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The cost to train a firefighter? \$113K

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Fairbanks fire crews battle a warehouse blaze Monday, May 3, 2021, in South Fairbanks. No injuries were reported in the fire, the smoke from which could be seen from across the city.

Alena Naiden/News-Miner

Acting Fairbanks Fire Chief Scott Raygor said recruitment was an expensive endeavor, just over \$113,000.

The city shells out \$17,000 per recruit for onboarding, including recruitment, written tests, physical and HAZMAT exams, and costs for equipment. That's before a new firefighter starts working.

New recruits go through an in-house two-month academy at \$13,000 per recruit, with two or three recruits per academy.

Additional costs include EMT training for \$200, CPR training for \$150, certification for Firefighter I classification at \$3,000 and \$700 for Firefighter II certification.

If the department decides to send new employees to paramedic school, it spends \$12,000 for 12 months of training, on top of \$67,000 in wages while they work.

Of the last four recruits, Raygor said two have left.

"One went to Anchorage for pay and benefits and the other for personal reasons," Raygor said. "We spent just under \$160,000 for two employees who never effectively worked for us as paramedics," Raygor said.

Due to employee shortages, the department needs to pull a fire captain to conduct the training, which generates overtime costs.

The city faces recruitment issues, Raygor said, because it can't start the recruitment process until after a firefighter leaves or retires. Average recruitment time runs five months.

The department currently has six openings, but only saw five applicants who tested. New openings are expected, after one firefighter retires and a second leaves for the private sector. Should Raygor take on the chief position full-time, he said, the department will need to hire a new battalion chief spot.

Nick Clark, a Fairbanks fire captain and president of the Fairbanks Firefighters Union, said the department at full strength includes 42 line firefighters, with 14 dedicated to a shift, including those on duty or in reserve. The department maintains three battalion shifts.

"What the department needs is the 14 firefighters per shift, because they have to cover sick time, leave time and injuries," Clark said. "We are never at 14 on a given day ... we haven't been at that for a long time. We have overtime every day and it's starting to wear on people."

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