

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET ANALYST REPORT

IBA Report Number: 16-15

Date Issued: June 22, 2016 City Council Docket Date: June 28, 2016 Item Number: 337

Firehouse Bond Ballot Proposal

OVERVIEW

On April 11, 2016, Council President Pro Tem Emerald presented to the City Council's Rules Committee a proposal for a \$205 million general obligation bond to build 18 additional fire stations (Firehouse Bond), which would be placed before the voters in November 2016.¹ The purpose of the proposal is to raise new dedicated revenue to fully fund the construction of new fire stations recommended by the 2011 Citygate Standards of Coverage Deployment Study (Citygate Report). If approved by voters, the proposal would authorize the City to issue general obligation bonds supported by a property tax increase. Proceeds from the bonds would generate one-time revenue to finance capital costs related to fire station design, land acquisition, and construction, with annual debt service payments to be made over a 30-year term.

At the Rules Committee meeting, a motion was adopted on a 3-2 vote to forward the Firehouse Bond proposal to the full City Council for consideration. The Committee further requested that our office prepare an analysis of the proposal.

This report provides information on the City's need for additional fire stations, the gap between identified capital needs and existing funding, details of the Firehouse Bond proposal, potential ongoing costs to the General Fund for fire station operations, and other significant issues to consider regarding implementation of the proposal.

FISCAL/POLICY DISCUSSION

Background on the Citygate Report and CWG Implementation Plan

In 2010, the City of San Diego retained Citygate Associates, LLC, to assess its fire services. The resulting report, commonly referred to as the Citygate Report, was presented to the former Public

¹ These 18 stations include 17 out of 19 fire stations recommended by the Citygate Report that currently lack identified funding for capital, as two stations are anticipated to be fully funded by developer fees, plus one additional fire station in East Village.

Safety & Neighborhood Services (PS&NS) Committee in February 2011. The report identified several challenges with the Fire-Rescue Department's ability to provide emergency service within nationally recognized best practice response times. In order to improve response times and eliminate service gap areas, the Citygate Report identified 19 sites for additional fire stations and ranked them in priority order. The PS&NS Committee formed the Citygate Working Group (CWG) in February 2011 to review the Citygate Report and develop an implementation plan for the recommendations. The CWG Working Group included Councilmembers Marti Emerald and David Alvarez, Fire-Rescue Chief Javier Mainar, and representatives from the Office of the IBA, Office of the City Attorney, and San Diego Firefighters International Association of Firefighters Local 145. The CWG Plan affirmed the need for 19 new fire stations, in priority order, and was adopted as policy by the City Council in November 2011.

A list of the 19 Citygate-recommended fire stations is provided in the table below. The table also notes whether each fire station site was determined by Citygate to be eligible for a Fast Response Squad (FRS). The FRS concept was recommended by the CWG as a pilot program to provide interim supplemental service to service gap areas until full fire stations could be constructed. The FRS is composed of a unit staffed by a two-person crew of one fire captain and one firefighter/paramedic, as opposed to a fire station, which is equipped with a minimum of one fire engine staffed by a four-person crew. The City currently operates two FRS units, 12-hours a day, in Encanto and South University City.

2011 Citygate Working Group Recommended Fire Stations				
Priority	FRS- Eligible	Fire Station Site		
1	No	Home Avenue		
2	No	Paradise Hills (Double)		
3	No	College		
4	No	Skyline		
5	Yes	Encanto		
6	No	Stresemann/Governor (South University City)		
7	No	Mission Bay/Pacific Beach		
8	No	UCSD (Double)		
9	Yes	Liberty Station		
10	Yes	North University City		
11	No	Torrey		
12	No	Serra Mesa		
13	No	Mira Mesa		
14	Yes	East Otay		
15	Yes	Scripps Miramar		
16	Yes	San Pasqual		
17	Yes	Linda Vista		
18	Yes	Black Mountain Ranch		
19	Yes	Mission Valley (West) (Double)		

Since the adoption of the CWG Plan in 2011, the City has made fire station infrastructure a high priority and has used the Plan as its guiding framework in making budget and policy decisions related to new fire stations. For example, the Fire-Rescue Department presents annual status updates to the Public Safety & Livable Neighborhoods (PS&LN) Committee with details of progress made on CWG Plan implementation. Additionally, recent Five-Year Financial Outlooks and Budget documents, as well as our Office's reports on those items, have used the CWG Plan as a reference point in evaluating the City's progress in meeting infrastructure needs of the Fire-Rescue Department.

