DEPLOYMENT PERFORMANCE AND HEADQUARTERS STAFFING ADEQUACY STUDY

CITY OF SANTA CLARA, CA

VOLUME 1 OF 3 — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

March 16, 2016
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VOLUME 2 of 3 – Standards of Response Cover and Headquarters Staffing Adequacy Study Technical Report (separately bound)

VOLUME 3 of 3 – Map Atlas (separately bound)
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Citygate Associates, LLC performed a Standards of Response Cover (Deployment) and Headquarters Staffing Adequacy study for the City of Santa Clara (City) Fire Department (Department). This study included reviewing the adequacy of the current fire station deployment system and the headquarters staffing to support the agency. This report is presented in three volumes, including this Executive Summary (Volume 1) summarizing our findings and recommendations, a Technical Report (Volume 2) that includes a Standards of Coverage (deployment) assessment and a headquarters staffing adequacy assessment, and a geographic map atlas (Volume 3) that displays fire unit travel time coverage.

1.1 Policy Choices Framework

As the City Council understands, there are no mandatory federal or state regulations directing the level of fire service response times and outcomes. The body of regulations on the fire service provides that if fire services are provided, they must be done so with the safety of the firefighters and citizens in mind. Historically, the City has made significant investments in its fire services, and as a result, has good fire and emergency medical services (EMS) response coverage in the City.

1.2 Citygate’s Overall Opinions on the State of the City’s Fire Services

In brief, Citygate finds that the challenge of providing fire services in the City is similar to that found in many communities: providing an adequate level of fire services within the context of limited fiscal resources, competing needs, growing and aging populations, plus uncertainty surrounding the exact timing of future development. Citygate must state up front that we found a quality fire services agency that the City should be proud of. The recommendations in this study should be considered as a continuous quality improvement tune-up that can be considered in the yearly budget process.

The City is currently meeting its needs through its own fire response resources and using its neighbors in the regional mutual aid system for assistance on catastrophic emergencies. The deployment system largely meets the City’s current demands, but needs small adjustments to best meet the ongoing needs of the populations and risks to be protected in Santa Clara. Throughout this report, Citygate makes key findings, and, where appropriate, specific action item recommendations. Overall, there are 31 key findings and 20 specific action item recommendations.

Citygate finds a best practices-based agency, with very committed and caring employees. They take pride in what they do, how they do it, and in taking care of their City. Both line and command staff must respond to an ever-escalating volume of emergency medical incidents due to the state of health care in America. However, the traditional method of sending more 3-person
engines to low-acuity medical incidents is no longer cost-effective. To the Department’s credit, it started to field a 2-person paramedic squad unit to reduce some of the incident pressure from the engine and quint/ladder companies.

1.3 **FIELD OPERATIONS DEPLOYMENT (FIRE STATIONS)**

Fire department deployment, simply stated, is about the **speed** and **weight** of the attack. **Speed** calls for first-due, all-risk intervention units (engines, ladder trucks, and/or paramedic squads) strategically located across a coverage area. These units are tasked with controlling moderate emergencies, preventing the incident from escalating to second alarm or greater, which unnecessarily depletes Department resources as multiple requests for service occur. **Weight** is about multiple-unit response for serious emergencies, such as a room and contents structure fire, a multiple-patient incident, a vehicle accident with extrication required, or a heavy rescue incident. In these situations, a sufficient quantity of firefighters must be assembled within a reasonable time frame to safely control the emergency, thereby keeping it from escalating to greater alarms.

In **Volume 2** of this study, Standards of Response Cover and Headquarters Staffing Adequacy Technical Report, Citygate’s analysis of prior response statistics and use of geographic mapping tools reveals that the City has adequate fire station coverage. The maps provided in **Volume 3** and the corresponding text explanation beginning in **Volume 2** describe in detail the City’s current deployment system performance.

