

October 21, 2014

To: City Manager Rod Gould
Fire Chief Scott Ferguson
Human Resources Director Donna C. Peter
City Council

From: Board of Directors, Friends of Sunset Park

RE: Fire Department Concerns – reply to Fire Chief Ferguson’s undated letter

On August 27, 2014, the FOSP Board sent a letter to all of you stating our questions and concerns regarding the Santa Monica Fire Department. While Chief Scott Ferguson’s response to that letter was lengthy, we are disappointed that some of our questions were not answered, and some responses seemed disingenuous. We have reviewed his response carefully, and here is our reply:

A. General statements on staffing and equipment
B. Values of the SMFD – Deputy Chief Clem and Chief Ferguson
C. More detailed statements on staffing, equipment, and facilities
Question #1 – Inadequate staffing and equipment
Question #2 – Tiered dispatch
Question #3 – Hiring and promotions
Question #4 – Age discrimination
Question #5 – Combining Fire and Police dispatch
Question #6 – Aircraft crash rig staffing
Final thought
October 15th memo

A. Chief Ferguson states that, “It should be clear that there are absolutely no plans to cut service levels.”

Having a call load double and not adding staff is cutting service. Moving to tiered dispatch is a cut in level of service.

Chief Ferguson refers to the purchase of equipment.

The Mobile Data Computers, tablets which replaced the older laptops (as the Fire Department dispatchers listen to callers, they type into the MDC’s), provide data to the response units, the command vehicle, and the dispatchers, versus communicating verbally over the radio, and also indicate the location of the rigs.

Unfortunately, Deputy Chief Clemo, who is in charge of operations, has apparently not provided training, the touch screens have only recently started working, there are questions about screen resolution, and there are still problems with connectivity and functionality. In other words, the money has been spent on the new tablet computers, but the equipment doesn’t seem to be working adequately.

In addition, the department has apparently been trying for 5 years to upload pre-incident plans (lay-out of buildings, hazards, stairwells, gas shut-offs, sprinkler and fire alarm info) but this has still not been accomplished. The MDCs apparently don't have the capability or the equipment cannot support this function. Other Fire Departments have this capability and have had it for several years. An example is the Ventura County and Ventura City Fire Departments.

Regarding the radios, which were upgraded, they apparently need more frequencies in order to segregate regular calls from incident calls, as there are only 4 channels that can be used reliably. The Universal Tactical Channels (UTAC) are unreliable and are not repeatable, which makes them hard to use, i.e., they don't work if you're not in close proximity. As a result, problems with functionality, quality, and reliability are compromising firefighter and citizen safety, and Deputy Chief Clemo has apparently not provided training.

B. Chief Ferguson refers to the Values of the SMFD: Integrity, Leadership, Compassion, Stewardship, Courage, Loyalty, and Accountability.

From what we understand, some in the department feel that Chief Ferguson and the Deputy Chief for Operations (Clemo) have violated some of these values, yet have not been held accountable.

Incident #1: *For example, on one occasion Deputy Chief Clemo, who did not have the authority to do so, cancelled a paramedic response to a situation that, in fact, required an ALS intervention by paramedics. He has never been a paramedic, and it's not clear whether he has a current EMT certificate. This type of action on his part potentially put the patient at risk, left the city liable. **Where was the accountability?***

Incident #2: *On another occasion, Deputy Chief Clemo apparently saw smoke and led nearly every SMFD fire suppression unit out of town for two hours to fight a wildfire in Temescal Canyon along PCH (in the City of Los Angeles) when the LA Fire Department had not called at that time for mutual aid. Dispatch for a normal brush fire is 2 engines and a ladder truck.*

*Instead, Clemo led all the city's units to the fire, leaving only one reserve rescue ambulance, which had to be quickly stocked and staffed with two Captains who happened to be in the City doing training, and no fire engines to serve all of Santa Monica for two hours. As a citizens and taxpayers of this city, this is not acceptable! **Where was the accountability?***

Incident #3: *At the time of the active shooter incident on June 7, 2013, Fire Department administration had apparently sent one of the four paramedic engine companies to the Riviera Country Club, despite knowing that the President was in town. Deputy Chief Clemo had taken a captain with him to his assignment on the detail to protect President Obama, apparently leaving the ladder truck crew without a captain.*

Around noon, Deputy Chief Clemo apparently heard about the active shooter event on SMPD radio channels and left his assignment, without regard for the safety of the President of the United States. SMPD personnel, who had more of a reason to respond, remained at their posts on the presidential detail, maintaining discipline. SMFD personnel also remained at their assigned posts as Fire Safety Officers in the city, maintaining discipline.

The SMFD active shooter incident commander, Battalion Chief Bridge, did not request that Deputy Chief Clemo respond to the incident. Nevertheless, Deputy Chief Clemo abandoned his post on the presidential detail without notifying other SMFD units on the detail, without communicating with Fire Command, and without regard to the fact that the shooter incident could have been a planned distraction for an attempt on the President's life.

En route, Deputy Chief Clemo did not communicate with Battalion Chief Bridges (who was ordering resources and trying to confirm that the active shooter was in the area of the reported structure fire) to coordinate a plan of action, but rather took it upon himself to self-dispatch to the scene and to begin ordering resources from LAFD.

