

Council Recap - October 3, 2023

The City Council approved an amendment to the contract with Riverside County that will change the staffing of fire and emergency services personnel at Station 93 in La Quinta. Each fire station is currently staffed 24 hours a day with three personnel: a driver and two firefighters. The driver can be a captain or a fire apparatus engineer. Under the current model, a captain is available for just one 72-hour shift per week, leaving less experienced personnel without the support of a captain most of the week.

Under the amended agreement, Station 93 – the busiest of the three in La Quinta – will include the addition of two fire captains and two fire apparatus engineers and reduce the number of firefighter II/paramedic positions.

The change brings Fire Station 93 in line with a “municipal Staffing Model” adopted by the National Fire Protection Association and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire), which staffs a captain position at the station 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Those captains go on every call.

The change will increase fire service costs by about \$40,000 per fiscal year, to be paid out of the general fund. City Council members questioned the reduction of paramedics when the number one call for service is medical. Where there will be a reduction in paramedics is on what’s called the “fixed relief” shift, Division Chief Bryan White said. “That shift right now is all paramedics – it’s a paramedic/engineer and two firefighters/paramedics,” White said. “In an age where we’re having an incredibly difficult time hiring (paramedics) it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to have three paramedics on one fire engine and none on another. So, this is really balancing and right-sizing the workforce.”

The paramedic shortage is nationwide, he said, and is a result of the pandemic. “We’re sitting on anywhere between a 35 and 50 percent vacancy rate,” White said, adding there are 300 positions departmentwide and 108 are currently vacant. One of the tools the department is using to balance the workforce is called an “underfill,” which is where an engineer/paramedic will be used scheduled to a shift along with a basic life support firefighter II, he said. All fire engines will be staffed with a paramedic, it’s a question of who that will be – the captain, engineer or firefighter, White said, adding the level of service would not be compromised.

In approving the changes, Mayor Linda Evans said she would seek regular updates to be sure service isn’t negatively impacting La Quinta residents. The amended agreement was approved 4-0 with Mayor Pro Tem Steve Sanchez absent due to a death in his family.

Anyone interested in a career with the fire service can find more information at www.rvcfire.org.

Additional highlights from Tuesday's City Council meeting:

- The Council approved adding the names of 21 La Quinta residents to the veterans monuments in Civic Center Park. They will be honored along with all who have served or are serving in the military during the City's annual Veterans Recognition Ceremony, from 9 to 10 a.m. Saturday, November 11, at City Hall. The public is invited.
- The Council approved plans and authorized staff to bid the Eisenhower basin slope repair project. The project will repair slopes where engineered soil covering the liner washed off in many areas during Tropical Storm Hilary. Degradation of the liner will occur if it is exposed to sunlight for a long period of time. The retention basin is on the west side of Eisenhower Drive, between Coachella Drive and Avenida Fernando. The estimated cost is \$260,000.
- The Council approved plans and authorized staff to seek bids for slurry seal improvements citywide at an estimated cost of \$1.5 million. Areas slated for improvements are Avenida Martinez; Avenida Mendoza; Calle Madrid, which will also include striping additional parking lanes; Avenida La Fonda; Washington Street between Eisenhower Drive and Avenue Montero, which will also include striping bike lanes with buffers. Collectively, the projects total about 1.8 million square feet of pavement improvements that will include striping and minor pothole repair.

The La Quinta City Council meets every first and third Tuesday of the month at 4 p.m. at City Hall. We invite the public to attend to stay in the know of all things LQ.

If you can't make it to a meeting or missed a meeting, you can livestream or watch the video online at <https://laquinta.12milesout.com>

Agenda packets with staff reports can be viewed on the City's website, www.laquintaca.gov, or received via email or text by signing up for Quail Mail.