

## Staff Report

**EMERGENCY RESPONSE TIME POLICY GUIDANCE**

May 22, 2012

On April 24, 2012 the City staff presented a report regarding the topic of emergency response times for the City of Ames. This report was in response to the City Council's recent decision to allow growth to the southwest, northwest, and southwest in addition to discussions about expanding to 590<sup>th</sup> Street to the east. Based on current approach to measuring response times to these parts of the city would be outside of the City's goal. Therefore, the Council requested that the emergency response time issue be revisited and that other cities be survey to determine how they are addressing this issue.

The report concludes with a number of policy questions for the City Council to consider regarding this topic. It was agreed that Council would be prepared to give direction regarding the various policy issues at the next meeting. **The staff would appreciate direction regarding the following issues.**

**WHO SHOULD ADOPT THE RESPONSE TIME GOAL?**

It should be noted that most of the cities surveyed are relying on an internal Fire Department indicators which were not formally adopted by the City Council and most of these cities are not even meeting their stated goal.

Since the word "goal" carries the connotation that a city is bound to take action if the goal is not met, it may be more appropriate for the City Council not to formally approve a response time goal. **Rather, the staff would recommend that the Fire Department should track emergency response times as one of its many "performance measures" that are provided to the City Council to consider.**

**WHAT RESPONSE TIME SHOULD BE MEASURED?**

The decision as to what an appropriate emergency response time should be resides solely with the City Council. A review of the comparable cities that were surveyed indicates that there is no one preferred measurement. The measurements range from Ankeny's 80% within 8 minutes to Marshalltown's 100% within 4 minutes.

**Staff believes that a measurement of 85% of calls within a 5 minute travel time would be in the middle of the range for other comparable cities that were surveyed and, therefore, should be used as a performance measure.**

In addition, staff believes that it might be possible to have a different, longer response time performance measure for industrial areas, depending on how the area ultimately builds out. We will explore this possibility for the future.

## **HOW SHOULD RESPONSE TIME BE MEASURED?**

All of the surveyed cities measure response time based on actual calls for service. As we have shifted away from a targeted growth strategy and are poised to grow in four directions, our current technique for measuring response time based on area covered no longer seems warranted. **Therefore, staff believes it would be more advisable to measure response times based on actual calls.** Furthermore, In order to avoid aberrations that might occur from year to year, a rolling five year period should be used to accomplish this measurement.

**For purposes of informing the City Council of the possible impact of future land use decisions, the staff can now utilize more sophisticated GIS tools for planning purposes.** This technique would allow us to analyze response time patterns from existing developed areas in the city and project this information onto undeveloped areas that are being considered for annexation to better project anticipated response times from these new areas.

Another alternative suggested at our April 24<sup>th</sup> meeting would be to measure response time not only for actual calls, but also measure the percent of developed properties that fall within the proposed measurement of 85% within five minute travel time.

## **SHOULD THERE BE A SEPARATE RESPONSE TIME MEASURE FOR FIRE AND MEDICAL ASSIST CALLS?**

None of the cities surveyed measure response times for fire and medical calls separately. **Since Mary Greeley Medical Center is the primary provider of ambulance service in the community, staff believes the City should work with them to establish an appropriate medical response time measure as well as develop cost-effective options for achieving the performance expectation.**

Currently, the Medical Center is implementing a new computer-aided dispatching system. They have indicated more data is needed from this new system before they will be in a position to recommend a medical response time measure. **Until this happens, the City will be focusing on one performance measure.** We will, however, be analyzing all calls in more precise categories.

## **WHAT CITY COUNCIL DECISIONS CAN HELP THE CITY BETTER MEET THE RESPONSE TIME PERFORMANCE MEASURE?**

The staff pointed out in the April 24<sup>th</sup> report that the Council could consider two strategies to help the City better meet the response time performance measure.

First, when making LUPP and zoning decisions, the City Council could give more consideration locating high density residential and assisted living/retirement communities closer to the urban core. However, there was no indication from our survey that other cities have adopted this land use approach.

Second, the City Council could require more stringent fire protection requirements related to sprinklers, smoke detectors, construction standards. Here again, this approach would place out of the mainstream in comparison with other cities and at a competitive disadvantage for those considering developing in Ames.

This technique is utilized in the developer agreement with the owners of the Rose Prairie who are required to provide sprinklers in home in this proposed development. We have also included this requirement in proposed agreements with Hunizker and Quarry Estates. Due to our new approach to fire response performance measuring, the Council might want to revisit this requirement as we annex additional land to the north of the current City limits.