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Palo Alto Fire Department Staffing at Fire Station 4: Details & Next Steps

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Palo Alto Fire Department Staffing at Fire Station 4

This community update addresses concerns raised by some community members about Fire Department response capabilities, staffing levels, and specifically Fire Station 4 located on Middlefield Road. Also previewed is a near-term recommendation to prioritize staffing to add a fire engine at Fire Station 4.

The Palo Alto Fire Department (PAFD) provides fire protection and emergency medical transport throughout the City and Stanford. Following pandemic budget reductions that impacted all City departments and services, the Council has reinvested in fire services to rebuild operations. Additional investment in emergency medical and fire response supports the whole community and a near-term proposal to add a fire engine to the current ambulance staffing at Fire Station 4 will be considered by the City Council later in February. This recommendation supports emergency response citywide while long-term staffing and funding options continue to take shape to respond to changing service demand, population growth and other priorities.

Read on to learn more about the staffing proposal, Fire Station 4 replacement project status update, and ways to share feedback as the Council considers interim and longer-term fire service approaches.

Fire Department Resources Work Together Citywide to Respond to All Emergencies



PAFD Fire Engine (with water)

PAFD works as a citywide system to respond quickly to any incident type. PAFD provides fire protection and emergency medical services (EMS) throughout the City and Stanford, with 1.5% of all calls relating to fires. Palo Alto is unique as it manages its own emergency medical transport services, the only community that has this service delivery model in Santa Clara County.

In FY2021, due to budget constraints in response to the pandemic, the City Council reduced fire staffing and programming to address a \$40 million deficit. Impacts included brownouts at Fire Station 2 on nights and weekends. Enhancements have been made to reconfigure staffing and resources since that time. In FY2022, Council budget enhancements supported a communitywide approach, ensuring resources at all six stations based on service needs. As noted, these

changes have ensured consistent fire and emergency medical response citywide.

The City has 6 full time fire stations, with a total of 5 engines, one ladder truck, and 3 ambulances, with resources deployed strategically to be most effective for emergency response to the City's needs as a whole – not individual neighborhoods. For example, the City's single ladder truck is best stationed close to most of the City's high rises, which are Downtown and on Stanford's campus.

Response Times



PAFD Fire Truck (no water)

Response times for the first Fire Engine in Palo Alto and Stanford in 2024 was 8 minutes and 40 seconds (from time of the first 911 call to arrival of the first fire engine at a structure fire), measured at the 90th percentile. Palo Alto Fire Department resources are deployed to provide the best response times for all of Palo Alto and Stanford.

Specific to the neighborhood areas around Fire Station 4, 73% of emergency responses are medical emergencies, so having an ambulance at Fire Station 4 is very beneficial. The fire engines from Fire Stations 3 (Rinconada) and 5 (Juana Briones/Barron Park) respond to an incident in Fire Station 4's neighborhoods within the same time frame that any other neighborhoods receive.

A couple of examples of recent responses near Fire Station 4 to demonstrate response time include the Middlefield fire (impacting Philz, AJ's cleaners, Bills Cafe) where Engine 65 (from Fire Station 5) was the first engine to arrive, and did so in 8 minutes and 20 seconds. Engine 65 was also first to arrive at the most recent fire on Janice Way, and it did so in 8 minutes and 18 seconds. A recent article erroneously stated that a fire alarm at the Mitchell Park Library received a response that took 15 minutes. The most recent incident that matched the description was on May 22, 2024, at approximately 8 p.m. where Engine 65 arrived to the incident in 6 minutes and 54 seconds.

Fire Station 4 Near-Term Staffing Model Recommendation Details & Next Steps

In November, the PAFD Fire Chief and the Finance Committee held an in-depth discussion about how to work towards a longer-term staffing Fire Engine 4 and a peak hour ambulance (12 hours a day). The proposal included possible revenue to help offset staffing costs, such as grant funding and reevaluating fees for ambulance transport.

Staff is now advancing a near-term proposal to add a fire engine to the current ambulance at Fire Station 4. This near-term proposal, called cross-staffing, includes adding one additional person, on overtime, to Fire Station 4, for a total of three personnel. The three personnel would staff both the fire engine and the ambulance. This is consistent with pre-covid staffing at Fire Station 4. PAFD determines which apparatus (engine or ambulance) responds to a call based on the nature of the emergency. This proposal also involves putting into service one of PAFD's two reserve fire engines. Reserve engines support the Department's response to large-scale incidents state-wide and allow for seamless service to the City when apparatus require maintenance.

