



Legislation Text

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Report regarding a resolution to approve a side letter agreement to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of South San Francisco and the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) Local 1507 to provide for additional compensation for canine search handlers. (*Leah Lockhart, Human Resources Director*)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that City Council adopt a resolution approving a side letter agreement to the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of South San Francisco and the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) Local 1507 to provide for additional compensation to canine search handlers, and authorizing the City Manager to execute the agreement.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

Since its inception in 1991, Fire Department personnel have participated in the FEMA Urban Search and Rescue team, California Task Force 3 (CA-TF3). In 2004, Fire Department members of CA-TF3 initiated the creation of a canine search team program. In support of this effort, the Fire Chief developed a letter of agreement with IAFF Local 1507 outlining the terms of participation in the canine search program as a voluntary assignment, with all compensation provided by CA-TF3.

Prior to 2016, CA-TF3 provided canine handlers with a stipend equal to three (3) hours of overtime per week, at one and half times the handler's hourly rate of pay. In addition, CA-TF3 provided reimbursement for costs related to qualifying and recertifying a search dog. However, in September of 2016, facing budgetary constraints, CA-TF3 reduced the canine handler compensation to a flat stipend of \$300 a month. Recognizing the dramatic decrease in monthly compensation, the City agreed to provide further assistance to the Fire Department's current canine handler, including expense reimbursement, vehicle use, and time for training and recertification. Currently, the compensation and terms provided to the canine search handler are as follows:

FEMA CATF-3 Contribution:

- \$300 per month stipend to CATF-3 canine handlers.
- Health insurance for the dog provided by CATF-3 and the Search Dog Foundation.
- Up to \$6,000 reimbursement for search dog recertification costs every three years.
- Up to three hours per month of CA-TF3 reimbursed overtime at one and half times the employee's hourly rate.

Current City Contribution:

- Reimbursement for food and expenses related to the search dog up to \$100 per month.
- Use of a Fire Department vehicle to participate in all preapproved CA-TF3 and rescue canine training and deployments.
- Ability to attend training while on duty with prior supervisor approval.
- Additional overtime during travel to and from recertification, and mileage reimbursement when canine handler opts to use personal vehicle.

During a budget study session on May 29, 2019, Council members discussed the existing compensation terms for the canine search handler in light of the value the program brings to the City. Having a highly trained canine search team serves as an additional resource for the City in the event of a disaster or other emergencies where search and rescue efforts must be deployed, and as such some Council members expressed interest in increasing the City's compensation to recognize this resource. Following this discussion, Council authorized staff to meet with IAFF Local 1507 to negotiate compensation terms for canine search handler.

The proposed terms, outlined in a tentative agreement attached as Exhibit "A" to the resolution, provides additional compensation to canine search handlers for a total amount of five percent (5%) of salary, including the \$300 per month stipend from CA-TF3. Under this agreement, the \$300 stipend will be remitted to the City, covering approximately fifty percent (50%) of the 5% premium pay paid directly by the City. The additional terms for reimbursement, vehicle use, training time and overtime currently provided by the City will remain in place.

FISCAL IMPACT

The cost of providing additional compensation to the canine search handler, with the CA-TF3 stipend being remitted to the City, is approximately \$4,500 annually. This amount will be covered by the existing Fire Department operating budget for fiscal year 2019-2020.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN

The proposed agreement for the Canine Search Specialist program supports the City's strategic initiative of Workforce Development by providing compensation to retain and reward highly-skilled employees.

CONCLUSION

The proposed side letter agreement with IAFF Local 1507 provides added compensation for the City's canine search specialist in conjunction with FEMA California Task Force 3. Staff recommends approval of the agreement to recognize and retain a highly skilled search team and maintain the canine search program as a City resource.