

Resolution of the Arlington County Civic Federation
October 2, 2001
Improving the number of building fire inspections

Whereas, once commercial and government buildings are constructed and occupied, it is the responsibility of the Arlington County Fire Department (ACFD) to inspect all of them annually for fire code violations; and

Whereas, there are approximately 6,000 properties in Arlington that require inspection every year, including child day care centers, schools, health care centers and residential facilities for the frail elderly; and

Whereas, safety inspections are an effective way to prevent structural fires and save lives; and

Whereas, building safety inspections are a primary line of defense against fire, especially in buildings where suppression equipment cannot reach; and

Whereas, the County Board admits “current staffing levels are unable to provide adequate inspection services that are required. Last year we were only able to inspect and test 40 percent of all high-rise buildings; the state law and County Code require 100 percent;” and

Whereas, currently 100% of fire inspections in high-rise buildings fail; and

Whereas, with the additional construction of high-rise buildings and increased building density in Arlington County, the workload for the inspections program is expected to expand. Without additional staff, the number of inspections completed will decrease, endangering the lives and property of people who live and/or work in Arlington County; and

Whereas, a December 2000 needs assessment study by the TriData Corporation for the ACFD recommended that Arlington County add two inspectors, one per year over the next two years, to meet the Fire Department’s inspection responsibilities; and

Whereas, TriData is an internationally recognized expert in research and management studies, and training and technical assistance in the areas of fire protection, emergency medical services and emergency management; and

Whereas, the TriData study categorized the need to hire additional safety inspectors as an “immediate” priority (the highest priority); and

Whereas, Arlington County is expected to close FY 2001 with a multi-million dollar budget surplus, enabling the County to make significant headway in hiring the personnel necessary to improve the number of inspections every year, especially in high-risk, high-density high-rise buildings.

Be it resolved, that the County Board should reaffirm its commitment to the health and safety of all Arlingtonians and the protection of public-use property against fire by following the recommendations of the TriData study and hire at least two full-time fire safety inspectors to the Arlington County Fire Department.

Further, the Civic Federation requests that the Arlington County Board, in conjunction with the ACFD, establish performance measures to monitor the number of building safety inspections completed every year. These measures shall include, but are not limited to:

- Percent of “inspectable” properties inspected per year, by category of occupancy (e.g. Assembly, Business, Educational, High-Hazard, Mercantile, etc);
- Number and percent of violations found, by category of occupancy;
- Number and percent of violations re-inspected, by category of occupancy;
- Number and percent of violations cleared, by category of occupancy;
- The number of emergency incidents of “inspectable” properties requiring an ACFD response, and the estimated dollar loss and casualties associated with them, by type of incident (e.g. fire, gas leak, etc.);
- An “Honor Roll” the names and locations of “inspectable” properties that have attained three consecutive years of “passing” grades in their annual fire inspection; and

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Further, the Civic Federation requests that these performance measures be compiled in a single report that is updated and made public every year; and

Further, copies of this report shall be distributed as follows:

- One (1) copy shall be posted on the Arlington County web site, www.co.arlington.va.us;
- Three (3) copies shall be sent to every public library in Arlington County;
- One copy (1) shall be sent to the president of every citizens’ association registered with the County;
- One copy (1) shall be sent to the President of the Arlington County Civic Federation
- Additional copies shall be made available to the public upon request.

Further, the Arlington County Civic Federation respectfully requests that the Arlington County Board respond in writing to this resolution no later than 30 days after adopting the FY 2003 Arlington County Budget. The response should include a summary of actions taken by the County Board in the FY 2003 budget to implement the recommendations made in this resolution.

AMENDMENT #1: Whereas it is valuable to the safety of occupants of all high rise buildings that fire safety be a part of the plans review and final sign off process, be it resolved that the Chief Fire Marshall be included in all plan reviews prior to approval of new construction projects. (APPROVED BY VOICE VOTE).