Deputy Chief Clemo announced contradicting orders to units responding to a potentially dangerous situation by establishing a staging location that was different from the one that Battalion Chief Bridges had already established and announced. Before the incident concluded, Clemo had announced three different staging areas and had used six different call signs, adding to the already confusing scene. He also confused responding units by causing them to think that there were two incident commanders rather than one, and by using critical radio air time for unnecessary dialog.

At approximately 12:15 PM, Clemo announced that "Operations" was established and all traffic would go through "operations," but failed to announce who "operations" was, adding to the chaos. Battalion Chief Bridges is credited with advising the responding SMFD units that there was an active shooter in the area of the structure fire and to be vigilant. It seems that Battalion Chief Bridges maintained discipline and exemplified true professionalism and emergency response experience, something that we as citizens expect from our Fire Department.

To summarize, Deputy Chief Clemo abandoned his assignment to the Presidential detail, caused confusion, failed to follow standard Incident Command System and SMFD protocols, used unfamiliar language, failed to order resources through the appropriate channels, and added to the chaos of the incident. These actions seem to demonstrate both his lack of experience on major emergency incidents and his lack of discipline.

*Residents wonder what Deputy Chief Clemo's goal was in abandoning his duties with the Presidential detail, other than to add the active shooter incident to his resume. **Where was the accountability?***

Has he ever been disciplined to any of these amateurish, unprofessional mistakes? After hearing these stories about him, the adjectives that come to mind are "undisciplined" and "impulsive." It is not reassuring to residents to have an undisciplined, impulsive person in a position of authority when it comes to public safety. With someone like this in charge of SMFD operations, the potential jeopardy that exists here is severe.

Regarding Chief Ferguson, it seems that he has failed in some instances to set a professional standard.

First, by appearing in his role as Chief at promotional ceremonies dressed in workout attire rather than his uniform. On one occasion, he even neglected to bring the badge that was to be pinned on the newly promoted staff person. Even a lay person recognizes the value of esprit de corps and the importance respecting the traditions of the fire service.

Second, by using a department vehicle for personal use on several occasions, apparently without the authorization of the City Manager – once to move personal property from Arizona to California, and another time to help his mother transport merchandise to a restaurant on the Third Street Promenade -- the Chief has violated the City's administrative instructions and policy.

Third, in 2011, the Chief hired a consultant, Gunnar J. Kuepper of Emergency & Disaster Management, Inc., without following the city's required contractual process. I.e., he expected that the company would get paid without his ever getting a Professional Services Contract in place or sending the contract to the City Manager's office for review and signature beforehand.

Fourth, the Chief interfered in the department's response to a fire on the Third Street Promenade on July 29, 2013.

In this last instance, when a gas leak ignited a grease fire in the flue at Yankee Doodle's Bar and Restaurant, 1410 Third Street Promenade, the incident commander and captains knew that the building didn't have an attic and that, therefore, there was little risk of the fire spreading to the attics of adjacent buildings.

However, Chief Ferguson arrived on the scene, got up on the roof without donning full protective gear and, not knowing that the building didn't have an attic, and not asking anyone, apparently began urging the firefighters to "write off" the Yankee Doodle's building in order to switch to defensive tactics and prevent the spread of a non-existent attic fire to the adjacent buildings.

This created stress and confusion on the fire ground. In other words, the Chief caused a problem by not listening to his subordinates. It's unlikely that someone of Terry Garrison's background and experience would have made similar mistakes. (Garrison was an applicant for the job of Fire Chief when Ferguson was hired.) Thankfully, the incident commander and captains did not heed the Chief's admonishments and proceeded to save the Yankee Doodle's building.

Residents wonder whether the City Manager is aware of these incidents and, if so, whether he approves of these actions on the Chief's part.

It seems that we could potentially have a major incident in the city if top-notch people are not hired for these positions of authority.

C. According to Chief Ferguson, "As Fire Chief it is my responsibility to embrace an atmosphere where all perspectives are considered. This requires that stakeholders regularly measure emerging trends and industry best practices against our department's existing standards of operation.

Before specifically addressing each question, please consider the following:

In 2013, the SMFD was dispatched to 13,431 calls for service. In 2010, EMS calls for eservice increased by 1,035 (10%) and fire increased by in 41 (18%). The trend is illustrative of an increase of calls for service over the past several years (1980: 5,000;

1990: 7,500; and 2000: 9,500), while staffing levels have remained relatively the same.

The SMFD operates within a *constant staffing* model. This means that 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year the SMFD staffs 31 crew members on duty. Firefighters operate on a 24-hour rotating schedule (24-on; 24-off; 24-on; 24-off; 24-on; 96 hours off).

The SMFD was awarded an Insurance Services Office (ISO) Class 1 rating in 2012. On a 1 to 10 scale, this is the best score available; a distinction afforded to only 60 of the nearly 30,000 ($\leq 1\%$) fire departments nationwide. The ratings process involves an objective, detailed analysis of all fire department operations, city water systems, and emergency 9-1-1 communications center.