Identified Capital Needs vs. Available Funding

Despite significant investments made in recent years by the Mayor and Council in the Fire-Rescue Department, identified capital needs continue to outweigh available funding, as is the case with all other City asset types. Nearly five years after adopting the CWG Plan, the City has not completed construction of any Citygate-Recommended fire stations.² Of the 19 Citygate-recommended sites for fire stations, one has received a temporary station: Skyline Temporary Fire Station (FS 51) in FY 2016. Additionally, two other recommended sites have received FRS units: Encanto (FRS 55) in FY 2015 and South University City (FRS 56) in FY 2016.

A key report highlighting the Fire-Rescue Department's capital needs is the FY 2017-2021 Five-Year Capital Infrastructure Planning Outlook (CIP Outlook), which used facilities condition assessments to identify needs at existing fire stations as well as current CIP projects with incomplete funding. The CIP Outlook identified a \$76.3 million funding gap for fire stations through FY 2021. At the time the CIP Outlook was presented to the City Council in December 2015, our office noted that this funding gap represented needs for five out of 19 Citygaterecommended fire stations. Needs identified for the remaining 14 stations would increase the funding gap substantially by up to \$168 million, for a total of \$244.3 million.

While the CIP Outlook *does not* identify full capital funding for new Citygate-recommended fire stations, the FY 2017-2021 Five-Year Financial Outlook (Outlook), a separate report which identifies future operating costs, *does* include funds to operate four Citygate stations. It is important to note that although the Outlook includes funding for the operation of these stations in FY 2021, capital funding has not yet been identified to fully fund the design, land acquisition, and construction costs associated with these facilities. Details on the remaining capital needs for fire stations included in the Outlook are described in the table on the following page.

 $^{^{2}}$ Eastside Mission Valley Fire Station (FS 45) expanded service and became operational in FY 2016, and Bayside Fire Station (FS 2) is currently under construction and is anticipated to become operational in FY 2018. Both these facilities, however, were excluded from the CWG Plan's recommendations as they were already in development at the time of the report.

Capital Needs for Citygate-Recommended Fire Stations Included in FY 2017-2021 Five-Year Financial Outlook					
	Remaining				
	Capital Needs				
Fire Station Name	(\$ in millions)	Status			
FY 2021					
Home Avenue Fire Station	\$10.0	\$2.0 million, primarily DC3 bond funds, identified for land and design.			
		Total project cost \$12.0 million.			
Paradise Hills Fire Station (FS 54)	\$11.1	No material funding identified in CIP. Total project cost \$11.1 million.			
College Avenue Fire Station	Avenue Fire Station \$11.7 \$270,000 in DIF funds identified for planning report and feasibility				
		study; no additional funding. Total project cost \$12.0 million.			
North University City Fire Station (FS 50)	\$0.0	Project costs expected to be fully funded by FBA, including apparatus.			
Total Remaining Capital Needs	\$32.8				

Past IBA Reports on Fire Station Infrastructure Needs

In past reports, our office has acknowledged the unique infrastructure needs of the Fire-Rescue Department. In September 2014, we issued IBA Report 14-39, *San Diego Infrastructure: Needs for Existing and New Fire Stations*, in which we noted that in addition to the typical capital needs for maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation of existing facilities experienced by most City departments, Fire-Rescue also has significant unmet needs for new facilities that have been identified as priority projects. We also noted that General Fund departments like Fire-Rescue do not have a dedicated funding source for capital projects for existing or new facilities.

In June 2015, our office issued IBA Report 15-25, *Ballot Scenarios for Infrastructure Funding*, at the request of the City Council's Infrastructure Committee. In that report, we provided an overview of the City's known infrastructure needs and a review of asset classes that could be supported by additional revenue. Among the City assets we identified as potential candidates for new infrastructure revenue were fire stations – both existing facilities and new fire stations identified as a City priority by the Citygate Working Group. Our report identified several revenue options for Council consideration, including a potential \$500 million general obligation bond to support streets, fire stations, storm water, and affordable housing. In that bond scenario, we proposed an option to dedicate \$100 million in bond proceeds to fire stations. Specifically, our scenario proposed funding the repair of 10 fire stations currently in poor condition plus fully funding seven new Citygate-recommended fire stations.

