



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

Finance Committee Staff Report

From: City Manager

Report Type: ACTION ITEMS

Lead Department: Fire

Meeting Date: April 1, 2025

Report #:2502-4221

TITLE

Evaluation of Fire and Ambulance Service Expansion Options (Follow-up from 11/19/24 Meeting)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Finance Committee evaluate Fire Department fire and ambulance service expansion options and provide feedback for further consideration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Hearings, the Finance Committee requested the Palo Alto Fire Department (PAFD) to return with options to increase fire and emergency medical service (EMS) resources to meet service needs. The Fire Department presented data on three staffing options to Finance Committee on November 19, 2024. During that meeting, the Finance Committee reviewed the options and requested additional data and additional staffing options to achieve the staffing of Engine 64 and a peak hour ambulance.

As part of the Mid-Year budget actions this month, Council approved staffing of Engine 64 and Medic 64 in a cross-staffed model with the addition of 3 positions to be filled on overtime.

This report includes specific follow-up data requested, including additional options for staffing Fire Station 4 and a peak hour ambulance for 12-Hour daily, and details on the creation of a new classification of single-role civilian EMS staff and establishing a single-role division (modified from the original proposal made in the November meeting). It also includes a proposed implementation timeline to illustrate the steps necessary to create the new division.

BACKGROUND

The November 19, 2024 Staff Report, (Attachment A) included information on existing City-wide Fire Department service demands and system performance, as well as options to increase resources by adding a fire engine at Station 4 and a peak call time 12-Hour ambulance (peak ambulance) to the current Palo Alto Fire Department deployment model. Three staffing options

considered in November included: A. Contract with a private ambulance company B. Current model staffing with additional firefighters, or C. Creation of a new classification of single-role civilian EMS staff and establishing a single- role division.

At the November 19, 2024 Finance Committee meeting, the following specific data was requested:

1. Details of “Other Calls” in Table 1 "Calls for Service" of the November report
2. Stanford Call for Service details
3. Mountain View Volume Comparison
4. Chart that shows history of deployment and cross staffing
5. Potential Revenue increases
6. Alternative options for staffing Fire Station 4 and the 12-Hour Peak Ambulance that were not presented in the November report
7. Details on the timeline for adding Single-Role Civilian staffing

Responses to each of these requests are provided below in the Analysis section.

ANALYSIS

Below are the responses to the Committee’s questions, updated based on the FY 2025 Mid-Year Budget Review actions that approved resources to cross staff an engine with the ambulance at Station 4.

1. Details of “Other Calls” in Table 1 "Calls for Service" of the November report

Table 1. Calls for Services shows a total of 9,416 calls for service in FY 2024, a 2% increase from the prior year. Of these calls, 5,884 (62%) were for EMS responses, 136 (1.4%) were for fires, and 3,396 (36%) were “All Others”. All Other calls include service calls, false alarm calls and good intent calls:

- *Good Intent Calls:* Good Intent calls capture incidents where there may have been an emergency, but it turned out to be non-emergent or nothing at all. For example, someone could smell smoke and call 9-1-1, but after firefighters arrive and investigate, they may find that the odor was from burnt popcorn down the hall.
- *False Alarms and False Calls:* These are primarily alarms that are automatically triggered during construction or other non-emergency causes such as steam from a shower, dust, insects, or smoke from cooking. This category also covers situations where someone negligently triggered a fire alarm or made an intentionally false report.
- *Service Calls:* These calls are for situations where the department is providing a service, but it’s not an emergency. This can include clean up calls for smoke removal, water evacuations or other hazards; assisting with non-emergency falls in the home; people trapped in an elevator or elevator overrides.
- *Hazardous Materials and Others:* Most of these are utilities-related, such as a natural

gas leak, wiring problem, powerlines down, but it also includes gasoline, diesel, or oil spills, chemical releases or other biological hazards.

Table 1. Detail of "All Other" Calls for Service in FY 2024			
	Count	Proportion of "All Other"	Proportion of Total Calls for Service
Good intent call	1,379	41%	15%
False alarm or false call	1,246	37%	13%
Service Call	655	19%	7%
Hazardous condition and Others	116	3%	1%
Subtotal "All Other "	3,396	100%	36%
EMS	5,884	N/A	62%
Fires	136	N/A	1%
FY 2024 Total Calls for Services	9,416	N/A	100%

2. Stanford Call for Service Details

The City of Palo Alto provides fire service protection under contract to Stanford University. The current contract began in July 2018, after being renegotiated with the closure of station 7 at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC). This contract was renewed to be effective through June 30, 2028, with re-negotiations for services beyond that date due to commence on or before July 1, 2026. The contract covers Fire Services only and explicitly excludes any costs associated with ambulance transport services. The cost model developed to calculate the charge to Stanford is complex and ensures that only the services covered by the contract, specifically resources staged at Station 6 and corresponding pro rata share of shared resources, are charged. The calculation equates to approximately 19% of the Fire Department budget.

