



CITY OF BETHLEHEM

10 E. Church Street, Bethlehem, PA 18018-6025

To: Grace Crampsie Smith, Chair of Finance Committee
From: Eric R. Evans, Business Administrator
Michael Reich, Fire Chief
Date: 7/8/2024
Subject: Up to 9 Cadets to Fire Academy

Action Requested: Budget Adjustment (Ordinance)

Proposed Transaction:

REVENUE					
<u>Account #</u>	<u>Account Title</u>	<u>From</u>		<u>To</u>	<u>Change</u>
001A-30850	Investment Interest	\$ 800,000	\$	1,160,000	\$ 360,000
				Total	\$ 360,000
EXPENSE					
<u>Account #</u>	<u>Account Title</u>	<u>From</u>		<u>To</u>	<u>Change</u>
0701-40001	Salaries	\$ 8,583,016	\$	8,763,016	\$ 180,000
0701-41016	Uniforms/Training Shoes	\$ 223,000	\$	295,000	\$ 72,000
0701-42032	Training	\$ 114,000	\$	222,000	\$ 108,000
				Total	\$ 360,000

Reason for Proposal:

Memo attached

This transaction will amend the total General Fund budget from \$113,589,955 to \$ 113,949,955.

Thank you for your consideration.



CITY OF BETHLEHEM

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To: Grace Crampsie Smith, Chair of Finance Committee

From: Eric R. Evans, Business Administrator

Michael Reich, Fire Chief

RE: Up to 9 Cadets to Fire Academy

Date: July 8, 2024

Each year, Fire Department staffing levels are reviewed, and the city hires enough recruits to send to the Allentown Fire Academy to fill the number of open positions available. As illustrated below, over the past decade, the Fire Department has enrolled an average of 3 recruits into the academy each year. Listed below is the number of recruits enrolled each year since 2015:

'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23	'24
0	6	0	7	5	3	0	0	0	8

In 2020 and 2021 there was zero turnover in the Fire Department and no open positions, so we did not send any recruits to the 2021 or 2022 academies. In January 2023, the first vacancy in a couple years occurred, but it was announced within weeks of the start of the academy, too late for enrollment. During the remainder of 2023 turnover did occur, and we worked to hire enough new recruits to fill the number of open positions. In early February 2024, the City of Bethlehem enrolled 8 recruits in the Allentown Fire Academy.

The 8 new hires in 2024 filled all but 3 of the budgeted positions (103 of the 106) in the Fire Department. (3 positions were held open to account for 3 ongoing arbitration cases.) However, since the academy began, 8 additional positions have become vacant, for a variety of reasons. In addition, a cadet that was enrolled in the 2024 academy was injured during training and had to withdraw.

The Allentown Academy has great proximity and is well-run. Unfortunately, Allentown only runs one academy each year, from February until June. In pursuit of the best path forward to fill the positions, the option of enrolling cadets in another academy in the summer/fall was investigated, versus waiting until February 2025 for Allentown's next academy.

Chief Reich and Training Captain Griffin researched a number of fire academies in eastern Pennsylvania, and felt the academy offered by Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) was the best option to consider. After multiple phone calls and email conversations, Chief Reich and Captain Griffin visited HACC in late-June to tour the facility and meet with the program's coordinator. The HACC academy begins on August 19th and the pricing per cadet is listed below. The tuition at Allentown is nearly identical (\$8,000 in 2024), but lodging will be an increased cost. However, if the choice is made to wait for the next Allentown academy to graduate in June of 2025, the department would be short-staffed for an extended period, and overtime costs generated would exceed the increased costs associated with the lodging expense for the HACC academy.

HACC Academy	\$ 7,800
Gear rental (expense is incurred with either academy)	\$ 622
Lodging (\$185 x 19 weeks at Central Penn College)	<u>\$ 3,515</u>
Total Academy	\$11,937

There are additional associated expenses that are standard whenever we hire new firefighters, and they are listed below:

Station Uniforms	\$1,100
Class A Uniform	\$ 730
Fire Gear	\$4,400
Fire Boots	\$ 570
SCBA Facepiece	\$ 390
Badges	\$ 220
Office/School Supplies	<u>\$ 100</u>
Total Associated Hiring Expenses	\$7,510

The expense per cadet is \$19,447, plus salaries. After consideration of all factors, this request is to fund the HACC academy for "up to" 9 cadets. The hiring process is lengthy, and although it has been in process for some time, it is not known at this date how many current candidates will ultimately be qualified to receive employment offers from the city, or how many will accept the offers. Since there are 5 Tuesdays in July, waiting 3 more weeks until the next Council meeting on August 6th would be too late to present this request, as the HACC academy begins on August 19th. If this requested action is approved, and the actual number of qualified candidates that were offered and accepted positions is less than 9, we will report the results at the next meeting and propose an amendment to decrease this requested action accordingly (\$40,000 per cadet), before the second/final vote.

Funding for this requested action will be provided with excess Investment Interest revenue. In late 2023, forecasters were projecting multiple interest rate cuts in 2024, and we budgeted accordingly. No cuts have taken place to date, and Investment Interest will exceed the 2024 budgeted amount.