



November 16, 2023

To: Tukwila Finance and Governance Committee
From: Brian Carson, Fire Chief

RE: 2023 Operations Overtime

Thank you for the opportunity to address the higher-than-expected overtime expenditures for 2023. Like other minimum-staffed organizations, Puget Sound Fire seeks the optimal balance between staffing levels that meet our daily minimum while avoiding 'over-staffing'. In general, assigned staff should cover all vacation and most sick leave; overtime is appropriate for unexpected absences. For a contract city like Tukwila, our salaries, overtime, and benefits are projections, with 'true ups' quarterly to reach actual cost. For FY'23, Puget Sound Fire's projections missed the mark.

In preparing the 2023 budget, PSF set assigned staffing for each shift at 72, with a daily minimum of 65. This number provided the industry standard 10% buffer against unexpected absences such as long-term sick leave and injury. The overtime budget for Operations was set at just under \$3.4 million – an amount that was not sufficiently increased from FY'22 to account for the four additional fire stations in the city of Tukwila. Regardless, both the number of assigned staff and the overtime budget proved insufficient. As of November 1st of this year, the PSF overtime budget was at 154%. We have identified several factors that played into the overage:

- PSF has two ongoing, year-long absences for cancers, two others for mental health, and still another for an undefined medical problem.
- PSF employees have made use of the state's PFML at a rate we did not anticipate. 35 employees had utilized PFML as of November 1. Many have been extended absences, including maternity and paternity leave.
- PSF has staffed an overtime aid unit daily to provide better coverage for crews conducting out-of-service training. This has been a very successful model, but the costs were not adequately captured in the budget.

Puget Sound Fire is taking two significant steps to address this gap, as many of the root causes will not ease in the coming year. The first is an increase in daily staffing to offset overtime, assigning an additional 3 per shift for a total of 75. The second step is a sharp increase in budgeted overtime money, from \$3.4M in 2023 to \$6.0M in 2024. If trends continue and overtime remains high, the RFA and Tukwila will have the budgeted funds. But because of the 'true-up' in the contract, Tukwila will only pay these costs if they are incurred.

Thank you again for the chance to share this information via memo, and I look forward to addressing your questions on the 27th.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Carson".

Administration

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