

# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Robert Sapien, Jr.

**SUBJECT:** EMERGENCY MEDICAL  
SERVICES FIELD  
COORDINATOR (MED 30)

**DATE:** December 17, 2023

Approved



Date 12/20/23

## INFORMATION

The Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Proposed Operating Budget included the elimination of 3.0 Fire Captain positions (\$1,182,351) assigned to the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Field Coordinator function (MED 30). Responsibilities previously assigned to that function were to be distributed as appropriate within the Fire Department. The City Council's budget deliberation resulted in the direction for continued funding of the 3.0 Fire Captain positions for six-months (\$565,607),<sup>1</sup> with costs offset by partial funding of other approved items, and that the Administration provide City Council with an update on the outcomes upon further evaluation of the MED 30 elimination plan prior to the 2023-2024 Mid-Year Budget Review.

Since the Adopted Budget was approved additional and unusual workload resulting from persisting challenges related to the paramedic shortage in the County of Santa Clara (County) EMS system has resulted in significantly greater workload for the Department relative to its 911 Emergency Medical Services Provider Agreement with the County of Santa Clara<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, the Administration determined a need for \$282,804 to continue to staff the MED 30 program through March 2, 2024.

On October 16, 2023, the City Council conducted a study session on *Santa Clara County 9-1-1 Ambulance Services* where the Fire Department presented information on the issues trending in the provision of the EMS system<sup>3</sup>, including increases in the unavailability of County ambulance resources and the impacts on the Fire Department services. In Fiscal Year 2022-2023, the lack of available County ambulances resulted in over 700 Fire Department Rescue Medic transports and 800 instances where Firefighter/Paramedics rode in County ambulances to maintain Advanced Life Support patient care to the hospital. In October 2023, the Fire Department conducted over 200 Rescue Medic transports in-lieu of unavailable County ambulances. The **Chart** below

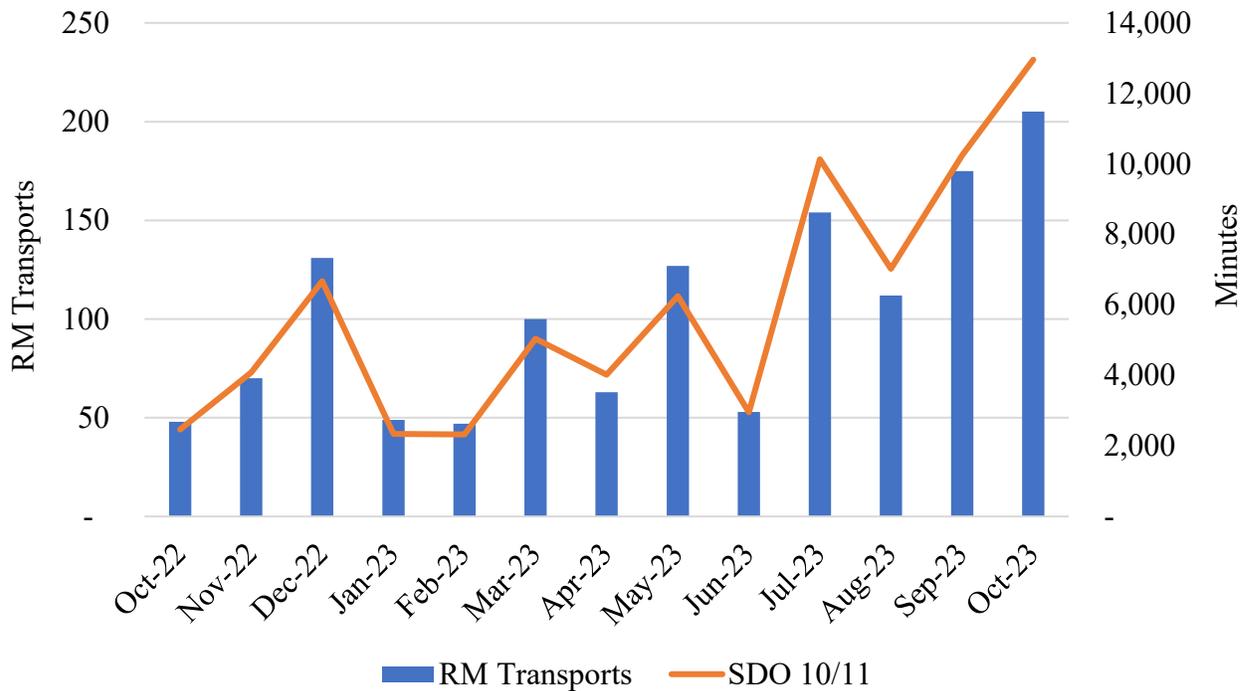
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/99474/638248657944270000>

<sup>2</sup> <https://emsagency.sccgov.org/sites/g/files/exjcpb266/files/General/CityofSanJoseEMSAgreementAmendments20181231.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sanjose.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=12366820&GUID=CF5EDE39-4F02-44B0-88DC-14F5272E9DCE>

provides the number of Fire Department ambulance transports and County special dispatch order activations that were ordered due to limited County ambulance availability.