For effective outcomes on serious medical emergencies, and to keep serious, but still-emerging, fires small, Citygate’s best practices-based recommendation is for the first-due fire unit to arrive within 7 minutes of fire dispatch alerting the fire unit, 90% of the time. In the City, the current fire station system provides the following unit coverage, across a variety of population density/risk areas for emergency medical and fire incident types:
Table 1—Call to Arrival Response Time (Minutes/Seconds) – 90% Performance (Table 23 from Volume 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>RY&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; 12/13</th>
<th>RY 13/14</th>
<th>RY 14/15</th>
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<tr>
<td>Station 10</td>
<td>8:29</td>
<td>8:25</td>
<td>8:51</td>
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</tbody>
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<sup>1</sup> RY = Report Year

As this study will explain, slow dispatch processing and crew turnout times, along with traffic congestion, push total response time to past Citygate’s recommended goal point of 7:00. If a time saving of 90 seconds could be saved in just dispatch and crew turnout times, then the Citywide measure falls to 6:36, which is better than Citygate’s recommendation.

As Volume 2 of this report will detail, the travel times are higher than a best practices recommendation of 4:00 minutes/seconds, ranging from 4:37 minutes/seconds to 6:24 minutes/seconds, reflective of the size of some station areas, road network design, and traffic congestion. Due to development, Station #10 needs to be relocated away from Levi Stadium. Traffic congestion and road network design will continue to hinder fire unit travel times, but not to the point of requiring more fire stations for a long time to come, if ever.

The Department is staffed for one serious building fires at a time and two medical calls for service at the same time. The regional mutual aid response system delivers greater alarm and multiple-incident support, when needed, although with longer response times.

1.4 **Overall Deployment Evaluation**

The Department serves a diverse land use pattern in an area bisected by open space areas and boulevards with limited crossovers. Population drives service demand, and development brings population. The Department’s responses are volume-driven by emergency medical events. But
the City also has to ensure an effective firefighting force is available even when multiple medical events occur.

For the foreseeable future, the City will need both a first-due firefighting unit and Effective Response Force (First Alarm) coverage in all parts of the City, consistent with current best practices, if the risk of fire is to be limited to only part of the inside of an affected building. While residential fire sprinklers are now included in the national model fire codes, it will be decades before the existing housing stock will be upgraded or replaced, even if these codes were to be adopted for all new construction.

While the volume of and response times to EMS incidents consume much of the City’s attention, all communities need a “stand-by and readily available” firefighting force for when fires break out. The Fire Department does not provide ambulance care and, even if it did, would still require resources in addition to EMS hourly demand for an effective response to emerging fires.

If the City wants to continue in providing the three elements below, the City can slightly increase its deployment plan and relocate Fire Station #10:

◆ Provide equitable response times to all similar risk neighborhoods
◆ Provide for depth of response when multiple incidents occur
◆ Provide for a concentration of response forces for high-risk properties.

For its current risks and desired outcomes, the City has the correct quantity of fire engines (pumpers) and quint/ladder trucks.

Based on the deployment analysis contained in this study, Citygate makes the following recommendations to slightly strengthen deployment performance and ensure quality paramedic coverage as incidents slowly increase year to year.

At one time, the Department had dedicated, staffed ladder trucks, and then moved to quints that are combination pumpers and ladder trucks. For Santa Clara’s risks and low building fire demand, Citygate believes it is effective to continue to operate with quints. However, ladder trucks, when needed to deploy their aerial ladders or to assist rescue or ventilation efforts at serious fires, are not as effective when staffed with three crewmembers. The quints should be staffed with four personnel. As found in this study, the quint/ladder at Station #2 is located too far north and should be relocated to the south.

For paramedic response, the Department has strived to staff, most days, a 2-person paramedic squad from Station #1, but this unit has to respond with the closest engine in many others areas of the City. If the squad is not available, two engines—the closest engine and a paramedic engine—have to respond. While the Police Communications Center does prioritize the response
to less severe medical incidents, the Department still frequently sends two units to respond to low clinical acuity incidents, which is an avoidable use of heavy and expensive fire engines.