The ISO score is used by many property insurance companies as a gauge of the likelihood of loss due to fire and policy rates are often set accordingly. Hence, those communities with the best ISO ratings enjoy the lowest fire insurance rates as they are judged the safest.

The ISO Class 1 rating was made possible in part to the department having its own dispatch center, and now there are plans to change that. Will that drop the ISO rating?

The Class 1 rating also requires certain pieces of equipment on the engines. This upgrade was apparently started by former Chief Berardinelli and then continued by former Chief Hone and Deputy Chief Bruce Davis.

The SMFD responds from four fire stations strategically located throughout the City. Frontline apparatus include 6-engines, 1-ladder truck, 1-air/light rescue, 1-command vehicle, 1-urban search and rescue unit and 1-hazardous materials unit, and 1-aircraft fire fighting rescue (ARFF) unit.

Each fire engine is staffed with 1-captain, 1-engineer, and two firefighters; at least two members of the crew are certified as paramedics. A ladder company is made up of both a tiller truck staffed with 1-captain, 1-engineer, and 1-tiller operator, and an air & light rescue unit staffed with two firefighters; all are Basic Life Support (BLS) certified.

AmeriCare Ambulance Company is contracted by the City to provide EMS transportation services with a minimum of five dedicated units staffed with two Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) 24-hours a day, 7-days per week. In tandem with SMFD paramedic units, at least one ambulance responds to every medical call for service, regardless of the nature of injury or illness.

Is the Fire Chief planning to send a private BLS unit to a so-called minor call without a Fire Department ALS unit? If so, how would this be considered better customer service? The Chief's idea of reinstating the Rescue Ambulance deployment model seems to be moving the department backwards! The Fire Department transitioned from that model when it put into service the sixth 4-person engine company in 2009, based upon the needs of the citizens, and retired the Rescue Ambulances. The 4-person deployment model has worked, and will continue to work, if a seventh engine company is put into service to meet the needs of the citizens in the south end of our city. Sending only two firefighters to a call is not moving forward.

Santa Monica's nighttime population is estimated at 91,040 and daytime population exceeds 250,000, resulting in significant fluctuations in response patterns.

If Santa Monica has a population exceeding 250,000 for 18 hours of the day, how does SMFD staffing compare to other cities with a population exceeding 250,000?

As was recently featured on the NBC Nightly News, [What Slows Down Emergency Responders When Every Second Counts](#), traffic congestion and a steady increase in call volume are beginning to have an impact on response times nationwide. While additional technology is currently being installed to aid in capturing this data, it has become apparent that the SMFD must incorporate some new strategies to deal with these challenges.

SMFD faces increased response times not only because of traffic, and increased call load, with engines covering other areas, but also because the city is growing upward. It takes more time to get to apartments due to the increase in larger and taller buildings, requiring the use of elevators.

In 2013/2014, The SMFD-Fire Prevention and Suppression Divisions inspected over 9,600 occupancies, reviewed 1,296 plans, and issued over 1100 permits.

Through the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP), the fire department continues to receive top-of-the-line fire apparatus. Over the next 2-year cycle, this will include two new fire engines, a ladder truck, an air & light rescue, and an urban search and rescue (USAR) unit totaling \$5,550,000.

Is this over and above normal replacement? From what we understand, 20-year-old reserve SMFD apparatus is currently in service virtually every day. What is the Chief's plan to replace aging and unreliable fire apparatus and equipment?

The CIP process also netted \$1,233,000 to improve mobile data technology and software systems intended to assist in the gathering and analysis of critical response data. The allocation also included additional safety equipment totaling \$700,000.

The Mobile Data Technology is still not functioning properly. Connectivity is lost, the department doesn't have the ability to put vital information on the MDTs such as pre-incident plans, or view added resources when responding to a multi-company call or incident. Some feel that the department is no better off now than when they were purchased several years ago. As citizens and taxpayers, we also find this situation unacceptable. And we deserved honest answers to our questions, not what one of our Board members described as "a quarterly report a business might send to its stockholders."

Over the past eight years, the SMFD has received over \$2.9-million in Federal Homeland Security funds, thereby offsetting expenditures that otherwise would have been drawn from the City's General Fund. Awards have included enhancements in technology, communications, and special operations training overtime, props, and equipment. An additional \$2.9-million in grant funds has been awarded in 2014 to fund interoperability communication projects.

What is the plan and timeline for these projects?

As the result of a seismic and American with Disabilities Act (ADA) safety evaluation, the

City is finalizing an acquisition of land and expects to provide a \$37-million state-of-the-art replacement of [Fire Station 1](#) (headquarters). The building design and structure is expected to serve the community for the next 50-years. [Station 3](#) (\$1.5-million) is also scheduled for a complete seismic upgrade, and the City has committed to providing a new training facility at the Corporation Yards (\$1.5-million).

Fire Station 1 is still only a concept. Meanwhile, 14 of the 31 firefighters are housed in a fire station that has been deemed seismically challenged.

Fire Station 3 was stick-built to blend in with the residential neighborhood, and was apparently designed to last a maximum of 30 years.

If public safety is the highest priority of city government, residents wonder why, when the city still had RDA funds, building Tongva Park was considered a more urgent priority than the replacement of aging fire stations.