Chart: Rescue Medic Transports vs. Standard Dispatch Order (SDO) 10/11<sup>4</sup> Activations



On December 14, 2023, the County’s EMS presented a report<sup>5</sup> to the County’s Health and Hospital Committee that detailed a remediation plan to address County ambulance response time delays. In this report, the County EMS referenced a reduced frequency of activation of Standard Dispatch Order (SDO) 17<sup>6</sup>. It should be noted that despite the reduction of SDO 17 activations, the Fire Department continues to experience unprecedented reliance on Rescue Medics for patient transports, as SDO 10<sup>7</sup> and SDO 11<sup>8</sup> activations have persisted.

<sup>4</sup> County EMS activates these two standard dispatch orders when County ambulance availability is depleted, thus activating supplemental ambulances provided by fire departments to perform emergency transport functions within their jurisdiction in lieu of unavailable county ambulances.

<sup>5</sup> [https://sccgov.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail\\_LegiFile.aspx?Frame=&MeetingID=14751&MediaPosition=&ID=118533&CssClass=](https://sccgov.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail_LegiFile.aspx?Frame=&MeetingID=14751&MediaPosition=&ID=118533&CssClass=)

<sup>6</sup> SDO 17: Automatic ambulance dispatches are suspended until a first response unit arrives on-the-scene and verifies that a patient needing emergency transport exists.

<sup>7</sup> SDO 10: Places all available Exclusive Operating Area (EOA) and Non-EOA ambulances in service.

<sup>8</sup> SDO 11: Notify Fire Departments with permitted ambulances that unrestricted use of fire-based ambulances have been authorized within their jurisdiction (Non-systemwide use).

In its report, the County EMS cited 30 vacant Paramedic positions that continue to impact County ambulance staffing levels. A short-term strategy referenced in the report detailed the increased deployment of Basic Life Support County ambulances without a Paramedic. This strategy, although expected to relieve the burden on County ambulances during its staffing shortages, will undoubtedly impact Fire Department operations by utilizing Firefighter Paramedics to accompany patients to emergency rooms when Advanced Life Support level care must be maintained.

With ambulance shortages impacting Fire Department operations daily, the Department has relied on MED 30 to monitor the EMS system status, engage the County EMS Duty Chiefs and Rural/Metro Ambulance Field Supervisors on the coordination of resources, monitor the receiving hospital emergency room status to determine patient destinations, facilitate the return of personnel and equipment from hospital emergency rooms back to their home fire stations, and facilitate the supply restock and completion of patient care reports involving ambulance transport. Additionally, MED 30 has been relied upon to support operations by providing Fire Communications and Battalion Chiefs updates on EMS system status and estimated resource commitment times for ambulance transports.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The Fire Department has continued its planning for redistributing the MED 30 program responsibilities upon elimination, however, the unexpected burdens created by current circumstances outlined above make the December 31, 2023 transition highly impractical. During this transition period staff will be focused on the following:

1. Continued monitoring and maintenance of daily operations, including facilitation of additional ambulance shortage burdens on Fire Department staff.
2. Engagement with the County EMS and County Administration to identify opportunities for improved system performance and sustainability.
3. Advance efforts towards implementing a system for medical insurance reimbursements. The Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Adopted Fees and Charges established the Ambulance Transport and User Fee that aligns with the County's Schedule of Ambulance and Transport User Fees for medical response services. The Fire Department is working closely with the Finance Department and is actively exploring ambulance billing and revenue recovery vendor options to begin services before June 30, 2024. Once implemented, the Fire Department expects to experience revenues, however, it is difficult to estimate due to the variability in payer circumstances and transport volume based on the County's exclusive provider resourcing.
4. Continued advancement of special studies toward the development of options to present to City Council for improved EMS delivery, cost recovery, and sustainability.

HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

December 17, 2023

**Subject: Emergency Medical Services Field Coordinator (MED 30)**

Page 4

The \$282,804 required to continue the MED 30 positions through March 2, 2024 will be drawn from the current Fire Department appropriation and through necessary adjustments made at the 2023-2024 Mid-Year Budget Review.



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