AMENDMENT #2: Reword the first paragraph of the “Be it resolved” statements to reflect the following: “...that the County Board should reaffirm its commitment to the health and safety of all Arlingtonians and the protection of public-use property against fire by following the recommendations of the TriData study and hire at least two full-time fire safety inspectors to the Arlington County Fire Department no later than FY 2003. (APPROVED BY VOICE VOTE).

Resolution of the Arlington County Civic Federation October 2, 2001 Meeting minimal staffing recommendations for fire suppression units

Whereas, it is the mission of the Arlington County Fire Department (ACFD) to provide essential emergency services, including an effective response to fire; and

Whereas, federal regulations require all firefighters to follow the “Two In/Two Out Rule” when conducting interior structural firefighting. This regulation states that the ACFD must ensure that at least two firefighters enter an IDLH atmosphere and remain in visual or voice contact with one another at all times (“Two In”) and at least two employees must be located safely outside to provide backup (“Two Out”).

Whereas, because of the Two In/Two Out Rule, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) mandates that a minimum acceptable fire company staffing level shall be four members responding on or arriving with each engine and each ladder company responding to any type of fire; and

Whereas, a first-arriving engine with four personnel can accomplish more in the early stages of a fire than an engine company staffed with only three: it can divide into two-person teams, meet the Two In/Two Out Rule, and immediately begin firefighting operations; and

Whereas, time is most critical in regards to effecting a rescue or making headway on controlling a fire, and four-person teams on firefighting equipment allow for a quicker and more effective attack in many circumstances; and

Whereas, meeting the four-man staffing requirement allows Arlington County to maximize efficient use of its fire suppression equipment and allow the County to rely less on mutual aid from other jurisdictions; and

Whereas, in Arlington County, eight (8) of the County's fourteen (14) engine and truck companies do not comply with the NFPA's standards. As a result, responding firefighters may have to wait for additional personnel to arrive on-scene before interior structural firefighting can begin; and

Whereas, waiting for additional personnel in order to comply with the Two In/Two Out Rule could endanger the lives of firefighters once they finally commence interior structural firefighting and could further exacerbate property loss; and

Whereas, a December 2000 needs assessment study by the TriData Corporation for the Arlington County Fire Department recommended that Arlington County increase the number of Fire Department FTEs to meet the NFPA staffing standards; and

Whereas, TriData is an internationally recognized expert in research and management studies, and training and technical assistance in the areas of fire protection, emergency medical services and emergency management; and

Whereas, the TriData study categorized compliance as an "immediate" priority by its research team (the highest priority) ; and

Whereas, Arlington County is expected to close FY 2001 with a multi-million dollar budget surplus, enabling the County to make significant headway in hiring the personnel necessary to meet this nationally recognized minimum safety standard for firefighters; and

Whereas, the ACFD's failure to meet national minimum staffing standards can be attributed to a decade of neglect towards Arlington's public safety services by the County Board.

Be it resolved that the Arlington County Civic Federation strongly recommends that the County Board provide the Fire Department with the budget authority necessary to phase-in an increase in the number of FTEs required over an appropriate period of time (no more than five years) until the minimum national staffing requirements for fire suppression units have been satisfied.

Further, the Civic Federation requests that the Arlington County Board, in conjunction with the ACFD, establish performance measures to monitor the emergency services provided by the AFDC. These measures shall include, but are not limited to:

- Monthly mutual aid statistics for both the AFDC and outside jurisdictions that provide fire services in Arlington County:
- Inbound: aid rendered in Arlington County by fire companies domiciled outside Arlington County; and
- Outbound: aid rendered by the AFDC to jurisdictions outside Arlington County
- Monthly average engagement times for both the AFDC and outside jurisdictions that provide fire services in Arlington County, where "engagement time" is defined as the elapsed time between receipt of an emergency call and the responding unit's ability to render physical aid; and
- The Number and type of emergency response calls, by month; and

Further, the Civic Federation requests that these performance measures be compiled in a single report that is updated and made public every year; and

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Further, the Arlington County Civic Federation respectfully requests that the Arlington County Board respond in writing to this resolution no later than 30 days after adopting the FY 2003 Arlington County Budget. The response should include a summary of actions by the County Board in the FY 2003 budget to help the ACFD move towards compliance.