The City is well covered by Fire Department paramedics from just four station locations. Given the modest number of medical incidents, it is not advisable to place a paramedic at every fire station, as maintaining a clinical sharp experience level is harder when an individual assists few serious patients per month.

For these reasons, and to offer improved single-unit response to low acuity medical incidents, Citygate recommends the Department move to eventually operating two full-time paramedic squads from Stations #1 and #6. In addition, the Department should maintain at least two paramedic engines per day for a total of four paramedic units.

Finally, Fire Station #10, if relocated to the west, improves multiple-unit coverage in the northwest and west central areas of the City.

Citygate’s specific deployment recommendations are listed in Section 1.6. The first deployment step for the City Council in the near term is to adopt updated and complete performance measures from which to set forth service expectations and, on an annual budget basis, monitor and fund Fire Department performance.

1.5 **OVERALL HEADQUARTERS SERVICES EVALUATION**

Citygate’s review of headquarters programs revealed that the Department does provide best practices-based services meeting the risk control and emergency control expectations of the City. Having said this, the recession-caused reduction in headquarters positions needs some restoration. The Department has been triaging its headquarters capacity to the programs that deliver day-to-day services first, along with ensuring safe, effective operations for the workforce. However, some services are strained and Citygate’s recommendations are to balance the needs of the emergency operations with the other lines of business in prevention and overall administration. The Department is filling some headquarters positions with line fire personnel on a temporary basis. These positions are needed and should be made permanent. The City needs to deeply review the fire prevention inspection and permit requirements to actual staffing needed, including a risk-based approach to inspect some businesses on a longer cycle than annually.

1.6 **DEPLOYMENT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Citygate’s deployment findings and recommendations are listed below. For reference purposes, the findings and recommendation numbers refer to the sequential numbers as these are presented in the technical report volume.

**Finding #1:** The City Council has not adopted a complete and best practices-based deployment measure or set of specialty response measures for all-risk emergency
responses that includes the beginning time measure from the point of the Police Communications Center receiving the 9-1-1 phone call, nor a goal statement tied to risks and outcome expectations. The deployment measure should have a second measurement statement to define multiple-unit response coverage for serious emergencies. Making these deployment goal changes will meet the best practice recommendations of the Commission on Fire Accreditation International.

**Finding #2:** The current number of ten fire stations can reach 90+ percent of the street segments within four minutes travel.

**Finding #3:** Traffic congestion impacts constrain four-minute travel time coverage. While such gaps do not last long enough in hours to deserve an additional fire station be placed, the gaps do mean that the City needs at least all ten of its fire station locations, or the coverage would be much worse during traffic congestion hours.

**Finding #4:** The entire City, except for an area southwest of Fire Station #3, is within eight minutes travel time of an Effective Response Force assignment of four engines, one quint/ladder, and one Battalion Chief compliant with the National Fire Protection Association.

**Finding #5:** The Department operates a two-person paramedic squad at Station #1. As funds permit, the Department would benefit from staffing a second paramedic squad at Fire Station #6 to better service the north City EMS incident densities and to allow the engine companies to be more available for non-EMS emergencies.

**Finding #6:** The City’s time-of-day, day-of-week, and month-of-year calls for service demands are very consistent. This means the City needs to operate a fairly consistent 24/7/365 response system.

**Finding #7:** The performance of the City’s Police Communications Center at 2:03 minutes/seconds to 90% of the EMS and fire emergencies is slower than a best practices expectation that 80% of the routine type incidents be dispatched within 60 seconds.

**Finding #8:** The City’s turnout times are consistently over two minutes from station to station.

**Finding #9:** The first-due unit travel times in the City are longer than a best practice goal of four minutes, which is reflective of the non-grid street design in some areas, and traffic congestion. The times are reflective of the reality in congested urban areas that even with a good pattern of ten fire stations, achieving four minutes travel is very difficult.
Finding #10: The City’s travel time response time for six units to serious fires, known as the Effective Response Force (ERF or First Alarm), ranges in Report Year (RY) 14/15 from 7:36 to 12:59 minutes/seconds, which, given the City’s road network design and small sample size, are not far off the ideal of eight minutes.

