



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

County Board Agenda Item Meeting of February 23, 2008

DATE: February 1, 2008

SUBJECT: Authorize advertisements for a public hearing on March 27, 2008, for a proposed amendment to Chapter 33-14 of the Code of Arlington County, Virginia, to increase fees for false alarm responses.

C. M. RECOMMENDATION:

Advertise for the public hearing March 27, 2008, to amend Chapter 33-14 of the Code of Arlington County Virginia, to increase fees for false alarms responses.

ISSUE: As part of the regular budget process, authorization from the County Board is being requested to advertise a public hearing on whether the false alarm response fee schedule should be increased.

SUMMARY: The FY 2009 proposed budget includes an increase in the false alarm response fee schedule. The proposed schedule would increase the fee from \$50 to \$100 for the third false alarm response and all subsequent responses by increments of \$50 to \$100. It is anticipated that the proposed increased fee schedule will generate approximately \$88,000 in additional revenue.

BACKGROUND: On November 1, 2000, the County Board repealed Chapter 33 of the Arlington County Code and enacted an updated version of Chapter 33 which outlined the administration and enforcement of various fees for alarm system registrations, reinstatements and false alarm responses. Chapter 33 of the Arlington County Code (Security Alarms Ordinance) declares that false alarm calls within Arlington County result in an inefficient use of police resources, reduce faith in security alarm signals, and promote complacency in police investigation of alarms. This creates a general safety hazard detrimental to the protection of property, the health, safety and general welfare of citizens, and the police personnel responsible for the investigation of alarm signals.

The false alarm fee schedule has not been increased since 2000. Since that time, the use of security alarm systems has increased both nationally and throughout the County, requiring additional time and resources from the Police Department. The intent of the false alarm fee is to discourage excessive false alarms. The Police Department has experienced some reduction in false alarm calls, but a small number of users continue to report an excessive number of false alarms that require Police response. For example, there were twenty-seven businesses that

County Manager: _____

County Attorney: _____

Staff: Nicole Billman, Department of Management and Finance, x3411
Stuart Ellis, Police Department, x4323

generated at least nine false alarm responses and at least one business that generated a total of twenty-nine false alarm responses in FY 2007. This group of chronic false alarm callers represents approximately 18% of all false alarm responses in FY 2007. The proposed increased fee structure seeks to decrease the number of nuisance false alarm responses so that Police resources can be used more efficiently.

DISCUSSION: The County Manager’s FY 2009 Proposed Budget includes an increase in fees for false alarm responses. As stated in the County Code, responses to false alarms divert Police resources away from legitimate emergencies, resulting in a safety hazard for residents and Police personnel. In addition to Arlington, several other localities in Virginia and Maryland charge false alarm fees. Fees charged by other localities range from \$25 for the second response and \$100 for the third response to \$4,000 for twenty or more responses. Since the intention of the increased fee structure is to reduce the number of false alarm responses and not necessarily to generate revenue, the first and second false alarm responses will remain free of charge. Fees for subsequent false alarm responses are proposed to increase in increments of \$50-100 with the maximum fine per violation increasing to \$500. The proposed fee structure for false alarm fees is summarized below.

False Alarm Response #	Current Fee	Proposed Fee
1st	No Charge	No Charge
2nd	No Charge	No Charge
3rd	\$50	\$100
4th	\$100	\$150
5th	\$150	\$200
6th	\$200	\$250
7th	\$250	\$300
8th	\$300	\$400
9 th and each response thereafter	\$300	\$500

Since the goal of the proposed fee structure is to improve compliance with the ordinance, the proposed fee structure does not include any increase for the security alarm registration fees (currently free for residential alarms and \$30 for non-residential alarms) or the reinstatement of suspended registration fee (currently \$10).

FISCAL IMPACT: Based on the number of false alarm responses generated and payments received in FY 2007, the fee increases could generate approximately \$88,000 in additional revenue in FY 2009. Revenue in subsequent years will likely decrease as more security alarm users comply with the ordinance.