The Department recently added two additional civilian support personnel; one dedicated to the Training Division, and a second to analyze department data and industry best practices in order to make informed budget and deployment decisions.

Due to the administrative workload in various divisions within the Fire Department, additional staff was approved by the City Manager. As an example, the Training Division was promised one of the new staff positions approved by the City Manager, but instead was assigned the former Fire Prevention Business Assistant, who does not necessarily have the budget and office skill set required for the type of work in the Training Division. This decision was apparently made without input from the division manager, which does not seem like an effective way to manage and/or administer. From the perspective of residents, “shuffling” staff is not the same as “adding” staff.

Since 1982, calls for service have increased tremendously, yet only 2 fire suppression positions have apparently been added. Med carts and bicycles help, but they would still have to be followed up with an engine company response.

Question #1 - Seemingly inadequate Fire Department staff and equipment

It has been said that necessity is the mother of innovation. The recent downturn in the economy and subsequent fiscal challenges facing local governments have forced communities to take a fresh look at a number of different staffing and response options. For many fire departments, this has meant civilianizing positions that do not require Suppression expertise, improved cost and resource sharing, and the consideration of response models that make use of peak-hour deployment and **alternate response vehicles. Many of these methodologies have now become industry best practices, improving on service delivery, efficiency, and response times.**

This conclusion is questioned by some of the staff. Santa Monica is a unique city, and SMFD has a proven deployment model. As the city becomes more congested and continues to add more tall buildings, it takes longer to respond to calls. The service level is decreasing as call volume is increasing without a commensurate increase in staff and equipment.

Looking only at the nighttime population, Santa Monica is one of most densely populated cities

in the state. During the day, we welcome commuters who come here to work; 34,000 SMC students; tourists; visitors to the two major hospitals and nearby medical offices, Main Street, Montana Avenue, Santa Monica Place and the Promenade, the beach and the Pier, and various special events; plus passengers on the soon-to-be completed Expo Light Rail Line.

While fiscal challenges due to the economic downturn may have forced some cities to reduce fire department staffing and use alternative vehicles, Santa Monica is not one of those cities.

According to City Manager Rod Gould, “Santa Monica is very fortunate to have a diverse and well-positioned local economy to drive its major revenue sources. That potent local economy allows Santa Monica to blunt the impacts of economic downturns—including most recently the Great Recession. Santa Monica is able to continue to provide high levels of service, to invest in its capital infrastructure, to maintain a quality workforce and labor peace, and to keep prudent reserves on hand for times of shock losses and other eventualities that cannot be foreseen. Our budget is the third largest of the 88 LA County cities at \$567 million this year. It has been balanced each year with surgical cuts, improved cost recovery and tax collection, and returns on investments, all while preserving our AAA bond rating.”

The Tualitin and Los Angeles models may not apply here. Rather, residents feel that we need to add staffing that supports the current SMFD delivery model that has led to a Class 1 rating, rather than change to a delivery model that is unproven and may save money, but at what cost to service and safety?

Chief Ferguson write about evaluating the “option of engaging in a two tiered dispatch system that segregates Advanced Life Support (ALS) versus Basic Life Support (BLS) calls and sends an alternative resource based on the need. This includes evaluating the risk versus benefit of such a program and the overall effect on response times.”

Some feel that the department is moving backwards. SMFD moved away from tiered dispatching due to liability and poor customer service. Tiered dispatching was referred to as “OMEGA” calls in the late 1990s.

Santa Monica is a unique city and can seemingly afford to not to revert back to tiered dispatching. Other cities that are switching to tiered dispatch are doing so to save money, not necessarily to provide better customer service. It is not a good system for a city with an aging population which will probably require additional ALS service. If a resident calls dispatch and reports that someone has fallen, the dispatch may send a BLS unit. But what if the “fall” turns out to be a stroke or full cardiac arrest?

Sending a utility vehicle (a pick-up) may result in a quick response time on a database (“stopping the clock,” when the responding unit arrives on the scene), but what if the victim dies or suffers irreparable harm, while waiting for a 4-person paramedic engine (the “gold standard”) that wasn’t initially dispatched, due to a flawed tiered dispatch judgment call? Is the cost benefit worth the risk?

Chief Ferguson writes that “Using national standards and best practices as a guide, committee members were asked to examine a number of staffing and response models; options for consideration have included....

Moving existing resources to alternate stations to accommodate those shifting response patterns associated with the emergence of light rail.

What does this mean? Moving resources from one area to another sounds like some sort of shell

game, rather than increasing equipment and staff to meet the increased demand when the Expo Light Rail is operational. Which resources would be moved – Engine 5 from the Airport, Engine 4 (which can't cover the north side), Engine 3 (which covers the elderly), Engine 2 (which covers the south side and beach), or Engine 1/Engine 6 (which covers downtown)? Which one will be moved?

Triaging 911 medical calls (tiered dispatch) using a standard protocol to determine the most appropriate resource to send.

If the department is all 4-man engines (with 2 paramedics), there is no need to tier dispatch.

Adding one or more 24-hour, 4-person ALS engine companies (*\$2,477,942/fullyburdened rate/unit) or ALS rescue ambulances (*\$1,340,802/fully-burdened rate/rescue ambulance).