Finding #11: The five busiest units in Santa Clara do experience a higher volume of incident demand during daylight hours when human activity is the greatest. However, the level of activity per unit area is not close to a Citygate recommended maximum of 30%.

Finding #12: In Santa Clara, mutual aid, both given and received, is insignificant. The modest amount of incident activity is routinely handled by the ten fire stations. Stated this way, Santa Clara is not dependent on its neighboring fire departments to handle routine day-to-day events.

Recommendation #1: As capital construction funds allow, the quint/ladder truck at Fire Station #2 should be re-located to Fire Station #5 to improve south City coverage.

Recommendation #2: The City should pursue a relocation of Fire Station #10 to the northwest corner of the redevelopment area west of the stadium.

Recommendation #3: **Adopt City Council Deployment Measures Policies:** The City elected officials should adopt updated, complete performance measures to direct fire crew planning and to monitor the operation of the Department. The measures of time should be designed to save patients where medically possible and to keep small but serious fires from becoming greater alarm fires. With this in mind, Citygate recommends the following measures:

3.1 **Distribution of Fire Stations:** To treat medical patients and control small fires, the first-due unit should arrive within 7 minutes, 90% of the time from the receipt of the 9-1-1 call in the City’s police dispatch center. This equates to a 1-minute dispatch time, a 2-minute company turnout time, and a 4-minute drive time in the most populated areas.

3.2 **Multiple-Unit Effective Response Force for Serious Emergencies:** To confine fires near the room of origin, to stop wildland fires to under three acres when noticed promptly, and to treat up to five medical patients at once, a multiple-unit
response of a minimum of four engines, one quint/ladder truck, one paramedic squad, the light/air unit, and one Battalion Chief totaling 20 personnel should arrive within 11:00 minutes from the time of 9-1-1 call receipt in fire dispatch, 90% of the time. This equates to 1-minute dispatch time, 2 minutes company turnout time, and 8 minutes drive time spacing for multiple units in the most populated areas.

3.3 **Hazardous Materials Response:** Provide hazardous materials response designed to protect the community from the hazards associated with uncontrolled release of hazardous and toxic materials. The fundamental mission of the City response is to minimize or halt the release of a hazardous substance so it has minimal impact on the community. It can achieve this with a travel time for the first company capable of investigating a HazMat release at the operations level within 6 minutes travel time or less than 90% of the time. After size-up and scene evaluation is completed, a determination will be made whether to request additional resources from the City’s multi-agency hazardous materials response partnership.

3.4 **Technical Rescue:** Respond to technical rescue emergencies as efficiently and effectively as possible with enough trained personnel to facilitate a successful rescue. Achieve a travel time for the first company in for size-up of the rescue within 6 minutes travel time or less 90% of the time. Assemble additional resources for technical rescue capable of initiating a rescue within a total response time of 11 minutes, 90% of the time. Safely complete rescue/extrication to ensure delivery of patient to a definitive care facility.

3.5 **Emergency Medical Services:** The City should continue to provide first responder paramedic services to all neighborhoods to 90% of the higher priority medical incidents within at least 7:59 minutes/seconds from fire crew notification per the County’s EMS Medical Direction.

**Recommendation #4:** The Police and Fire Departments need to lower dispatch processing and fire crew turnout times. If 90 seconds total were to be saved, the 9-1-1 call received to first unit on-scene time would become 6:36 minutes/seconds, under the Citygate best practices recommendation of 7:00 minutes.
Recommendation #5: Increase staffing on the quint/ladder trucks to a minimum of four personnel per day.

Recommendation #6: Increase daily staffing to initially provide the paramedic squad full-time from Fire Station #1. As funding allows, operate a second paramedic squad from Station #6.