Firehouse Bond Proposal Details

As stated in the introduction of this report, Council President Pro Tem Emerald has proposed a Firehouse Bond to fully fund the construction of 18 new fire stations (17 out of 19 fire stations recommended by the Citygate Report that currently lack identified funding for capital, plus one additional fire station in East Village). The proposal was forwarded to the City Council by the Rules Committee in April 2016. The proposal calls for the issuance of up to \$205 million in general obligation bonds, supported by a property tax increase, which would be placed before the voters in November 2016. If approved by two-thirds of voters, proceeds from the bonds would generate approximately \$204 million in one-time revenue to finance capital costs related to fire station design, land acquisition, and construction, with annual debt service payments to be made over a

30-year term. Details of the proposal, as currently understood by our office, are provided in the following sections of this report.

Background on General Obligation Bonds

California state law allows cities and counties to issue general obligation bonds upon approval of two-thirds of voters in order to finance large capital projects and acquire real property. Unlike other revenue sources that recur annually, a general obligation bond is a one-time funding source designated for specific projects. General obligation bonds are typically issued for a 30-year term with equal debt service payments over the term. The bonds are secured by an annual levy of property tax in an amount sufficient to pay off the bonds' debt service costs.

In order to minimize financing costs, the City can elect to issue general obligation bonds in multiple bond series as needed to ensure that funds are available only when projects are ready to be undertaken. The Firehouse Bond proposal includes a provision to exercise this option and anticipates issuing bonds in two equal tranches.

Bond proceeds can only be used for capital costs, and cannot be used to fund the operations or maintenance of new facilities or infrastructure. For example, land acquisition and construction of fire stations may be financed with bond proceeds but the associated operating costs may not. Should the Council choose to move forward with the Firehouse Bond, costs and ongoing funding sources for the annual operation and maintenance of all new bond-financed fire stations should be identified. Estimated ongoing General Fund costs associated with the Firehouse Bond proposal are discussed later in this report.

Estimated Debt Service and Annual Property Tax Impact

Based on current market conditions, the Debt Management Department has estimated that the City's annual debt service on a \$205 million Firehouse Bond would be approximately \$10.9 million. If approved, real property owners would pay roughly \$5 per \$100,000 of assessed value for 30 years in the form of increased property tax to support debt service on the bonds. For example, the associated additional property tax for a home with an assessed value of \$500,000 would be approximately \$25 per year. Details of the estimated tax impact of the Firehouse Bond proposal are provided in the table below.

General Obligation Bond Estimated Debt Service and Ad Valorem Tax			
Bond Size:	\$205,220,000		
Bond Proceeds:	\$204,000,000		
Citywide Tax Base:	\$218,000,000,000		
Annual Debt Service:	\$10,940,000		
Tax Rate:	0.00502%		
Annual Tax:	\$5 per \$100,000 Assessed Value		

Proposed New Bond-Funded Fire Stations

The Firehouse Bond proposal identifies a total of 18 new fire stations for which capital costs would be funded by bond proceeds. These 18 stations include 17 out of 19 fire stations recommended by the Citygate Report that currently lack identified funding for capital, as two stations are anticipated to be fully funded by developer fees, plus one additional fire station in East Village. A list of the proposed Firehouse Bond-funded stations is provided in the table below. The stations are listed in the order recommended by the Citygate Report where applicable. Two fire station sites, Judicial and Nobel, and Carmel Valley and Winecreek Road, are highlighted and listed in strikethrough as they are anticipated to be fully funded by developer fees. An additional fire station site, Broadway between 13th and 14th, is also highlighted as it was not included in the original Citygate list of recommended fire stations but was added to the Firehouse Bond project list as the proposal was developed.