This near-term approach provides additional resources to the area and the City as a whole, while long-term staffing proposals and funding decisions continue. This recommendation will be presented as part of the City Council's mid-year budget actions slated for review on February 24, 2025. Should Council approve this recommendation, it would take about 30–60 days to implement.

Fire Station 4 Replacement Project Design Includes Room to Grow as Service Needs Change

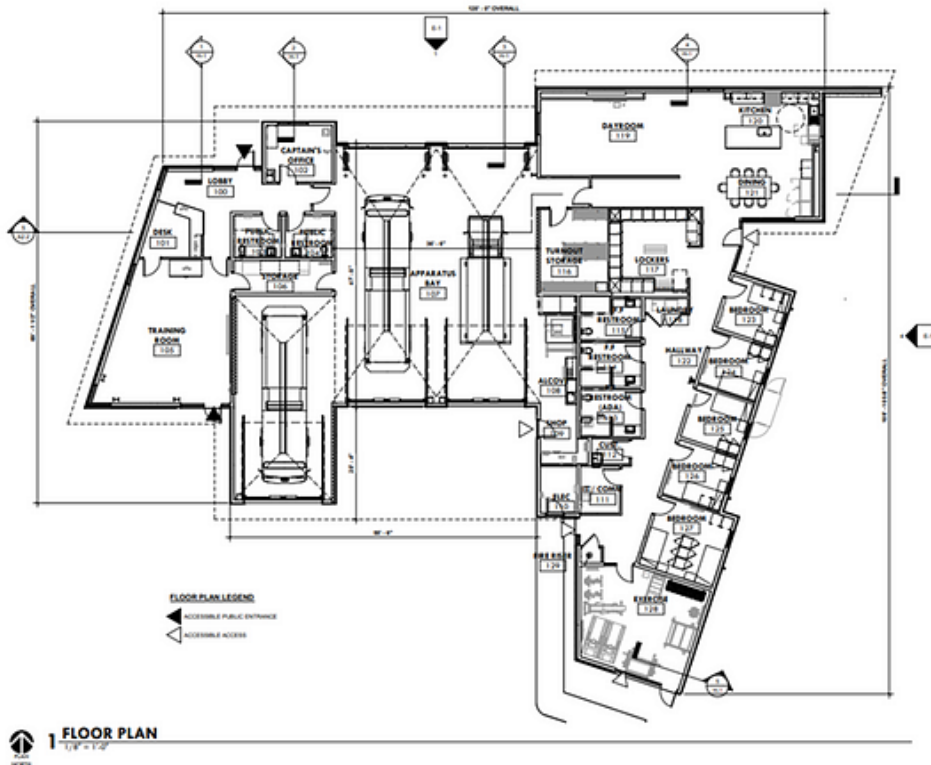
The City Council included the replacement of Fire Station N^o4 in the Infrastructure Plan approved in June 2014. The existing station can accommodate 3 personnel and 2 fire apparatus. The project is underway, and the approved design includes additional space, allowing it to grow with service level demands and population increases in this part of the City. The design includes accommodations for 5 personnel and 3 fire apparatus. The design supports the long-term plan to staff an engine and an ambulance at Fire Station 4 as soon as reasonably possible. The temporary Fire Station 4 at Cubberley also has the flexibility to support the interim approach noted above adding 1 firefighter and the fire engine.

Construction of Fire Station 4 is expected to begin in the summer of 2025, with a projected build time of 2 years.

Find more project details [here](#).



Fire Station 4 Replacement Project Design (front)



PALO ALTO FIRE DEPARTMENT
STATION 4 REPLACEMENT
 3000 WASHINGTON ROAD
 PALO ALTO, CA 94303
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Fire Station 4 Replacement Project Design

Next Steps

Mid-Year Budget -The City Council will consider Mid-Year Budget actions on February 24, 2025. The meeting packet will be released on February 13 and when published can be found at www.cityofpaloalto.org/councilagendas.

FY 2025–26 Budget -Following the Council actions on February 24, the City Council will consider the Fiscal Year 2025–2026 budget through public hearings at the Finance Committee in May and Council discussions in May and June. All meetings are open to the public and information will be posted

at www.cityofpaloalto.org/budget throughout the budget decision making process.

More Online Resources



Find Frequently Asked Questions [here](#).

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