the Board to seek approval to over-hire up to two additional FTEs.

DISCUSSION:

ACFR has been challenged for several years to maintain required minimum staffing levels without routinely "calling-back" employees who are not scheduled to work. Call-back work must be compensated at time and a half of the employee's regular hourly rate. Excessive reliance on call-back staffing results in employee fatigue, causing concerns for their safety and the safety and quality of ACFR's service to the community. Routine call-backs also lower employee morale and reduce the department's ability to forecast expenditures. The lack of predictability and scope/magnitude of actual overtime costs is demonstrated in "Attachment A" from the County's Performance Management data. These data reveal that periods of excessive overtime are directly related to a lack of trained personnel available to fill daily assignments.

Over-hiring is a common method for addressing staffing shortage issues. Fire and Rescue proposes to hire 1-2 more staff than needed to normally staff operations with the expectation that the normal attrition rate will offset the additional hires so that generally there will only be the number of staff employed that are needed to cover operations without having to program overtime. Roanoke County began its over-hiring process soon after the events of September 11, 2001 when the department lost employees due to military leave, and continues to over-hire as a means to address daily staffing needs.

The designated and budgeted FTE count for the department is expected to remain the same because the number of new hires will be offset by new vacancies. The approval to over-hire would mean that, when necessary and appropriate, and able to be accomplished within budget, ACFR would hire one or two additional employees beyond its designated head count. Staff believes this can be done in a cost-neutral manner through surplus in salary lag and the reduction in overtime expenditures.

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Salary Lag:

ACFR has experienced an average of three employee vacancies (separations from employment) each month for the last three years. It should be noted that the issue is *not* excessive turnover, as the department's annual turnover rate is normal for the public safety sector.

Salary/benefits lag due to these vacancies for the last three fiscal years was approximately:

FY08	\$ 155,000 salary + 30% benefits	=	\$201,500
FY09	\$ 62,000 salary + 30% benefits	=	\$80,600
FY10	\$ 63,000 salary + 30% benefits	=	\$81,900

The cost of a new firefighter, including an Advance Life Support (ALS) stipend and benefits, is roughly \$60,000 annually.

Overtime Reduction:

Based on ACFR's history of overtime data for the past two years, one additional FTE would have reduced enough of the department's call-back/overtime costs to be cost-neutral.

- The highest amount of minimum-staffing-driven overtime occurs during Monday through Friday, daylight hours.
- Over the past two years there were 347 day shifts (83% of the *total* day shifts) with an overtime call-back of at least one firefighter to maintain minimum staffing needs. Sometimes two or three were needed and were called -back.
- This averages out to 174 days, or 2,082 hours per year, where at least one additional firefighter was required.
- The average department firefighter overtime rate is \$28.63 per hour.
- 2082 hours x \$28.63 = \$59,608 per year for the last two years required to cover one minimum staffing position with overtime from hire-back.

The addition of a new firefighter for roughly \$60,000 a year should reduce the department's overtime costs by an equal amount.

Summary:

Should the Board approve ACFR to over-hire by up to two FTEs, it would greatly reduce the use of call-back and the associated overtime costs to cover minimum staffing positions and do so in a cost-neutral manner.

BUDGET IMPACT:

There is no budget impact anticipated.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff recommends that the Board authorize ACFR to over-hire up to two additional firefighters over the current FTE staffing level.

ATTACHMENT A: [Chart - Fire Rescue Overtime Per Quarter](#)

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