

Work Session of the Sandy Springs City Council was held on January 16, 2024 at 6:00 PM, Mayor Rusty Paul presiding.

I. Staff Discussion Items

Mayor Rusty Paul called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

- A. 2024-010 Review of a Proposed Amendment to Chapter 22, Article II, Division 1, Sect. 22-25 (Collection of Fees) of the Sandy Springs Code of Ordinances

Keith Sanders, Fire Chief, presented a recommendation to approve an amendment to Chapter 22 (Fire Prevention and Protection), Article II (Fire Prevention Code and Fire Prevention and Safety Standards), Division 1 (Generally), Section 22-25 (Collection of Fees) of the Sandy Springs Code of Ordinances to include a fee schedule for special fire services.

When necessary, the Sandy Springs Fire Department provides special fire services such as fire watch, fire standby, the cleanup of hazardous materials, lift assist, and the equipment, supplies, and/or personnel affiliated with special fire services to Sandy Springs' residents, businesses, and visitors.

The Sandy Springs Fire Department responds to residences, hospitals, group homes, continuing care facilities, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes 300 or more times a year to provide non-emergency "Lift Assist" services.

A "Lift Assist" is a request for a response by the fire department personnel to assist in physically moving a person who has fallen and who does not require emergency care or medical transportation.

A "Lift Assist" response requires a fire apparatus to go out of service and the apparatus as well as the fire department personnel, are unavailable to respond to emergency situations i.e., Structure Fires, Heart Attacks, Trauma injuries.

Care facilities policies prohibit staff to "Lift Assist" a resident who has fallen.

The Fire Department proposes a fee schedule for special fire services performed by the Sandy Springs Fire Department. The Special Fire Services Fee Schedule is based upon the actual cost of providing the services, including but not limited to personnel cost, equipment cost, apparatus cost, and administrative costs. The fee schedule will not apply to individuals who may request emergency services. The fee schedule would pertain to businesses including, but not limited to, hospitals, group homes, continuing care facilities, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes.

Proposed Special Service Fee Rates include:

- Fire Watch will be charged at a \$75.00 per hour per fire personnel rate. A 4-hour minimum will be assessed for all fire watches required after normal business hours or during a weekend or City of Sandy Springs recognized holiday.
- Fire Apparatus Standby per fire apparatus will be charged at a \$440.00 per hour rate. A 4-hour minimum will be assessed for all standby requests i.e., apparatus standby on a vehicle accident on I-285 or GA400.
- "Lift Assist" call for service to a facility¹ will be billed at a rate of \$225.00 per half hour per fire personnel rate for the first and second calls within a 30-day period. The third and fourth calls to the same facility within a 30-day period will be billed at a rate of \$300.00 per half hour per fire

personnel. Five or more calls to the same facility within a 30-day period will be billed at a rate of \$450.00 per half hour per fire personnel.

Year	2021	2022	2023
Lift Assist Incident Count	134	98	70
*Cost Per Call	\$1,022.58	\$1,225.89	\$1,446.08
Cost Per Call to Facilities** for Lift Assist by Year	\$137,025.72	\$120,137.24	\$101,225.71

*Cost Per Call Formula Methodology = Total Fire Budget / # incidents

**Facility = hospitals, group homes, continuing care facilities, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes

If approved, the minimum expense recovery for Lift Assist calls:

Year	2021	2022	2023
Lift Assist Incident Count	134	98	70
Lift Assist Fee Per Call	\$225.00	\$225.00	\$225.00
	\$30,150.00	\$22,050.00	\$15,750.00

Any calls for Hazardous Materials Clean Up or Equipment & Supplies will be billed at cost, which are based upon current FEMA equipment rates which can be found on FEMA's website (<https://www.fema.gov/assistance/public/tools-resources/schedule-equipment-rates>).

Other special fire services may be assessed on a case-by-case basis as determined by the Fire Chief, Fire Marshal, or their designee, in accordance with the City of Sandy Springs Official Code.

The Sandy Springs Fire Department met with facility managers/directors of the five assisted living facilities that generate the largest number of "Invalid Assist" 911 responses to discuss the ordinance being proposed. All the facilities acknowledged the challenges facing the 911 system and understand the need to alter responses to better serve the community. None of the facilities communicated an issue with the fee schedule and agreed to further educate their staff on the importance of not utilizing 911 for non-emergency calls.

