

City Council – Action Request Form

Date: May 11, 2020

To: Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore, and Members of the City Council

From: Damon Dequenne, Assistant City Manager
William L. Mayo, Fire Chief

Council Action Requested:
Resolution authorizing submission of an application to the Department of Homeland Security for a Fire Prevention and Safety Grant

Strategic Focus Area: Safe and Secure Community
Strategic Objective: Improve Public Safety Service Quality
Strategic Plan Action Item: No
Key Work Item: No



Summary of Information:

The Fire Department is seeking authorization to apply for a Fire Prevention and Safety Grant (FP&S) to fund the purchase of a mobile fire investigation unit. This is a 33-foot enclosed trailer that is climate controlled and has workstations, an interview room, a lavatory, and storage for equipment and evidence. Determining the cause and origin of fires is required by State law and is part of the local community risk reduction effort. Fire investigation is also a deterrent to those who would intentionally set fires.

The fire problem in Winston-Salem remains significant, despite community risk reduction efforts. In the past five years, Winston-Salem has had 439 fires that were determined to be intentionally set. Many of these involved other, sometimes violent, crimes and attempts to defraud insurance companies. Winston-Salem averages a working building fire every thirty-six hours and three fire fatalities per year.

Committee Action:

Committee	Finance 5/11/2020 Public Safety 5/11/2020	Action	Approval
For	Unanimous	Against	

Remarks:

The process of fire investigation has become more scientific and complex due to changes in the National Fire Protection Association's 921 Standard *Guide for Fire and Explosions Investigations*. NFPA 921 is the consensus industry standard for determining fire cause and origin and is referenced in court by both prosecutors and defense attorneys. Complex investigations require the effort of several fire investigators and sometimes span multiple operational periods. A fire investigation unit, as described, will result in fire investigations that are more thorough, consistent, and intact.

Based on similar models, it is estimated that a fire investigation unit will cost \$150,000. If awarded, the local match will be 5%. This request is for authorization to apply for a FP&S Grant, with a local match not to exceed \$7,500. If the City is awarded the funds, they will be made available at the beginning of Fiscal Year 2021. A budget amendment will be brought to City Council for approval at that time.