Table 2. Fiscal Year 2024 Stanford and Palo Alto Calls for Service			
	Palo Alto	Stanford	Total
EMS	5,154	730	5,884
Good intent call	1,234	145	1,379
False alarm or false call	851	395	1,246
Service Call	583	72	655
Fire	110	26	136
Hazardous condition and Others	100	16	116
TOTAL	8,032	1,384	9,416
Ambulance Transports	3,595	395	3,990

Stanford University accounts for fifteen percent (15%) of all calls for service. The call volume trends are similar to that of the rest of the city, with the majority of calls for emergency medical

services (53%). However, false alarms make up a greater proportion of Stanford call volume (29%) in comparison to Palo Alto (11%). Stanford University makes up ten percent (10%) of transports.

3. Mountain View Call Volume Comparison

The City of Mountain View Fire Department’s most recent annual report that is available to the public is from Fiscal Year 2023¹. In that report the following calls for service data is provided:

Table 4. City of Mountain View Fire Department Calls for Service Comparison				
	Mountain View (FY23)		Palo Alto (FY24)	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
EMS*	5,747	72%	5,884	62%
Good intent call	546	7%	1,379	15%
False alarm or false call	718	9%	1,246	13%
Service Call	539	7%	655	7%
Fire	196	2%	136	1%
Hazardous condition and Others	231	3%	116	1%
TOTAL	7,977	100%	9,416	100%

*Mountain View does not provide medical transport services, during this period they are serviced by County of Santa Clara EMS

4. Chart that shows history of deployment and cross-staffing

Attachment B provides a deployment and cross-staffing timeline for the Fire Department since Fiscal Year 2011.

5. Potential Revenue increases

As part of the municipal fee study being conducted in fiscal year 2025, the Fire Department has included work exploring the addition of a first responder fee and an increase to the base fee for ambulance transports. Neither of these fees are dependent on any of the options discussed for additional resources or alternative service models. Work is underway and analysis are too preliminary as of the date of this report to publish with confidence of reliability.

Adding a 12-Hour peak ambulance will generate additional revenue by capturing transports that Santa Clara County is picking up when City resources are fully deployed and unable to respond. This is estimated to generate \$70,000-\$100,000 in revenue that could offset the significant on-going and one-time investment costs of enhanced services.

¹ <https://www.mountainview.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/8329/638423818087870000>

6. Alternative Options for staffing Fire Station 4 and the 12-Hour Peak Ambulance that were not presented in the November report

The November 19, 2024 Staff Report presented the following options for adding a dedicated fire engine to station 64 and a new 12-Hour ambulance:

- Option A: Contract with a private ambulance company
- Option B: Current model staffing with additional firefighters, or
- Option C: Creation of a new classification of single-role civilian EMS staff and establishing a single-role division

Additional options are limited that will increase resources and provide the same service level enhancements as Options A through C. Two Alternatives have been identified that are steps towards a Long-Term implementation of Option C.

Fire Engine Staffing

Permanent alternatives to bring Engine 64 to full-time staffing are limited. To provide some clarity on staffing needs for an engine, below outlines operational and budgetary staffing details. “Daily positions” represents the number of employees on each unit at any given time providing services to the community. This is how many people must be assigned to the unit for it to be in service. A fire engine requires 3 daily positions to operate. In total, the current staffing model operates with 3 daily staff. All engines operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days per year which requires three shifts (i.e. “battalions”); therefore, each daily position must be multiplied by three battalions:

3.0 daily positions on an engine x 3 battalions = 9 total employees to staff one dedicated engine + Backfill staffing

Additional firefighters are authorized in the service delivery model to provide leave coverage and are called “backfill.” The Department has 0.5 FTE backfill positions for every daily position. When adding 3 daily positions, at least 1.0 FTE firefighter would be necessary as a backfill position. Therefore, a total of 10 FTE would need to be added to fully staff a dedicated engine.

Table 5: Fire Engine Staffing		
Position Classification	Daily Staffing	Budgeted Staffing (FTE)
Fire Captain	1	3.0
Apparatus Operator	1	3.0
Fire Fighter	1	4.0
Total Staffing	3.0 daily staffing	10.0 budgeted staffing (FTE)

Alternative Options

Options A through C presented in the November report are long-term options to fully staff Engine 64 and a 12 HR Peak Ambulance. The Finance Committee asked the Department to explore alternative options for Fire Station 4 and a 12-Hour Peak Ambulance.

