



CITY OF PINOLE

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August 20, 2010

Regarding the Recent Letter to the Editor on "Browning Out" of Fire Station 74

Dear Pinole Citizens:

As most of you have probably read, there was a recent letter to the editor in the newspaper on Wednesday August 18, written by a Pinole citizen regarding a comparison of Police and Fire expenditures and salaries. Staff rarely responds to editorials as this is a forum for the public to express their viewpoints and everyone is entitled to participate. However, this letter to the editor did not just include a viewpoint; it included misinformation about the cost and comparison of police and fire operations that needs to be addressed with the facts.

The City of Pinole is facing catastrophic financial times and we have been including articles in the Weekly Report on a regular basis about what we have been doing to "balance the budget". Over the last year and a half, due to State "take aways" and a severe decline in revenue sources such as sales taxes and property taxes, the City has been forced to reduce the budget by almost \$4 million.

Reducing staff achieved a large part of the expenditure reduction across all departments. This included laying off 15 employees, an early retirement program, and salaries savings that resulted in attrition of 13 additional positions that in effect eliminated 33 positions. In addition, we have also instituted a hiring freeze for all non-public safety personnel, no cost of living or merit increases for management, elimination of a deferred compensation program, 2 years of 12 day work furloughs for most employees, a reduction in operating hours for the public at City Hall, and plans for renegotiating labor contracts to reduce benefit costs.

These are difficult times, and we no longer have General Fund reserves to keep us afloat. Having no reserves to draw from for cash flow has reached a stage of delicate dance steps each month in order to keep us moving forward. We have already borrowed \$2.6 million from the Redevelopment Agency and we are using the PALC Fund to assist us with cash flow to meet our monthly financial obligations.

We are holding our own for now, but barely. However, we are not out of the woods and we are not the only government agency facing this situation. We have all heard about the financial times of Vallejo, Antioch, Walnut Creek, Oakland, San Jose and most recently Benicia. All cities are going through this. All cities are looking at reductions in salaries and benefits, fire station

closures including the elimination of both firefighters and police officers. The last thing we want to do is impact public safety, and yet here we are. We have little choice since the majority of the General Fund is used towards paying for these vital services.

The Pinole City Council has had to make some very hard decisions that were not easy to say the least. The “browning out” out of Fire Station 74 for the 10 shifts a month was one of the most difficult decisions we have had to make. As the law requires, we negotiated with Fire Local 1230 on the impacts and they agreed.

The truth is that Fire Local 1230 has continuously been working with us over the last several years to assist in developing sustainable delivery of fire services. Knowing these are depressed financial times like nothing our generation has ever seen, Fire Local 1230 also recognizes that additional brown outs may be required. With the agreement of their membership, this language was added to the MOU as negotiated in June.

Given our revenue deficit, there were no other alternatives left in order to balance the budget. Even the browning out of Fire Station 74 does not guarantee that we are out of the ballpark. While currently holding our own, we are not naive enough to think that there may not be more reductions, decreased revenues, State “take aways”, and loss of local property and sales taxes that will necessitate further cutbacks. We are taking every conservative approach that we can to balancing the budget including the continuous monitoring of our expenditures in relationship to the amount of cash we have on hand.

The “browning out” of Fire Station 74 did not include laying off one firefighter. The two positions that the Fire Department lost due to budget reductions were the Assistant Chief that was a part time position and the secretarial position that was voluntarily vacated because of an early retirement incentive package. Both of these positions were lost in the two previous fiscal year’s budgets. Until we can figure out a long-term model for fire services delivery, we are also operating with a temporary Fire Chief as the only administrative staff.

In an independent report commissioned by the Contra Costa County LAFCO Commission, their 2009 Municipal Services Review of all fire departments in the county, found the current delivery of fire services in Pinole to be financially unsustainable. This report can be found in its entirety on the City’s web site at <http://www.ci.pinole.ca.us/fire/index.html>. Recognizing that Pinole cannot independently afford to have two stations operating, we are looking at different models with our partners including Rodeo-Hercules Fire, Contra Costa County Fire, and the Richmond and El Cerrito fire departments. As a direct result of our partnerships, our neighboring fire departments have stepped up to the plate and are assisting in responses. Knowing that we are in fire season, we are ensuring that there is coverage available.

At the current time based on FY 2009-10 statistics, Fire Station 74 had a total of 807 calls for service. Of this amount 507 were for medical and 300 were for fire or other calls. In comparison, Fire Station 73 which is located in Old Town Pinole had 1476 responses in FY 2009-10. A total of 1,014 were medical and 462 were for fire or other calls. As you can see, we have far more medical calls than actual fire calls.

Out of all the calls in FY 2009-10 Fire Station 73 responded to 65% of the calls and Fire Station 74 responded to 35% of the total calls for service (medical, fire, and other). Our ambulance provider, AMR is still responding to all medical calls and has been doing so for years prior to the opening of Fire Station 74 or our department delivering paramedic service. They are in fact at every medial call unless the Pinole Fire Department staff instructs them differently.

