



Finance Committee Staff Report

From: City Manager

Report Type: ACTION ITEMS

Lead Department: Human Resources

Meeting Date: June 3, 2025

Report #:2505-4699

TITLE

Finance Committee Discussion for Fire Chief Recruitment and Input of Candidate's Key Characteristics

RECOMMENDATION

This item is for the Finance Committee discussion and feedback, no action necessary.

BACKGROUND

The Fire Chief position will become vacant when the incumbent Geoffrey Blackshire retires by the end of 2025 after serving as the Fire Chief for 6 years. Staff are preparing to launch this executive recruitment. Given the Finance Committee's recent deliberations regarding fire service model options, staff requests Finance Committee feedback on key challenges facing the department and leadership characteristics required to help guide in the identification of potential candidates.

ANALYSIS

A recruitment process led by the City Manager as the hiring manager will be facilitated by the Human Resources Department and an executive recruitment firm. Input and feedback gathered from members of the public, the City Council (via the Finance Committee), and City staff will assist in the development of the recruitment brochure as well as to screen potential candidates. A dedicated website will be available to share updates and gain community feedback on leadership characteristics and opportunities and challenges facing the department.

Teri Black and William Geisberger (a former Fire Chief) will lead the recruitment and use feedback received to conduct outreach and recruit a new Fire Chief. The goal is to open the recruitment process by the beginning of July. Upon the City Manager's selection of a recommended candidate and per the City Charter this selection will be presented to City Council for confirmation.

This position leads the Palo Alto Fire Department (PAFD), overseeing fire suppression,

emergency response, and fire prevention programs to protect lives and property. The role includes developing strategies to ensure the department meets fire rating standards and city needs, while enhancing public awareness of fire risks and prevention. Responsibilities also include managing fire prevention training, enforcing fire codes, providing emergency medical care, and coordinating mutual aid agreements with neighboring governments. The position plays a key role in updating fire and building codes, representing the City in civic and professional matters, and managing the department's operating and capital improvement budgets. PAFD serves 69,700 residents in Palo Alto, as well as Stanford, plus thousands of visitors. With seven fire stations covering 37.5 square miles, PAFD prioritizes resource readiness to address the challenges of a growing population and evolving risks.

For reference, staff have included relevant documents to this role including the job description (Attachment A) and relevant sections in the City's annual operating and capital budget (Attachment B). The Fire role is specified in the City's Municipal Code. Palo Alto Municipal Code section 2.08.180 includes the following responsibilities for the fire department under the direction of the fire chief who shall be accountable to the City Manager:

- To be responsible for the prevention of fires, the protection of life and property against fires, and the removal of fire hazards and preparation of emergency plans;
- To be responsible for the rendering of emergency medical services for which the department is equipped, including emergency medical transportation services;
- To inspect business and other premises for fire hazards, and to enforce the fire prevention code and to conduct educational fire prevention and risk reduction programs;
- To protect the environment from the adverse effects of hazardous materials and to coordinate and administer programs to minimize problems associated with the use and disposal of hazardous materials;
- To serve as an information resource for the public, other city departments, industry and the media concerning the areas described in this section;
- To perform or cause to be performed all duties required by this code or other law of the fire marshal;
- To perform such other duties as may be required.

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

Executive recruitment for this role is within existing contract authority and sufficient funding is available within the Fire Department budget.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The City's Finance Committee will host discussion in which stakeholders may engage and provide feedback for consideration as part of this recruitment process. In addition, a City website will be available to gain community input on key leadership characteristics to inform the development of a candidate profile and finalize a recruitment brochure.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This discussion is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Fire Chief Job Description

Attachment B: FY2026 Proposed Fire Department Budget

APPROVED BY:

Sandra Blanch, Human Resources Director