Councilmember Tibby DeJulio said some apartment complexes are so big they need about three or four people to do Fire Watch. Does the City of Sandy Springs have any ordinances that require apartments to have a certain number of people are needed to perform a Fire Watch?

Dan Lee, City Attorney, said generally a Fire Watch is part of a sentence in lieu of a fine. If a citation has been written for failing or improperly installed sprinkler system, as part of a plea arrangement, they are required to have a fire watch. The fire inspectors determine how many people are necessary for a Fire Watch.

Councilmember Jody Reichel asked is the assisted living facility or the individual billed for the "Lift Assist"? Would it be per person or per facility? Mount Vernon Towers for example is not assisted living. How are they billed?

Fire Chief Sanders said we will not bill Mount Vernon Towers, or independent individuals in the

facility calling for assistance. The proposed fee would be for those facilities that have a police that will they will not assist their residents in non-emergency events.

Councilmember John Paulson asked how many facilities in the City of Sandy Springs does the fire department responds to?

Fire Chief Sanders said the City has less than ten and there are two facilities we have the biggest issue.

Councilmember Paulson said it is strange that though most are assisted living facilities, they do not assist with lifting a fallen resident. Do they understand what is coming?

Fire Chief Sanders said we visited each facility and spoke to management. They were not aware their team was not assisting. The facilities understood we are taking units out of service that are unable to respond to emergency calls, to provide this non-emergency assistance, and we need to be compensated.

City Attorney Lee said this ordinance applies to entities, not individuals, who do not provide lift assist because they do not have the right licensed people to lift the patient. Their insurance will not allow them to do it and they must call our licensed people to come. All the fees in every category requested here are paid to the private sector to do what the Sandy Springs Fire Department is being asked to do for free.

Councilmember Andy Bauman said it appears the goal is to change the behavior. This is almost in nature of a fine, but we are not calling it a fine. I understand we have to do this. They are trying to shift the liability. Do we have different protections of liability as first responders than private service givers?

City Attorney Lee said to some degree. The Sandy Springs Fire Department is well staffed EMTS licensed for this kind of activity. It appears some assisted living facilities have night watch personnel but not the proper licensed folks that could carry out the process.

Councilmember Bauman asked does this result in a violation the City has enforcement authority over, or something that we can report to a state licensing body?

City Attorney Lee said all the facilities are licensed but they are outside the City.

Councilmember Bauman asked does the City have a right to report it after discovery?

City Attorney Lee said we can report anything.

Mayor Rusty Paul said the State has certain staffing requirements for nursing homes and assisted living Facilities, which focuses more on the number of people you must have and not necessarily the quality of their training.

Councilmember Bauman said at some point the public should be aware of habitual violators.

Fire Chief Sanders said Cobb County implemented a similar ordinance and their call volume has not changed. The response they got from the facilities was they do not have a problem paying it, but they do not want the liability.

Councilmember Melody Kelley asked how was it determined what the fees would be?

Fire Chief Sanders said we took the overall Fire Department budget and divided it by the number of

total calls that we respond to annually, which was in excess of 10,000 calls. For other fees, we utilized FEMA price guidelines and fee structure.

Councilmember Kelley said for example, in 2023 the cost per call was \$1,446.08. Are the numbers on the fee schedule based on that?

Fire Chief Sanders said \$225.00 is per firefighter. A minimum of three firefighters will always be on the apparatus when it responds.

Councilmember Kelley asked how many hours, for example in 2023, were fire personnel performing Fire Watch duties?

Fire Chief Sanders said as of today, there is no record of our firefighters doing the Fire Watch. There are accountability issues in the apartment complexes falsifying logs and not being on fire watch. We noticed the issue during unprecedented cold weather this past year when water lines ruptured. That is the reason why we have come before Council. We are about to go through a lot of cold weather, and we will have more of the same issue. We have many apartment buildings and are putting our people out there and we need to make sure they are being watched.

Councilmember Kelley asked are the number of hours for the apparatus standby available?

Fire Chief Sanders said this information can be provided.

Mayor Paul stated no action will be taken tonight but this item will be voted on in February.