Since the November meeting, City Council approved Engine 64 to be placed into service by cross-staffing the unit with Medic 64 on overtime in the FY 2025 Mid-Year Budget Review. This is a swift and initial action to place a fire engine in service allowing the City time to explore additional resource options to invest in the system.

The alternative options presented below offer different levels of resources added to the current system. Both include the Single-Role model of staffing for ambulance services, moving towards the Long-Term Option C presented in the November report.

Option D: Cross Staff Engine 64 and Medic 64 (as approved at FY 2025 Mid-year)

- Adds 3.0 FTE Fire Captain positions to Cross-Staff Engine 64 and Medic 64

Fire Station 4

This option adds Firefighter positions in the budget that are currently filled with Overtime. This will maintain the cross-staffed Engine 64 and Medic 64 while reducing reliance on overtime. It continues firefighting capacity at Fire Station 4, however, it does not add resources to the emergency response system. This is meant as a very limited-term option as it will not address the performance issues covered in the November memo. Cross-staffing Engine 64 and Medic 64 will not positively impact Unit Hour Utilization or Response Times. It will increase the workload of the crew at Fire Station 4, and Medic 64 will be less available to respond.

As the City ~~works through~~ considers additional options to fully staff Fire Engine 64 these positions could be used as a stepping stone towards full staffing with firefighters or ~~be removed~~ reduce future vacancies through attrition if the single-role model is fully implemented (Option C).

Option E: Establish Single-Role Division with 12 Hour Peak Ambulance

- Adds 7.0 FTE to launch Single-Role Division with 12 HR Peak Ambulance

Single-Role

This moves towards the single-role model with the addition of a 12-hour peak ambulance staffed with single-role positions. This option includes adding management and administrative staff to build the single-role division and set the City up for further expansion into the single-role model, moving towards the long-term Option C.

The 12-hour peak ambulance will assist with improving response times, as it is adding a resource to the overall system, and it will help reduce reliance on Santa Clara County ambulance service.

Option F: Establish Single-Role Division with 2 Full-Time Ambulances, Add Engine 64 and 12 HR Peak Ambulance on Overtime

- Add 12-hour peak ambulance on firefighter overtime
- Adds 16.0 FTE to launch single-role division with 2 24-hour ambulances
- Adds Engine 64 full-time by reassigning current firefighters from ambulances

Single-Role

This creates the single-role division that allows for the full-time staffing of Fire Engine 64, the transition of 2 full-time ambulance staffed with single-role positions, instead of firefighters. This option includes management and administrative staff to help build the single-role division and set the City up for further expansion into the single-role model.

By adding enough single-role positions for 2 full-time ambulances, the firefighters on the ambulances will be reassigned to staff up Engine 64. The chart below shows how this results in a reduction of 3.0 FTE firefighters.

Table 6. Firefighter Position Changes with Option F			
	2 Ambulances	Engine 64	Difference
Daily Staffing	4.0	3.0	(1.0)
Budgeted Staffing (x3 Battalions)	12.0 FTE	9.0 FTE	(3.0) FTE

Fire Station 4

This option brings firefighting capacity to Fire Station 4 and Fire Engine 64 into full-time staffing, adding it as a resource to the system. Option F will improve key areas of performance by reducing response times and improving Unit Hour Utilization for all units in the system.

Peak Ambulance

The 12 -hour peak ambulance is still an important resource add to improving response times, and reducing reliance on Santa Clara County’s ambulance. In this option, it will be staffed on firefighter overtime. This allows for that resource to be easily deployed in a cost-effective manner while the Department works toward the long-term Option C.

Attachment C, Staffing Options Summary, compares Options A through C presented in the November report, and the alternatives presented above. All cost are shown in Fiscal Year 2025 figures.

7. Details on the timeline for adding Single-Role Civilian staffing

Single-role refers to an organizational model that will be new to Palo Alto, and has been adopted by other fire departments in California that provide an ambulance service. Currently all PAFD ambulances are staffed with firefighter Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) and paramedics, working as an EMS provider and firefighter.

The single-role organizational model establishes a new type of ambulance employee that does not have firefighting duties. The “single-role” will have the singular role as an ambulance employee and not a firefighter. This new position classification requires engagement with labor related to salaries and benefits. Staff have engaged labor in discussions on adding classifications for the positions of EMT and Paramedic, so the City will have the administrative ability to proceed with a new single-role staffing approach if approved.

Single-role EMTs and paramedics market salary is typically 30% lower than those of firefighters, and there is potential for additional savings with pension benefits. CalPERS does not have uniformity on whether these job classifications would have safety or non-safety (miscellaneous) pensions. Across jurisdictions in the state, there are examples of different CalPERS classifications for these roles; for example, the City of Berkeley provides a safety pension for their single-role civilian staff, and the City of Chula Vista provides a non-safety pension. Palo Alto’s Human Resources staff has already communicated with CalPERS about the City’s intent to create the new job classifications, but has been informed that a determination cannot be made until final job descriptions are submitted to CalPERS.