Santa Monica probably has the largest budget expenditure per resident of any city on the west coast. Why can't we afford to staff a 4-person engine that the city already owns?

Add one or more paramedic-staffed rescue ambulances (*\$431,335/ fully-burdened rate/ 40-hr week) to be deployed on low acuity calls during 12 largest peak-hours of operation.

Would residents with a medical emergency want a 2-man or a 4-man Fire Department unit coming to their home?

Chief Ferguson states that, "MedCarts extend ALS services from pavement to the waterline and allow for easy access to patients. This response model has proven to be extremely effective in decreasing medical response times during special events and on busy weekends."

The MedCarts were apparently purchased with grant funding. Are there any replacements in place?

Chief Ferguson states that "The City Manager is scheduled to receive the SMFD's final recommendation in time for Council's mid-year budget review in January of 2015."

The recommendation of some staff members is to add a 4-person ALS Engine Company, rather than relying on a 2-person rescue ambulance, and to keep the Med-Carts for special events and projected populated days. This would enhance the current delivery model, while providing extended coverage on the beach and hard-to-reach areas near Santa Monica Pier.

Community Comparisons -- Los Angeles and Orange County Comparable Agencies

The SMFD has the fourth highest annual calls for service.

The SMFD has the seventh highest daily constant staffing.

SMFD is only 7th in staffing, while calls for service are 4th?

Agency	Annual Calls	Daily Staffing	Engine/ Truck	HazMat Driver	Rescue Ambulance	Engines/ Sq. Mile	Residential Population
Santa Monica	13,431	31	6/1	Yes-1	0	.72	93,040
Culver City	4,671	18	3/1	No	2	.57	39,165

Beverly Hills	6,632	27	4/1	No	3	.73	34,358
Burbank	9,600	36	6/2	Yes-0	3 ALS	.34	108,000
Compton	10,661	26	4/1	No	3 ALS	.40	97,156
Downey	8,900	21	3/1	No	1 BLS	.24	112,584
Garden Grove	11,966	29	7/1	No	0	.39	173,470
Glendale	17,215	50	9/3	Yes-0	6 BLS	.29	200,000
Huntington Beach	16,430	41	8/2	Yes-0	4 BLS	.25	192,888
Newport Beach	10,000	39	8/2	No	3	.34	86,484
Pasadena	16,846	51	8/2	No	5	.35	138,101
Torrance	12,808	46	7/2	Yes-0	2	.34	146,860

Beverly Hills and Culver City have a combined total of 45 firefighters on duty per day and 11,303 calls.

Santa Monica has 31 firefighters on duty per day and 13,431 calls for service.

What's wrong with this picture?

It also seems troubling that Beverly Hills has 27 firefighters on duty for 23,258 residents, while Santa Monica has only 31 firefighters on duty for 93,040 residents.

This seems to work out to 1 firefighter per about 1,275 residents in Beverly Hills, compared to 1 firefighter per about 3,000 residents in Santa Monica. Looking at it another way, that's 1 firefighter per about 8,000 Santa Monica daytime population in winter, or 1 firefighter per about 16,000 Santa Monica daytime population in summer.

Chief Ferguson states that, "Auto and Mutual aid is commonly exchanged between the SMFD, and the Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, and Culver City Fire Departments. And while responses to these jurisdictions are often cancelled (77%), Santa Monica has benefited from this agreement on a number of incidents such as the June 7, 2013 Santa Monica College shooting, and events like the Marathon, Twilight Concert Series, and GLOW."

The list of administration, technology, and other additions, accompanied with data and graphs, is impressive. But the bottom line is that the department is still trying to do more with essentially the same amount of equipment and staff it had in 1982.

Question #2 - The recommendation to switch to tiered dispatch

Chief Ferguson writes that, "A number of EMS systems throughout the industrialized world have adopted a method of prescreening medical calls in order that most highly trained personnel on advanced life support (ALS) units remain available for critical life-saving emergencies. Tiered emergency medical dispatch (EMD) is a system of rapid telephone assessment from which

skilled call takers direct EMS response units to where they are most appropriately most needed.”

The proposal to combine SMPD and SMFD dispatch ignores that fact that SMPD dispatchers are not trained to the level of SMFD dispatchers with regards to Emergency Medical Dispatch. A combined dispatch center will compromise this level of service until all dispatchers become trained as a team.

Santa Monica residents still remember when SMFD dispatch was transferred to LAFD in order to save money – what a disaster that was!

SMFD has a Class 1 rating – why jeopardize that? It’s one thing to have SMPD and SMFD dispatchers working in the same location, but a different matter to have combined dispatch.

Chief Ferguson states that, “SMFD’s existing response model sends a fire engine staffed with a captain, engineer, and two paramedics, and a privately contracted ambulance staffed with two emergency medical technicians (EMT) to every medical call, regardless of the nature of the request. Without a tiered system there is a reasonable chance that our highest medically trained personnel may be out of service on a scrape or sprained ankle when a more critical 9-1-1 call for assistance is received within their first-due district.”

