

FFPD Organizational Restructuring (Full-time Paid Fire Chief)



The Foothills Fire Protection District and Foothills Fire & Rescue is considering modifications to the organizational structure of the fire department. The most significant proposed change has to do with converting the current, volunteer Fire Chief to a full-time, paid, Fire Chief position.

Historically, Foothills Fire & Rescue has been led by a volunteer Fire Chief. Each year the Chief has been nominated and voted on by active volunteer members of the Department, and approved by the Board of directors. Over the past several years FFR has had frequent Chief turnover, for many reasons including; increasing time demands, work load, changes in regulations, training requirements, and changes in the general “nature of the business” of firefighting. For the Chief’s term beginning January 1, 2010, there were 12 members qualified to be chief. Unfortunately for a number of reasons, none of these members were able to accept nomination. Given that a chief was not elected, the decision on filling the position falls to the Board of Directors.

The FFPD Board appointed a “Structure Committee” to look at potential changes to the current organizational structure. The committee, comprised of firefighters, board members and community members, presented its recommendations for the Fire Chief’s position at the August 18, 2009 Board of Directors meeting. The consensus recommendation was to convert to a full-time, paid Fire Chief position.

Pros for a full-time, paid, Fire Chief include:

- Reduce impact of turnover and provide leadership consistency
- Provide new ideas and a significant wealth of experience
- Ability to dedicate 40 hours per week for day-to-day management and oversight
- Provide strategic leadership, and enhance long-term goal setting (5-year plan)
- Provide increased accountability - Chief hired and reviewed by both Volunteers and Board
- Reduce impact of demographic shift in community

Cons for a full-time, paid, Fire Chief include:

- Potentially alienate FFR volunteers
 - Personality conflicts with new Chief
 - Change from existing election process
- Potentially increase mandates on volunteers to cover more calls and/or shifts
- Requires additional Board participation
 - Set parameters for the Chief
 - Performance reviews to ensure expectations

Some feedback has already been received (see excerpts below), from current and former FFR firefighters and community members. This subject will be discussed further at the October 20, 2009 Board meeting.

Ed Daniels, former Foothills Fire Chief: “Foothills and one of its predecessor departments, Lookout, have had a very unfortunate history with fire chiefs. Either the Chief doesn’t get the job done or the job gets the Chief done. That’s not fair to the District or to the Community, and it’s also not fair to those who try their best to be Chief. We (the community, Department and Board) need continuity of leadership. The Chief’s job is a full time job. It has been since Foothills was formed. Unless we can find a qualified, dedicated independently wealthy candidate, we are going to need to pay someone full-time to be Chief. We shouldn’t be sad about this, it is the right thing to do and we should be pleased to do it and pleased to inform our community that the time has come.”

John Kilpatrick, current Volunteer and former Foothills Fire Chief: “I personally believe that the full-time paid chief option is the better option for the department for the following reasons: Applicants can be more thoroughly vetted for the full-time position vs. a stipend position for a volunteer; A full-time chief will bring a stronger, more effective effort to the position than a stipend volunteer; There will be much better continuity year-to-year or term-to-term than with a stipend volunteer. The anticipated stipend for a volunteer is insufficient for any volunteer to leave his full-time paid position or to place a high priority on the needs of the Fire Department for an extended period of time.”

Jen Sliemers, current Foothills volunteer firefighter: “The position of fire_chief is an immense undertaking filled with major responsibility, liability and time commitment. Volunteers ARE absolutely concerned and expect to be included in the process of choosing the next leader.” “The process of transitioning to a paid chief (part or full) will be a MAJOR culture change and paradigm shift. This step should not be rushed into and the FFPD Board and Structure Committee need to open their minds and truly listen to feedback from volunteers and the community.”

Where are we now?

Based on feedback received from the volunteers and community members, the Board of Directors voted, at their September 15, 2009 meeting, to begin the process of hiring a full-time, paid, Fire Chief.

Interview Committee

T.J. Carney, Board President, will head up an Interview Committee tasked with hiring a new full-time, paid, Fire Chief. The committee will consist of 1 Board member, 2 current volunteer and/or paid firefighters, and 2 community members.

Committee tasks will include refining the roles and responsibilities of the Fire Chief's position, establishing salary, and conducting job interviews. Candidate recommendations are slated to be presented to the Board of Directors at their December 15, 2009 meeting.

Community members, FFPD volunteers and Board Members interested in participating on the Interview Committee are welcome to send their name and contact information to T.J. Carney at tj-ffpd@carneylaw.net or phone (303) 526-0214.

To read the initial Structure Committee recommendation report, and firefighter/community feedback emails, visit the department website at <http://www.foothillsfire.org> under FFPD Organizational Restructuring Decision.



"..the chief is the primary representative of the department in its relations with the governing body and the community."

"...the chief is the manager/leader of the entire department and is responsible for establishing the direction of the operation of each unit and the members of the department."

Harry R. Carter, Erwin Rausch
Management in the Fire Services

A Fire Chief's Role

The Fire Chief is the highest-ranking officer in Foothills Fire Protection District. He serves by the authority of the Foothills Fire Protection District Board, and is responsible for administration and all other functions of the Department as its Chief executive officer.

Under policy adopted by the Board of Directors, the Fire Chief:

- Directs and oversees the activities of the Fire Department;
- Plans, implements, and reviews departmental short and long-range goals;
- Develops general policies for the administration of the department;
- Establishes operational standards for the department;
- Prepares annual budgets and controls expenditures;
- Evaluates needs and makes recommendations for construction of fire stations and the purchase of apparatus and equipment;
- Responds to alarms and directs activities at the scene of larger fires or incidents;
- Develops recommendations for the protection of life and property in the District;
- Directs administrative functions including planning, personnel administration, equipment purchasing, and the allocation of resources;
- Demonstrates continuous effort to improve operations, decrease turnaround times, streamline work processes, and work cooperatively and jointly to provide quality seamless customer service.
- Attends conferences and seminars on fire administration to keep abreast of developments in the field;

If you are interested in applying for the Foothills Fire & Rescue Fire Chief position, please visit the department's website or contact the fire department at (303) 526-0707. Application deadline is Friday, November 13, 2009 at 5:00 p.m..

Please visit the department's website at www.foothillsfire.org for more information about FFPD.