Hiring costs and timeframes are expected to be reduced with the single-role staff. Hiring timelines may be shortened, as the selection and training process for single-role staff is significantly shorter than it is for firefighters. Single-role staff will be required to complete approximately three weeks of training as compared to the 20-week academy for firefighters. This will allow the Department to fill vacancies for ambulance staff more rapidly. The associated expenses related to the hiring and training of new single-role staff is lower compared to the costs of firefighters.

The single-role model is expected to create a more flexible staffing structure that will allow for faster and more cost-efficient expansion of EMS services in the future. This staff model could increase the resources provided to the community with a lower financial impact in both the short and long term. There is a possibility of a higher turnover rate with single-role personnel, however, that is something we would have to monitor to quantify.

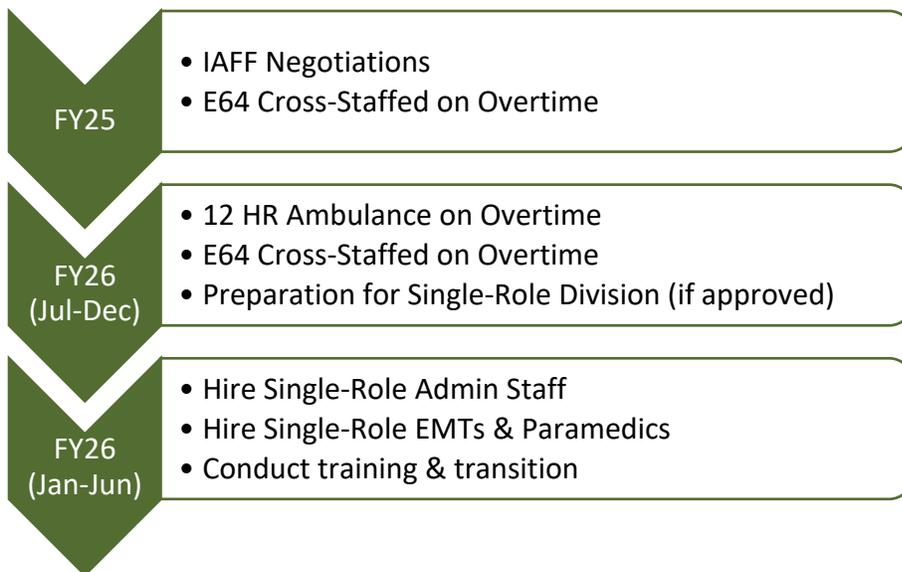
This model will create a hiring pipeline and assist with recruitment and diversity in hiring. The Department can tap into the more diverse candidate pool of civilian EMTs and paramedics, many of whom would be attracted to joining PAFD in the pursuit of a career in the fire service.

It would create a hiring pipeline for civilian EMS workers to gain exposure and experience in the fire service.

Single-role has a number of anticipated operational benefits for the Department, and will create more availability for response units during firefighter training exercises. Single-role ambulance staff will provide medical response coverage for the City as firefighters complete mandatory training. All firefighters must complete 200+ hours of training each year, including emergency medical training. This is currently accomplished while they are on-duty. Often, firefighters in training are called away due to the heavy workload from increasing calls for service. With this option, single-role civilian staffing would not be required to complete the firefighter portion of the training and would be able to provide full coverage for firefighters during training drills significantly reducing interruption and improving training continuity.

Timeline

The transition to an alternative service delivery and/or implementation of new resources takes time, and that time depends on the options outlined. Further details on the timing of each option is outlined in their descriptions. In addition to labor discussions discussed previously, both funding to support investments and internal administrative updates such as policies, procedures, specialized training and change management all factor into the implementation timeline, especially if this includes establishing a new division and operational model.



FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

This report presents information for consideration and potential fiscal impacts. Direction and feedback from the Committee will guide the Department in preparing the Fiscal Year 2026 budget to be presented and approved by the City Council.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Department conducted a neighborhood briefing on February 13, 2025 and maintains a dedicated webpage to the staffing of Fire Station 4 to provide up to date information to the public.

All proposals will have an impact on the Stanford Fire Services Contract cost model and will require discussion and potential renegotiation with the university.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Finance Committee's review and discussion of potential staffing models to expand fire and ambulance services is not a project under CEQA.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: November 19, 2024 Staff Report

Attachment B: Deployment and Cross-Staffing Timeline (2011 – present)

Attachment C: Staffing Options Summary

APPROVED BY:

Geoffrey Blackshire, Fire Chief