1.7 Headquarters and Support Services Findings and Recommendations

Citygate’s headquarters services findings and recommendations are listed below.

Finding #13: The Department’s management organization is effectively organized but undersized to effectively address current and anticipated future workloads.

Finding #14: The Fire Prevention Division is effectively organized but slightly under-staffed to effectively meet regulatory inspection requirements, customer service turnaround time expectations, and anticipated additional future workload.

Finding #15: The Training Division requires, on a permanent basis, the three Fire Captain / Assistant Training Officers and the Fire Captain for Special Events and other training duties. The quantity of office support staff time is inadequate for the amount of records keeping the Division must perform to track training and certifications to state and federal mandates.

Finding #16: Switching to Target Solutions is an important first step in managing training, although it has some limitations.

Finding #17: Devoting four positions to what in business would be described as “trainee” positions, is both unusual and, in Citygate’s opinion, a wise choice. The transition from company officer to chief officer in the fire service is often difficult. Santa Clara’s process minimizes the time required to become proficient at the desired level by spending time in advance as an Acting Training Officer (ATO). The process also provides honest feedback from the ATO’s mentor during the development process.

Finding #18: The career succession development plan for firefighter through chief officer is a model plan.

Finding #19: The lack of a written career development plan and succession plan are the only elements of the training program that need modest improvement.

Finding #20: Props are an essential component of a contemporary training program.
Finding #21: Overall, the Department training program is one of the most complete Citygate has seen. There are some minor issues identified in this report that the Department should consider addressing as time and funds permit, but overall the program meets or exceeds best practices. Given the limited staffing, the quality of this program is a credit to the high level of commitment and energy invested by Department personnel.

Finding #22: Due to the volume of paramedics and incidents, the EMS Division staff is barely adequate to meet County and State mandates.

Finding #23: The Department’s leadership structure in EMS should not depend mostly on peer review efforts. EMS is a very specialized profession and should be managed as such.

Finding #24: The adoption of NFPA 1071 Standard for Emergency Vehicle Technician Professional Qualifications is critical to a healthy fire apparatus maintenance program. The City Garage has on staff a master fire mechanic. He is a member of the statewide fire apparatus committee; he attends and helps with workshops in Sacramento. In addition, there are three mechanics in training to be fire mechanics when he retires. This is an unusually high level of commitment to fire service apparatus maintenance by a shop not totally devoted to fire apparatus.

Finding #25: The City Garage is small and outdated. It is very crowded and cluttered. This creates inefficiencies and wasted time and could potentially be a safety hazard.

Finding #26: The average age of both the front-line engines and reserve engines is beyond the best practices normal life expectancy of fire apparatus. The actual age of seven of the front-line engines and two of the reserve engines is beyond best practices life expectancy. Given that the ordering process for apparatus generally takes 1.5-2 years, except for apparatus already purchased and due to arrive, the rest of the fleet continues to age and the problem becomes exacerbated.

Finding #27: The front-line quint/ladder trucks should have many years of service ahead based on regular preventative maintenance and care.

Finding #28: Two of the medic units are nearly twenty years old.

Finding #29: The City has no formal emergency public communications plan. While this should not hamper the effectiveness of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), in today’s environment of social media information and the hyper speed at which
news is spread using social media, having a communications plan to manage public information is essential.

Finding #30: Despite the intensity and dedication of time required to plan for major events, the Fire Department manages this workload with existing staff. This is a significant workload, and even though it is distributed, the day-to-day operation is impacted.

Finding #31: There appears to be no special funding to reimburse the City for the extraordinary costs special event planning and staffing. One Assistant Training Officer (Captain) has been assigned primary duties for action planning for scheduled stadium events.

Recommendation #7: The City consider adding one Fire Protection Engineer for plans review, to improve processing time and to allow more field inspection hours for other Division staff.

Recommendation #8: The Division should undertake a rigorous workload analysis to determine inspector capacity to permits and inspections workload. This effort should include a review of all permits and inspection frequencies to balance annual inspector capacity, across not just an annual program but a three-year inspection cycle based on risks.