2016 Firehouse Bond Proposed Fire Stations				
Citygate Priority	Council District	Fire Station Site	Community Planning Group	
1	4/9	Home Ave. and I-805/Fairmount	Mid-City/City Heights	
2	4	Potomac and Saipan	Skyline-Paradise Hills	
3	9	55 th and Hardy	College Area	
4	4	Sychar and Skyline	Skyline-Paradise Hills	
5	4	65 th and Broadway	Encanto-Southeastern	
6	1	Governor and Stresemann	University	
7	2	Mission Bay Dr. and Bunker Hill	Pacific Beach	
8	1	N. Torrey Pines and Torrey Pines Scenic	University	
9	2	Nimitz and Rosecrans	Peninsula	
10	1	Judicial and Nobel	University	
11	1	Carmel Mtn. and Canter Heights Dr.	Torrey Hills	
12	7	Mission Center and Murray Ridge Rd.	Serra Mesa	
13	6	Camino Sante Fe north of Miramar Rd.	Mira Mesa	
14	8	Britania Blvd. and Airway	Otay Mesa	
15	5	Magnifica and Pomerado	Scripps Miramar Ranch	
16	5	San Pasqual Valley and Zoo Rd.	San Pasqual	
17	7	Genessee and Park Mesa Way	Linda Vista	
18	5	Carmel Valley and Winecreek Rd.	Black Mountain Ranch	
19	7	Morena and Friars Rd.	Mission Valley	
-	3	Broadway between 13 th and 14 th	Downtown	

Fire Station Construction Costs

At this time, most of the 18 proposed Firehouse Bond fire stations do not have cost estimates as they are not active CIP projects. Three of the proposed fire stations (Home Avenue, Paradise Hills, and College Avenue) are current CIP projects with cost estimates ranging from \$11.1 million to \$12.0 million as discussed earlier in this report. For informational purposes, we have provided estimated costs for new fire stations in the table below. The approximate cost estimate of \$10 million per fire station is based on information provided by the Fire-Rescue Department and is consistent with estimates reflected in Council President Pro Tem Emerald's Firehouse Bond proposal.

New Fire Station Costs			
Station Components	Estimate		
Planning, Design, and Land Acquisition	\$2,000,000		
Construction	\$8,000,000		
Total	\$10,000,000		

It is important to note that fire station construction costs may vary significantly depending on the specifics of each recommended fire station site. For example, the \$2.0 million estimate for planning, design, and land acquisition may underestimate the cost of land purchase in high-cost areas. Conversely, costs may be significantly lower at sites where the City already owns suitable parcels of land for future fire stations.

The Firehouse Bond proposal includes measures to attempt to reduce fire station construction costs and completion times using standardized designs and the Multiple Award Construction Contract (MACC) approach to contracting. The MACC approach shortens bidding and contract award processes by using a list of pre-qualified project delivery teams without conducting individual open solicitations for each project. At numerous presentations made to Community Planning Groups, staff from Public Works/Engineering & Capital Projects indicated that new fire stations would be likely candidates for the MACC project delivery method.

Ongoing General Fund Costs

As stated earlier, general obligation bond proceeds may only be used for capital costs, excluding the operations and maintenance of new facilities. Any new fire stations completed as the result of a successful Firehouse Bond ballot proposal would incur significant ongoing operations costs that would be borne in future years by the General Fund. Ongoing costs would include firefighter personnel expenditures, equipment purchases, and general facilities maintenance. The Fire-Rescue Department has indicated that the current operating cost for a standard single-house fire station (for personnel and supplies but not apparatus) is approximately \$1.3 million per year.

Additional costs, not eligible for bond-financing, include the acquisition of fire apparatus. Each San Diego fire station requires a minimum of one fire engine. A number of fire stations require a fire engine plus an additional ladder truck. Fire engines and ladder trucks cost approximately \$850,000 and \$1.3 million, respectively, and have an expected useful life of 12-18 years. Recently the City has not cash-funded the purchase of fire apparatus, opting instead to finance fire engines and trucks through the Equipment and Vehicle Financing Program (EVFP). For illustrative

purposes based on current rates, Debt Management has indicated that financing a fire apparatus worth \$1 million would result in annual lease payments of approximately \$155,000 for a sevenyear finance term. It is the City's general practice to fund the purchase of fire apparatus through the EVFP using funds budgeted in the Fleet Services Division. These funds are generated by assignment fees made annually by benefitting departments to Fleet Services based on projected vehicle needs.