ALS units have always had the authority and ability to transfer a BLS call to EMTs if needed. This would be the case if a more critical call needed to be responded to by the committed ALS unit on the scene of a minor call. The ALS unit can get right back into service and, if necessary, leave one person with the victim and send the other 3 with the engine to a fire.

Chief Ferguson uses King County as an example of tiered dispatch increasing survival rates from cardiac arrest. However, King County Health Services credit entirely different factors for the increase:

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/news/2014/14051901.aspx>

The cardiac survival rate in King County has dramatically risen over the past decade or so, from an above-average 27 percent in 2002 to 62 percent in 2013. Strategies that have contributed to the rise include:

- *Adoption of high-performance CPR method by emergency medical technicians to maximize oxygen circulation and increase survival chances.*
- *Adoption of telecommunicator CPR, whereby 911 emergency personnel provide instant CPR instructions by phone.*
- *Increasing public availability of automated external defibrillators (AEDs), including more than 100 in King County facilities, and placement of AEDs in many law enforcement vehicles, including with King County Sheriff’s deputies.*
- *High rates of CPR training for local residents.*
- *A regional paramedic training program, funded by charitable contributions, that exceeds national standards for certification.*

- *“Our region's Medic One system is the gold standard for pre-hospital care and these steadily improving survival rate statistics are a testament to our paramedics and to the community's commitment to the Medic One Foundation,” said Jan Sprake, Executive Director for the Medic One Foundation.*
- *“King County's achievement is an incredible victory. The American Heart Association has always been an advocate for community CPR training, AED placement in the community, and research-based techniques for effective CPR. We are thrilled to see that all of us working together is resulting in even more lives saved in our region,” said Cheryl Dale, Executive Director, American Heart Association Puget Sound Division.*

Chief Ferguson states that, “A number of Los Angeles County Fire Departments also engage in tiered dispatching, including the cities of Long Beach, Pasadena and most recently Downey. When the Downey Fire Chief was asked to share his regional dispatch center's data related to the accuracy of the new dispatch triaging efforts, he provided the following response statistics for Downey, Vernon, La Habra Heights, Santa Fe Springs, and Compton (6-3-13 thru 8-7-14):

During this time the dispatch center had 24,588 EMS calls. Of those, 755 calls were coded (BLS) by dispatch under the tiered code (3%). Of that total number, there were only 7 “upgrades” which required an ALS unit to be sent after the initial tiered dispatch. Those individual calls are reviewed by the dispatch supervisor and our nurse educator for quality assurance purposes. All were attributed to Captains who were initially uncomfortable with the implementation of the tiered program.

If we understand this correctly, after Downey switched to tiered dispatch, only 3% of the calls were coded BLS. Why bother switching to tiered dispatch for only 3% of calls?

It should be reiterated that, while a number of these agencies, have successfully used a full tiering system that responds BLS resources to low acuity calls, discussions in Santa Monica have focused on a more conservative approach - all calls, regardless of their nature, would receive at least 1 BLS ambulance and one ALS rescue ambulance staffed with two paramedics (4 total personnel).

Fire departments used tiered dispatch for a number of reasons: money, staffing, a large area to cover, etc. SMFD uses tiered dispatch in fire dispatching, i.e., bells, smell of smoke don't automatically lead to a structure response.

But with medical emergency calls, survival rates improve due to early and good citizen CPR followed by paramedic intervention. Tiered dispatch for medical emergency calls works with an acceptable error rate. Is this what citizens of Santa Monica want, and are we really so financially strapped that this should be an option?

As previously stated, adding one full ALS Engine Company would resolve this issue, and SMFD would not need to revert back to tiered dispatching. The current SMFD system is working. There does not appear to be a financial crisis in the City of Santa Monica that would require reverting back to a tiered dispatching system in order to save money and reduce the level of response to medical emergency calls.

Question #3 - Hiring and promotional practices involving Fire Department and Human Resource Department

Chief Ferguson states that, “The City of Santa Monica Human Resources Department is responsible for the coordination of identifying qualified candidate pools for a variety of positions throughout the City. In some instances the City utilizes the services of a recruiter for high-level executive positions. Adding to this transparency, the SMFD affords a representative of the Fire Association the opportunity to sit in on all final interviews.

Given Deputy Chief Clemo’s apparent errors in judgment, which we’ve described above, we’re curious as to who was responsible for vetting his resume and doing a background check. Who did the background check, and who decided that an applicant who had never been a paramedic, and may not even have a current EMT certificate, was qualified to supervise paramedics and EMTs? Residents, workers, and visitors are put at risk when the most qualified applicants, including those from within the department, are not hired for these important posts.

Terry Garrison

Chief Ferguson states that, “The City utilized the services of an executive recruiting firm for the search to replace the retired Fire Chief in 2010. The recruiter arranged for all advertising, targeted outreach for potential applicants and conducted all screening of the candidates. Mr. Garrison was among the applicants presented to the City as potential candidates for the Fire Chief position. To protect their privacy, it is not the City’s practice to disclose reasons why individuals are included or not included in the recruitment process. However, we can confirm that Mr. Garrison was not included in the final interviews that were conducted by the City. No further information can be provided.”

