

**Surprise Independent Guest Commentary: City budget focused on safety**  
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Public Safety remains a top priority for the City of Surprise and our residents. This is evident with the passage of the voter-approved 2017 General Obligation (GO) Bond, which brings two Fire Stations, land for a future Fire/Police Station, a Public Safety Evidence & Readiness Center and a Training Facility. Furthermore, Public Safety accounts for 47% of the general fund operating budget. The FY2020 budget adopted by Council brings 18 new public safety positions (12 of which are in the Surprise Fire-Medical Department), as well as \$12.6M of Capital and Asset Replacement for the Fire Department.

The Surprise Fire-Medical Department (SFMD) tracks and publicly reports both average and 90<sup>th</sup> percentile response times. Benchmarking response times with other valley Fire Departments is often done using average response times, as some departments report not having the ability to generate data for the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. Benchmark comparisons for 2018 with other West Valley cities reflected comparable emergency response times as those experienced by SFMD.

In 2017, SFMD was awarded a grant which funded five (5) firefighter positions. The grant expired in January of 2019, and all five (5) positions have since been absorbed into the Department's general operating budget. These positions permitted the Department to address call volume activity out of Fire Station 305 through a pilot program utilizing a "peak-time" engine. This engine was in service for 40 hours a week, operating out of Fire Station 305, during periods of higher call volume. This peak-time engine is being replaced with a Low Acuity (LA) Unit based out of Fire Station 305. LA Units are a model which have been deployed in other Valley cities.

The LA Unit at Fire Station 305 will be in service 24/7 and staffed with a sworn paramedic and sworn EMT. This LA unit is equipped to respond to multiple types of medical calls, which account for approximately 75% of SFMD calls; additionally, the LA Unit is available to respond to other service calls (alarms, fire calls as additional manpower, etc.). This will allow resources such as Ladder and Engine companies to remain in service and available for other emergency calls. Beyond the new LA Unit, use of Engine 305 in peak-times continues to be a resource available to the Department, as staffing permits. While the City's standard practice is to anticipate future public safety needs through budgetary efforts, SFMD continues to seek grant opportunities to enhance service delivery to the community. Grant applications have been submitted as recently as early 2019, requesting eight (8) firefighters.

With the passage of the 2017 General Obligation (GO) Bond, additional fire stations will be opening in the City. The recruiting and training processes for firefighters is lengthy. A staggered and phased-in approach for new staffing comes as result of training academy availability and field training capacity. A multi-year staffing plan began with the addition of five firefighters in the FY2020 budget, which was intended to ensure well-trained staff are onboard and prepared as new fire stations open. In the interim, these positions will be deployed for the staffing of all SFMD fire apparatus and stations.

As the City continues to grow, service for all areas of our community remain a priority in strategic planning efforts to keep pace with growth. The future downtown City Center development is an area closely monitored for coverage and service needs. Like other areas around the City, medical-related calls remain the largest service demand (75%) of the SFMD. The deployment of the LA

Unit in service 24/7 will increase the availability of other resources throughout the City. As development continues at City Center, as well as other areas of the community, the need for future fire stations, specific resources and capabilities will be better defined in the Department's ongoing strategic planning.