Details of ongoing General Fund costs associated with a successful Firehouse Bond ballot proposal are provided in the table below. Our estimate of these costs is based on the following assumptions:

- Operations funding is estimated for 18 new stations proposed to be funded by the Firehouse Bond. This does not include two Citygate-recommended stations that are anticipated to be fully funded by developer fees (North University City and Black Mountain Ranch), as they will likely be completed and incur operations costs regardless of the outcome of the proposal.
- While operations costs are assumed for 18 new fire stations, *it is important to note that for three of these stations (Home Avenue, Paradise Hills, and College Avenue), operations funding is already included in the City's FY 2017-2021 Five-Year Outlook.* As stated previously, capital funding has not yet been identified to fully fund the design, land acquisition, and construction costs associated with these facilities.
- One fire apparatus for each new station is assumed to be lease-purchased. Several stations may also require the acquisition of a second apparatus depending on operational needs. The incremental cost over time is not likely to be material and is not included.
- Certain fire stations may be double-houses, which house additional firefighters and incur additional costs, depending on operational needs. For informational purposes, this estimate assumes only single-house fire stations.
- During the initial construction period, the City will likely need to hold an additional fire academy (for a total of three) each year to increase firefighter staffing, as discussed later in this report.
- Costs in the early years of proposal implementation include start-up costs; after construction is complete ongoing costs will likely decrease and stabilize, although future maintenance and repair costs are unknown.
- Costs during construction will vary depending on the speed at which new fire stations are completed. Our estimate includes a total for all 18 stations for illustrative purposes to note a maximum potential cost; in practice new fire stations would likely be constructed in a phased approach.

Estimated Annual General Fund Costs for New Fire Stations				
	During Construction	Post-Construction		
Personnel & Supplies	\$1,300,000	\$1,300,000		
Apparatus Financing	\$155,000	-		
Total per Station:	\$1,455,000	\$1,300,000		
Additional Fire Academy	\$970,000	-		
Total for 18 Stations:	\$27,160,000	\$23,400,000		

While we have prepared a thorough analysis of the potential impact of a successful Firehouse Bond on future City budgets, it is important to note that this analysis is based on information available to-date. Should the proposal move forward, the specifics of the ballot language (e.g., the exact number and location of stations to be constructed, the number of firefighter crews at each station, etc.) would affect our analysis. This information would be provided to the public in a Fiscal Impact Analysis prepared by our office for voter materials.

Other Issues to Consider

Capacity Concerns

The Firehouse Bond proposes that, if approved, new bond-funded fire stations would be constructed over a 10-year period beginning in early 2018. Staff from Public Works/Engineering & Capital Projects has participated in numerous presentations on the Firehouse Bond proposal to Community Planning Groups, specifically regarding the MACC contracting approach, and have not raised concerns about contracting capacity.

With regard to firefighter staffing at new fire stations, a successful Firehouse Bond proposal would necessitate significant hiring increases for the Fire-Rescue Department, as described earlier in this report. Each new fire station would require a minimum of 12.00 FTE additional firefighters or the equivalent amount of overtime to staff operations. Based on a review of recent Fire-Rescue staffing levels and service expansions, our office estimates that an additional fire academy (for a total of three per year) will be required for up to 10 years as new stations are constructed. Related fire academy costs are discussed earlier in this report.

Updated Citygate Report Expected October 2016

On April 8, 2016, Fire Chief Brian Fennessy issued a memorandum to the Chief Operating Officer stating that the Fire-Rescue Department had retained Citygate Associates to prepare an update to the 2011 Citygate Report. This action was further discussed at the May 18, 2016, meeting of the Public Safety & Livable Neighborhoods Committee. At that meeting, Chief Fennessy indicated that the new Citygate study would be complete no earlier than October 2016. The Chief also noted the possibility that the updated study may recommend a different number of stations in potentially different locations than recommended in the original 2011 report. He acknowledged, however, that the highest-priority station recommendations were unlikely to change. Should the City Council decide to place the Firehouse Bond proposal on the November 2016 ballot, the release of the updated Citygate Report in October 2016 could raise questions about the appropriate number and priority order of new fire stations.