We understand personnel protocol, but no explanation is provided as to why Terry Garrison, who was assistant chief in Phoenix, and was subsequently hired as fire chief in Houston, did not rate an interview for Fire Chief in Santa Monica. When someone of that caliber is not even afforded an interview for an opening here, residents can only conclude that something is very wrong with the local hiring process, and we would like to know what has been done to correct this.

Santa Monica residents expect the City Manager and Human Resources to select, interview, and hire the best qualified candidates. When someone like Terry Garrison is not even considered at the time that Chief Ferguson was hired, and when a Battalion Chief from within the department with a resume that exceeds that of Deputy Chief Clemo’s is passed over, we feel that our safety is being put at risk, and we want to know why.

Trend to hire from the outside

Chief Ferguson’s letter states that “Out of the last 26 examinations, the SMFD has hired just two personnel (Fire Chief and Deputy Operations Chief) from outside the department, and has committed to recruiting internally for the next Deputy Chief vacancy expected in December of 2014. This represents a long history of recruiting internally for positions solely from within the department. All promotional opportunities are managed exclusively from within the City. Conversely, open, competitive examinations allow for both internal employees, as well as those who do not currently work for the City of Santa Monica to apply.

No explanation is provided as to why Chief Ferguson initially requested approval from Human Resources and the City Manager to proceed with an inside-the-department exam for Deputy Chief of Operations in 2011 and then, after one of the Battalion Chiefs who had applied for the job passed the exam, did an about face, told that successful candidate that he “wasn’t a good fit,” and started recruiting from outside the department.

Deputy Chief Clemo seems to have made errors in judgment that wouldn't have happened if Division Chief Torres had been hired/promoted.

Training of evaluators

The Director of Human Resources writes, "Regarding the evaluation of candidates by outside raters, all individuals who assist the City of Santa Monica on interview panels are subject matter experts in their respective fields.... Additionally, while it is the policy of the City to keep this information confidential, the assertions made within your comments related to the scoring of the candidate in question, are inaccurate."

Which part of the following information from our August 27, 2014 letter was inaccurate?

"It seems that qualified and experienced SMFD firefighters who have applied for various promotions may have sometimes been passed over in favor of younger, less experienced employees. One candidate for promotion, who had passed the written exam; had 29 years of experience as a firefighter; had 27 years of experience as a licensed paramedic; had earned two college degrees (Public Fire Service and Fire Administration); had been a Fire Academy instructor; had been a clinical instructor for a paramedic training program connected with UCLA; had certification from the State of California as Firefighter 1, Firefighter 2, Fire Officer, Incident Command, and Wildland Fire Behavior; had taken the National Fire Academy Course in Emergency Response to Terrorism; had been certified as an Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighter; and had training regarding Hazardous Materials, nevertheless failed the oral interview.

When he asked Human Resources why he had been passed over, the head of Human Resources informed him that one of the interviewers had marked a "zero" on training and a "zero" on education."

From what we understand, that same interviewer had been promoted by Chief Ferguson while he was with his previous department and, after failing this SMFD candidate, that same interviewer was subsequently fired. How is the safety of our community enhanced when lesser qualified individuals are hired for important posts?

Departure of staff

Finally, in the last several years a large number of City of Santa Monica employees of the baby boomer generation have reached retirement age. This has provided them the opportunity to retire following long careers with the City. The Fire Department is no exception. In fact this is happening in Fire Departments all over the country creating vacancies in a variety of positions. Staff in the Santa Monica Fire Department is taking advantage of promotional opportunities to advance their careers, not only within the City, but in other agencies as well....

– Donna Peter, Human Resource Director

There is a feeling that some of the departures since 2010 have more to do with SMFD management and leadership style, as well as the actions of the Human Resources Department, and less to do with the desire to retire early or seek promotional opportunities elsewhere.

Question #4 - An investigation regarding aged discrimination within the Fire Department

"Due to privacy rights, the City of Santa Monica cannot discuss individual personnel complaints....it should be noted that some statements quoted in your email were taken out of context and not entirely accurate."

– Donna Peter, Human Resource Director

In a January 2014 letter from the head of Human Resources, Chief Ferguson is described as referring to an older employee as “a 50-year-old knuckle dragger” and to some age 40+ employees as “dinosaur” and “old guy” in conversations or writings. The Human Resources letter continues, “While the comments did not appear frequent or pervasive, they do constitute a violation of the Department’s Code of Conduct.”

Ms. Peter can say that we’re taking those quotes out of context, but her letter speaks for itself.

If residents continue to hear complaints from city employees about hiring practices and age discrimination, we will advocate for another independent investigation.

Question #5 - The possible downside of combining Police and Fire Dispatch

The purpose of consolidating the Santa Monica Police and Fire 9-1-1 dispatch centers is to speed the provision of accurate information to first responders to improve outcomes.

To become proficient as a Police or Fire dispatcher takes years. How reasonable is it to expect them to quickly become proficient in a different discipline without specialized training? Could the Fire Chief switch to Police Chief without years of training? The City of Torrance recently switched to combined dispatch. How did that work out? Is there a study showing that the change improved service?