Outlined below is a factual response to all of the statements made in the August 18, 2010 West Contra Costa County Times editorial. We are happy to answer any questions or concerns as well as listen to new ideas that will help us solve this problem. Please feel free to call me at 724-8933 or Michelle Fitzer (Project Manager) at 741-3864.

I assure you that we will continue to work towards a long-term solution for the delivery of fire services. That may mean that we will need to work together and do things differently, but fire is a core service of our City and we don't take that for granted. The Pinole Fire Department is one of the most efficient and a productive department in the area and it operates at the lowest possible cost. Even with that, we still do not have enough funding to sustain two fire stations in the short or long term based on our economic tax base.

The City Council and I along with staff have enjoyed a collaborative relationship with our Fire Department and Local 1230 as well as with our surrounding partners in the fire service to try and resolve our issue. They have been with us every step of the way. We plan on continuing to do so as we progress in resolving this most difficult issue.

Sincerely



Belinda B. Espinosa
City Manager
City of Pinole

**Written Facts in Response to West Contra Costa County Times
Letter to the Editor Dated August 18, 2010**

Statement: *Police comprise 80% of the public safety expenditures, and Fire only 20%.*

Response: The total Police Department budget for FY 2010-11 is \$7,687,443, including all funds. The total Fire Department budget for FY 2010-11 is \$3,144,188, including all funds. That breaks down to 30% of the total public safety budget being allocated to Fire operations, and 70% to Police operations. The General Fund allocation alone works out to be approximately 32% to Fire and 68% to Police.

In comparison to other cities:

	<u>% of General Fund Budget Fire Department</u>	<u>% of General Fund Budget Police Department</u>
Pinole	32%	68%
Benicia	45%	55%
El Cerrito	44%	56%
Fairfield	31%	69%
Vacaville	37%	63%
Vallejo	36%	64%

Statement: *The City requested massive cuts to Fire services without any prior public notice or comment before entering into labor negotiations.*

Response: This was a change that had to be negotiated, due to the minimum/constant staffing language found in the Fire IAFF Local 1230 Memorandum of Understanding. That language restricted the City's ability to change staffing levels, and to engage in public dialogue about service changes until such time as an agreement or impasse was reached. The confidentiality of labor negotiations did not allow the City to publicly discuss the issue prior to June 15, 2010.

Statement: *Police Officers are paid \$11 per hour more than their equivalent Firefighter counterparts.*

Response: A Firefighter/Paramedic earns \$28.6451 per hour at the top of the salary range. That equates to \$83,415 in base pay annually. However, Firefighters are paid an additional ½ of their hourly rate for 10 hours every 24 day cycle, just for the base 48/96 work schedule. That adds an additional \$2,148 in base pay, bringing the total to \$85,563.

A Police Officer earns \$40.9922 per hour at the top of the salary range. That equates to \$85,264 in base pay annually.

The reason that the hourly rate is less for Fire staff is because they work alternative schedules, usually on 24 hour shifts, which provide for additional compensation. For this reason it is most appropriate to compare annual salaries.

Statement: *Police work 40 hours per week (2080 annually) while Firefighters average 56 per week (2912 annually, none of which is overtime). However, Police have higher base salaries and work 832 fewer hours per year.*

Response: As noted above, the 2912 annual hours does include compensation for 152 hours of overtime at a federally mandated rate.

Statement: *Police have 33 paid positions, and Fire has only 16.*

Response: The Police Department has a total of 35 sworn positions authorized in the budget, including the Chief, Commander, Lieutenant, 7 Sergeants and 25 Officers. However, 5 sworn positions are currently unfunded (2 Sergeants and 3 Officers), leaving a total of 30 funded positions at this time. Because the Police Department is also a 24/7 operation, but Officers are not able to work 24 hour shifts, we require additional staff to cover all hours. Officers are currently working 12 hour shifts.

The Fire Department has 16 suppression personnel and 1 administrative staff which is the Fire Chief for a total of 17. We are currently holding two positions, a Captain and a Firefighter that are vacant due to attrition. Fire personnel are "on call" for 24 hour shifts.

Statement: *Police costs the City more than three times the amount Fire does annually.*

Response: The total Police Department budget for FY 2010-11 is \$7,687,443, including all funds. The total Fire Department budget for FY 2010-11 is \$3,144,188, including all funds. That breaks down to 30% of the total public safety budget being allocated to Fire operations, and 70% to Police operations. This is not uncommon in all cities. In large cities, because of the number of fire stations, the police and fire budgets may be more in line with each other.

Both Police and Fire encompass Public Safety and without either department, Pinole would be impacted. The budget that is allotted to each department is not an indication as to which department is deemed more important. Rather the allocation is based upon what it takes to get the job done in a manner that protects both the community and the employee. The editorial that appeared in the WCCCT does a disservice to our City in trying to pit one public safety department against the other. Both departments are of equal value and both departments will always receive the full support and respect of the Council and our administrative department managers.