Role of Existing CIPs and PFFPs

At the April 2016 Rules Committee meeting, Councilmember Kersey raised a question regarding the potential impact of a successful Firehouse Bond on existing CIP projects and Public Facilities Financing Plans (PFFPs) that include fire stations. A discussion of existing CIP projects for Citygate-recommended fire stations is provided earlier in this report. Should the Firehouse Bond be approved by voters, bond proceeds would supplement existing incomplete CIP funding for those stations. With regard to PFFPs, in the event a community's PFFP includes a planned fire station project for which impact fees are being collected, additional bond proceeds would have an impact on the financing plans. As PFFPs are updated or amended, such fire station projects could reflect the bond as a new funding source.

Oversight

As we have stated in previous reports on infrastructure financing, successful general obligation bond programs in other cities are typically designed to fund a specified list of necessary projects and capital improvements. In the case of the Firehouse Bond proposal, a specific list of 18 new fire stations to be bond-financed has been developed. Additionally, general obligation bond programs are often monitored by an oversight committee, which is charged with ensuring that expenditures are consistent with the intent of the voters.

Community Planning Group Support

Between July 2015 and March 2016, Council President Pro Tem Emerald gave informational presentations regarding the Firehouse Bond Proposal to 18 Community Planning Groups whose jurisdictions include a proposed new fire station site. An additional presentation was made to the citywide Community Planners Committee. Each Community Planning Group voted to support the draft proposal in concept, pending additional details.

CONCLUSION

Since the Citygate Report was released in 2011, the City of San Diego has made significant investments in the Fire-Rescue Department, including the completion of one new fire station, one temporary fire station, and the implementation of two Fast Response Squads. Despite these investments, identified capital needs continue to outweigh available funding, as is the case with all other City asset types. Nearly five years after adopting the CWG Plan, the City has not completed construction of any Citygate-recommended fire stations. If approved by two-thirds of voters in November 2016, the proposed \$205 million Firehouse Bond would raise dedicated revenue to fully fund the design, land acquisition, and construction of 18 new fire stations and would complete the recommendations of the CWG Plan. Annual debt service payments would be supported by a property tax increase of approximately \$5 per \$100,000 in assessed value for a 30-year term. Additionally, ongoing operations costs for new fire stations from ranging from \$23-27 million would be borne by the General Fund in future years and would require new resources to be identified.

In this report, our office has identified several significant benefits a successful Firehouse Bond ballot measure would offer the City. First, the proposal would provide dedicated one-time revenue to fill the infrastructure funding gap for an identified need – new fire stations prioritized by the CWG Plan in 2011. Second, closing this infrastructure funding gap would accelerate the implementation of a City priority which, absent this dedicated funding source, would likely not be completed for several decades if ever. Additionally, new revenue solely for new fire stations would free up other future infrastructure funding sources, portions of which would otherwise have funded fire stations, to then be directed toward different priority projects.

Counterbalancing the above-stated benefits are significant concerns about the timing of the ballot measure and the increased operations costs associated with new fire stations. Since the development of the Firehouse Bond proposal, the Fire-Rescue Department has commissioned an update to the Citygate Report, which is currently underway and is expected to be released in October 2016. This update may change the number and location of recommended new fire stations after ballot language for the Firehouse Bond has already been finalized for the November 2016 election. With regard to operations, for each additional fire station completed, the City's General Fund will bear added costs in perpetuity for personnel, equipment, fire apparatus, and maintenance needs. These costs will require that other ongoing revenue be identified. We note, however, that operations costs for several Firehouse Bond-proposed stations are already included in the City's Five-Year Financial Outlook as they are anticipated to be completed by FY 2021 despite a lack of identified capital funding.

Essentially, the Firehouse Bond proposal seeks to accelerate the implementation of an existing City priority – the completion of new fire stations recommended by the CWG Plan in 2011 – and to raise it above other critical infrastructure needs. Whether to ask the voters to fund this priority via a general obligation bond, supported by a property tax increase, and to dedicate future General Fund revenue to expanded operations, is the policy question the Firehouse Bond proposal currently presents to the City Council.

Chris Olsen Fiscal & Policy Analyst

ÅPPROVED: Andrea Tevlin Independent Budget Analyst