



NEWS RELEASE

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Federal Stimulus Funds Awarded for Two Santa Maria Fire Stations

Earlier this week, the City of Santa Maria announced through a news release that the City was successful in securing a \$2.02 million grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for help in constructing a new fire station. The City is pleased to announce that a second grant of \$2.3 million will be awarded from the same source of funding to be used toward construction of a second new fire station. The City will be receiving more than \$4.3 million to help construct two new fire stations.

“Santa Maria welcomes this windfall from the Federal economic stimulus program because it will improve public safety – the City Council’s number one priority. We need more fire stations,” Mayor Larry Lavagnino said. “This also means that our busy City’s newest financial challenge is weighing our options as to how to staff one of those future fire stations.”

The Mayor recognized that only six other fire agencies in California also received these grants through a competitive national process, and Santa Maria received the most funding of any other agency in California, about \$4.36 million. In October, the City and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) staff will discuss the grant award and guidelines. The grant allows three years for the stations to be built.

Building both new stations is estimated at \$6.8 million, and the City has identified about \$2 million of City funds for construction. However, the cost to staff and operate each fire station is about \$1.2 million per year.

“We can staff one new fire station because that’s where we’re going to relocate an existing station, and its crews,” the Mayor said. “For the second new station’s staffing, the City Council will roll up its sleeves along with City management to look at our alternatives and options. Right now, the City’s financial resources are entirely spoken for, and the Council has already made substantial budget reductions City-wide. Finances for each department will continue to be a challenge for several years.”

Acting Fire Chief Jeff Jones also expressed his appreciation for the ARRA grants. He said the new fire stations will improve emergency response times to some of the busiest

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areas of Santa Maria. In 2008, the Santa Maria Fire Department responded to 8,840 calls, up from 7,292 calls in 2006.

The City presently has four fire stations serving the entire community, and operates a fifth, a specialized station at the Santa Maria Public Airport that is dedicated to serving only the airport.

Due to the City's geographic expansion and population growth, the Fire Department's long-term goal is to have five stations serving the community, plus one more at the airport. The existing City Fire Station No. 3 is to move into the future station in Preisker Park and leave its old quarters, a converted 70-year-old house at 1527 N. College Drive.

Both facilities are to be built on City-owned land, one in the northwest section of the community in Preisker Park, the other station near Suey Crossing Road in the northeast side of Santa Maria.

The City plans to use an additional pot of economic stimulus money totaling \$341,281 toward the future fire station in Preisker Park. Those funds were previously allocated to the City earlier this year in the Community Development Block Grant-Recovery funds.

The City made its application in July 2009. More than 8,000 agencies across the nation submitted applications and competition was tough, with only \$210 million available. Each application was scored according to priorities established by the Department of Homeland Security, then to peer review panels for evaluation. Panelists scored applications based on the clarity of the project description and budget, the cost/benefit of the project, the financial need of the applicant and the effect the project will have on the applicant's community.

Questions may be directed to the City Fire Department at 925-0951 ext. 255, or to Mark van de Kamp, Management Analyst II in the City Manager's Office, 925-0951 ext. 372.

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