Questions #6 - Failure to staff the specialized aircraft rig near Santa Monica airport 24/7

Chief Ferguson states that, “The SMFD currently maintains one primary and one reserve Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting (ARFF) crash unit for response to the airport and surrounding properties. The apparatus is cross-staffed with personnel from Fire Station #5....some consideration has been given to moving the hazardous materials driver and apparatus from Station 3 to Station 5, allowing for a more dedicated training and response effort.”

The Chief refers to the September 2013 jet accident and notes the quick response time, but he fails to mention that the response was quick only because Engine Company 5 happened to be at the station, because they’re well-trained, and because the crash occurred right around the corner from the station.

This was a matter of luck. If Engine 5 had been out on another call, the response time would have been much slower. As call loads increase, so does the amount of time that the station is vacant. So Chief Ferguson’s response evaded the point of the question, and this diminishes our faith in him because he’s trying to make us feel secure when there is no security for residents with an unmanned Aircraft Crash Rig. This is a low frequency but high risk situation.

Jet traffic at SMO is increasing again this year and may top its previous high of 18,575 landings and takeoffs per year (about 50 per day). There are still no Runway Safety Areas or Runway Protection Zones at SMO. As a result, residents have assumed that the Aircraft Crash Rig was

staffed 24/7 and are quite disheartened to discover that neither the Fire Chief nor the City Manager seem to think that this is a priority.

Final Thought

Despite Chief Ferguson's words of praise in his closing statement, he seems to believe that the department is broken and must be fixed his way. As a result, he does not seem to listen to his qualified subordinates or value their expertise, but rather acts only on his own beliefs.

The Chief states in his letter that he "would place the passion and dedication of our Santa Monica Firefighters against any other agency in the country – period."

Yet, in a January 2014 letter from the head of Human Resources, he is described as referring to an older employee as "a 50-year-old knuckle dragger" and to some age 40+ employees as "dinosaur" and "old guy" in conversations or writings. Is this an example of integrity and leadership?

How can residents have confidence in Chief Ferguson and Deputy Chief Clemo, given the information in this letter? How can we have confidence in the practices of the Human Resources Department when qualified staff members from within the department are passed over in favor of seemingly less qualified applicants from outside, and when a highly qualified applicant such as Terry Garrison is not even afforded an interview?

Public safety is supposed to be the highest priority of city government. It seems that the public's safety is put at risk when less-than-the-best candidates are hired for positions of authority.

October 15th memo

Regarding the October 15, 2014 memo from Chief Ferguson:

- 1) He is still moving forward with combining Police and Fire dispatch.*
- 2) Re the exam for Deputy Chief, he has agreed to keep the position in house. But the question is why the minimum qualifications in experience and education were not also dropped for the Fire Marshal's position, when there were only two internal applicants. Why did he not go to the outside for this position, as he did for the Deputy Chief's position when Tom Clemo was hired? The hiring practices seem to be inconsistent.*
- 3) When Deputy Chief Davis retires, the Chief plans to move Deputy Chief Clemo from Operations to Administration, which is undoubtedly an improvement. Ms. Peter stated in her letter that the baby boomer generation is reaching retirement age and that this is "creating vacancies in a variety of positions. Staff in the Santa Monica Fire Department is taking advantage of promotional opportunities to advance their careers, not only within the City, but in other agencies as well...."*

From the point of view of the FOSP Board, Deputy Chief Clemo's resignation from SMFD in order to advance his career in some other city's fire department would be welcome.

4) *The memo states that during the first quarter of 2015, the department will hire 6 firefighters to staff one 24-hour paramedic rescue ambulance. There has been mention of stationing this rescue ambulance on the south side of town. If paramedic staffing is to be increased in our area, we would prefer continuation of the 4-person response model, rather than depending upon a Police dispatcher to decide when our emergencies require 2-person or 4-person response.*

When our FOSP president phoned 9-1-1 a few years ago to report that her 98-year old mother was vomiting, a civilian without medical training did not have to decide whether this merited BLS or ALS response. A 4-person engine company was automatically sent, they stabilized the patient, who was suffering from heart block (severe arrhythmia,) and contacted the ER at St. John's so that when the ambulance arrived, the staff was prepared to deal with the patient, who lived another six months, thanks to the SMFD. A 2-person crew would not have been able to simultaneously stabilize the victim and contact the hospital.

5) "A small team of Operations/EMS personnel will work to design/affirm a conservative tiering system that would send a paramedic RA and our EMT transport provider on BLS calls for service."

Again, we strongly oppose the department moving back to tiered dispatch, especially at the same time that Police and Fire dispatch are being combined. This seems like a recipe for disaster.

6) *The Fire Chief states that since the firefighters union wants to stick with 4-person response units, he considers that they have "opted out of the staff and deployment discussions" and he will "keep them well informed" about what he decides to do "in the coming years."*

Anyone who reads the Los Angeles Times is aware of how well this "top down" autocratic style of management has worked for LAUSD Superintendent John Deasy.

In conclusion, the Santa Monica Fire Department has been providing excellent service to the City of Santa Monica for 125 years. It was here before Chief Ferguson and Deputy Chief Clemo, and it will be here long after they are gone.

We believe that Santa Monica firefighters want to continue to provide excellent service, and that they are committed to this despite what some of them, as well as the Friends of Sunset Park Board, consider a lack of effective leadership from these two gentlemen.