



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
City Commission Agenda Memo
CONFERENCE MEETING

#21-0640

TO: Honorable Mayor & Members of the
Fort Lauderdale City Commission

FROM: Chris Lagerbloom, ICMA-CM, City Manager

DATE: June 15, 2021

TITLE: Addressing Diversity Recruitment Hiring for Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue
Discussion - **(Commission Districts 1, 2, 3 and 4)**

In June 1980, the City of Fort Lauderdale ("City") entered into a consent decree ("Decree") with the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) that committed City staff to take measures to increase the diversity in the recruitment of black and female police officers and firefighters (Exhibit 1). Through the 41 years that followed, progress was made in the recruitment of black and female police officers and female firefighters, causing the DOJ to dissolve the portions of the Decree relative to those population groups. The DOJ is of the opinion that the City "has been fully compliant with its obligations" in the recruitment of black firefighters, notably, DOJ has never pursued action against the City for non-compliance. In an effort to address a number of outdated consent decrees nationwide, the DOJ has communicated to the City that it wishes to dissolve the remaining portion of the Decree related to the recruitment of black firefighters.

Moving forward, City staff developed the improved initiatives to address recruitment and hiring processes. As such, current and proposed enhanced recruitment and hiring practices are on the horizon.

Staff proposes the following:

1. Change the structure of the oral boards in the recruitment process. The current structure must anticipate and achieve a truly diverse approach to the oral board panels. The oral boards have been organized by the staff of the Fire Department, but future ones will be organized and approved by the Human Resources Department that will allow and encourage a diverse perspective provided by external panelists from area Fire Departments.
2. Remove swim test requirement as a condition of employment. Because of Fort Lauderdale's location by the ocean, and the number of waterways in the City, the Fire Department has historically required candidates to have the ability to swim prior to being hired as a firefighter as part of the rescue component of the position.

Review of the recruitment process has shown that this requirement has presented a barrier to black candidates and is a step in the process where they are eliminated. We agree that the ability to swim is important for the rescue function, but it is a skill that can be learned post-employment and can be proposed as a condition for continued employment.

3. Examine the scoring of candidates in the recruitment process. With the implementation of a pilot program to apply a banding process for scoring, we can increase the number of black candidates advancing for selection without lowering the standards set by the Fire Department.
4. Ensure and invest in a community-engaged recruitment team. We propose to identify a qualified and active group of City employees to act as ambassadors and recruiters to attend and create events to specifically engage the public, showing the many faces of our Fire Department and the value we attach to their work.
5. Relax the requirement for a paramedic certification as a condition of employment. This is a considerable cultural shift that will require discussion with the leadership of the International Firefighters Association (IAFF). Historically, the City has changed the approach regarding the need for every firefighter to hold a paramedic certification. Again, this requirement has proven to be a barrier for black candidates. While the City still needs to have firefighters hold the certification, it can be obtained post-hire and staffing can be managed to accommodate those who do not hold the certification.
6. Expand and invest in the current Explorer program to encourage more youth to consider firefighting as a career. This initiative is connected to initiative #4 in that it involves engaging our community and promoting the variety of disciplines involved in fire suppression and prevention, as well as the emergency response and rescue functions of the fire service.

Due to the length of the recruitment process and the need to develop recruitment sources that include our youth, these initiatives likely will not be realized in the short term. Rather, they present a cultural shift in the Fire-Rescue Department, which is always a long-term endeavor requiring diligence and patience. The issue is compounded by the current number of black firefighters who will become eligible to retire from the City over the next five years. This will further challenge us to find new qualified candidates to keep the Fire-Rescue Department reflective of the community we serve.

Resource Impact

There is fiscal impact with this action.

Strategic Connections

This item supports the *Press Play Fort Lauderdale 2024 Strategic Plan*, specifically advancing:

- The Internal Support Focus Area
- Goal 7: Build a values-based organization dedicated to developing and retaining qualified employees
- Objective: Establish an organizational culture that fosters rewarding, professional careers

This item advances the *Fast Forward Fort Lauderdale 2035* Vision Plan: We Are United.

Attachment

Exhibit 1 - Consent Decree

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