B. 2024-011 Medical Response Unit Purchase for the Sandy Springs Fire Department

Keith Sanders, Fire Chief, presented a recommendation to authorize the purchase of a Medical Response Unit ("MRU") and authorize the City Manager to execute documents to effectuate the same.

AMR is facing significant challenges, including:

- Decreasing Reimbursement Levels: Insurance companies have reduced the amount being paid to EMS providers. This is significantly less than current Medicaid/Medicare reimbursement rates.
- Labor Issues: Post-pandemic cost increases (labor, vehicles, fuel, equipment, medical supplies) and the inability to provide competitive wages to recruit & retain staff
- Hospital Bed Delay Issues: Ambulance forced to wait until hospital can find a bed for patient, less ambulances available to serve during this time; and temporary additional ambulances increase cost

After meeting with AMR, the City agreed that the current static deployment plan far exceeded the compliance thresholds and peak time coverage of the current contract agreement. In April 2023, the City agreed to implement a trial dynamic, demand-based deployment model. The current contract Section 4.4 (c), states, "In the event the Deployment Plan provides a higher level of coverage that is required by the response time standards, the parties agree to meet to discuss potential decreases in the resources deployed." Since April 2023, AMR has continued to meet the monthly compliance of eight (8) minute response, ninety percent (90%) of the time for emergency calls.

A historical review of fire and EMS response to EMS calls within the City of Sandy Springs for service

has revealed that ninety-three percent (93%) of ambulance transports to the hospital are “non-emergency”.

In 2016, the Fire Department added Advanced Life Support equipment to all fire apparatus and staffed all apparatus with a minimum of one (1) certified paramedic. This model ensured that fire personnel arrive on an EMS incident with qualified personnel to properly assess the patient and have immediate access to all medical intervention that is found on an AMR transport unit. Patient stabilization has been immediate and in most cases emergency transportation was not necessary. Once the ambulance arrived on the scene the patient was packaged and then transported non-emergency to the closest hospital.

In review of current and historical data the transport unit arrival within eight (8) minutes is not necessary. Since patient stabilization is established by fire personnel a transport unit arrival within ten (10) to twelve (12) minutes would be more adequate.

Over the last two (2) years, Fire Department leadership and the City Manager have had ongoing discussions with other North Fulton City leadership as well as with AMR management. As a result of these discussions City leadership recommends the following:

Purchase a transport capable medical response unit (“MRU”). The MRU will be staffed with one (1) Firefighter II/Paramedic and one (1) Fire Apparatus Engineer/Advanced EMT, per shift. This vehicle will be equipped with firefighting equipment and Advanced Life Support Equipment. The vehicle will have the capacity to transport a critically ill patient to the nearest hospital should there be a delay in an AMR unit’s arrival time.

The recommendation is to enter a contract with Frazer LTD, through The Buy Board Cooperative Contract (#601-19) for a total of \$390,046.00 to purchase a custom-built International CV515 diesel chassis with custom-built 14’ transport module constructed onto the chassis with additional accessories and equipment.

Due to the extended delivery time of ten (10) to twelve (12) months, it is recommended to obtain approval and fund the \$390,046.00 MRU purchase using Public Safety Impact Fees.

Councilmember Tibby DeJulio asked why are both an ambulance and a truck at the scene?

Fire Chief Sanders said often our truck is on the scene before the ambulance and we never know when we will go anywhere from a level four to six ambulances, down to level two to level one to level zero where we have no ambulances in the City. Today for example, we went to level zero and stayed at level two for about four to six hours because we had so many calls. All our units were not Advanced Life Support (ALS), but now all our engines and ladder trucks have ALS capabilities, and every unit can respond. Often, we have five to six EMS calls at the same time daily. The challenge is that ambulance may be at the hospital, but it is out of service waiting for someone to take the patient. We are structured to have Alpha/Bravo/Charlie/Delta/Echo calls which are the more life-threatening calls. We do not send a fire truck on Alpha calls, but the ambulance goes. This is a non-emergency call. We are trying to fine-tune this emergency medical dispatching, so the fire truck only responds on the Charlie/ Delta/Echo calls which are more life-threatening calls. We want to reduce the mileage and wear-and-tear on those apparatus. Often when the ambulance arrives on scene, they need assistance either lifting or getting the patient down the stairs. It takes four people if a stair chair is to be used, and six to eight people to work a cardiac arrest. We may be on scene from 20 to 30 minutes because we have everything the hospital has. We are trained to get that heart beating again and stabilize the patient in cardiac arrest calls. That is our protocol on the scene while in constant contact with the doctor and ER as well.