Recommendation #9: The four Fire Captains should be permanent positions in the Training and Special Events programs. Increase the office support to one full-time position.

Recommendation #10: Develop the data connectivity to ensure that Target Solutions data shows up on an RMS “Dashboard” so that other Chief Officers can easily see who is completing and recording required training and, more importantly, who is not.

Recommendation #11: Conduct a Department-wide training needs assessment to develop a comprehensive picture of how the Department’s training program is performing and what needs to be done. While most of the elements of a training program are present, a needs assessment will identify what is missing.

Recommendation #12: Based on the needs assessment outcome, develop a written career development plan that employees can follow as they develop their careers.
**Recommendation #13:** The City should consider having a budget line item for fire service props to ensure that they are maintained and replaced as needed.

**Recommendation #14:** The EMS Division needs one 40-hour/week technical EMS Nurse Specialist position for Quality Assurance and Continuous Quality Improvement programs.

**Recommendation #15:** The City should consider investing in a modern, well-designed shop, not only for the Fire Department fleet, but for all the City’s vehicles.

**Recommendation #16:** Develop a five-engine purchase cycle for new engine purchases every seven to eight years. This will have a number of advantages:

16.1 There will only be two models of engines in service at any given time, plus a third model in the reserve fleet. This will reduce the needed parts inventory and lead to more consistent maintenance. This is similar to Southwest Airlines which uses one type of aircraft.

16.2 It reduces the time and energy spent on developing specifications for new apparatus.

16.3 It should result in a discounted price (as a large order) from the apparatus manufacturer. Often other neighboring fire departments will order the same apparatus if the order is for five or more and if the specification is to their liking, which can result in further savings.

16.4 Only having two distinct models in front-line service and a third distinct model in reserve will reduce training costs, similar to the Southwest Airlines model.

16.5 Finally, it will make moving from engine to engine easier as the firefighters will only have to learn the layout of three models, including reserves, instead of the current five models including reserves.

**Recommendation #17:** When the reserve ladder truck reaches the retirement age of 25 years, consider purchasing a used truck that will meet the City’s needs as neither of the current front-line trucks is nearly old enough to consider retiring.

**Recommendation #18:** Based on the age of two medic units alone, consider replacement in the next budget cycle.
**Recommendation #19:** The City should consider adopting a communications plan focused on social media and public information. This plan could be either a part of the Emergency Operations Plan or a separate plan.

**Recommendation #20:** Consider adding a Fire Captain and Police Lieutenant as emergency planners / Special Events Coordinators as well as disaster plan trainers on rotation to the City’s Emergency Services Coordination effort which assists in the planning of these major events and overall disaster preparedness.

### 1.8 Next Steps

The purpose of this assessment is to compare the City’s current performance against the local risks to be protected, as well as to compare against nationally recognized best practices. This analysis of performance forms the base from which to make recommendations for changes, if any, in fire station locations, equipment types, staffing, and headquarters programs.

As one step, the City Council should adopt updated and best practices based response time goals for the City and provide accountability for the City personnel to meet those standards. The goals identified in Recommendation #3 meet national best practices. Measurement and planning as the City continues to evolve will be necessary for the City to meet these goals. Citygate recommends that the City’s next steps be to work through the issues identified in this study over the following time lines:

**1.8.1 Short-Term Steps**

- Absorb the policy recommendations of this fire services study and adopt updated City performance measures to drive the deployment of firefighting and emergency medical resources.
- Implement the staffing increases for the quint/ladder companies and one paramedic squad.
- Fund and hire the near term needed fire headquarters positions.
- Replace the needed front-line fire apparatus over the next three years.

**1.8.2 Long-Term Steps**

- Conduct an in-depth workload analysis study of the fire prevention inspection, staffing, and permits program to balance staffing to annual needs.
- Relocate Fire Station #10.
- Rebuild Fire Station #5 to accommodate a quint/ladder apparatus.