Councilmember DeJulio thanked Fire Chief Sanders for doing an excellent job.

Councilmember Andy Bauman thanked **Fire Chief Sanders** for a remarkable display of knowledge and command of the information. This should be shared with everyone in the City of Sandy Springs. At the Retreat maybe we can discuss how we are mining AI data?

Councilmember Jody Reichel asked what are we doing between now and June 30th, 2024 when the contract expires, and we get this new truck?

Fire Chief Sanders said we will continue to respond. We just will not have the capability to transport should there be need. We know we are going to extend the time. Today, we have no data showing that an ambulance getting on the scene within eight minutes made any difference in the patient's outcome. We can show that since the inception of this City. When we arrive on scene, if we do not have bystanders doing CPR, they are not going to revive. This is why we spend so much time training our citizens and businesses in CPR. It starts in that home or business and when we get on the scene, chances of reviving that patient tremendously improves.

Councilmember Jody Reichel said an ambulance came to my home twice in the last year. Everyone was comforted by you and your staff. Great job.

Fire Chief Sanders said about nine and half years ago, a fire truck engine was about \$700,000.00. Today they are about \$1,200,000.00. A ladder truck and aerial were about \$1,000,000.00 and today they are \$2,200,000. We were replacing apparatus between four and six years through our new fleet program, and through designing smaller apparatus efficiently powered. We have now extended our engines to ten-year replacement, and our aerials twelve to fifteen years. Our goal is to maintain that ten to twelve to fifteen because that is sustainable. We must change our behavior and stop sending large apparatus on things that we do not need. That ambulance may respond emergency to the Bravo/Delta/Charlie/Echo calls, but only 6% of those respond from the scene back to the hospital with emergency lights and sirens. Out of a hundred calls they responded emergency to the scene, only six of those calls did they respond back to the hospital with lights and siren. We have got to change our behavior and we are going to do that in the City of Sandy Springs.

Councilmember John Paulson said we have a top notch first responder group. Thank you to the City of Sandy Springs Fire and Police Departments for your efforts. You tailor the responses that we need to the particulars of the event. We send no more than needed in personnel and equipment. Are you communicating with 911 folks so they can better quantify what you are facing when you start dispatching people there?

Fire Chief Sanders said yes. They must be Emergency Medical Dispatcher (EMD) certified. ChatComm911 is an accredited center certified through the Emergency Medical Dispatch Association and must meet certain benchmarks to maintain that accreditation.

Councilmember Paulson asked is this consistent with what we are trying to do?

Fire Chief Sanders said that is correct.

Councilmember Paulson said we plan to spend almost \$400,000 for the equipment. How will the return on investment be realized.

Fire Chief Sanders said Fire Station Two is the City's busiest fire station and responds to approximately four thousand to five thousand calls a year. This unit will take the place of an engine and ladder currently responding to EMS calls. That is a huge return and is where the advantage is seen.

Councilmember Melissa Mular said it was mentioned this will come to Council as part of a budget. Will staff need to be increased?

Fire Chief Sanders said two options will be presented to Council. One is to staff the unit with the required six personnel. The other is to maintain the current ISO rating and response times by having two of three aerial ladder trucks in the City, decommission the other, and restructure organization response and put those personnel on this unit. This is according to current data, and we are also waiting on our ISO review to come back. That is the recommendation that will probably be made in next year's budget. I feel confident in what I am sharing with Council, but I want the data to match.

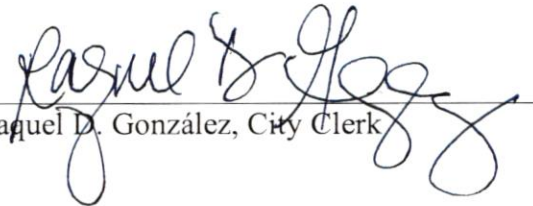
Councilmember Mular thanked Fire Chief Sanders for having many statistics. You are working it for the benefit of the residents in the City of Sandy Springs.

II. City Council Discussion Items

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:41 p.m.

Approved: February 6, 2024



Russell K. Paul, Mayor

Raquel D. González, City Clerk