



# SOUTH METRO FIRE DEPARTMENT

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DATE: January 6, 2016

TO: Mayors and Council Members

FROM: Mike Pott, Fire Chief

**RE: Proposed Commercial Inspection Fee Program**

## Summary:

At their September 16, 2015 meeting, the South Metro Fire Board requested staff to explore the concept of implementing a Commercial Property Inspection Fee Program as a cost recovery measure for services provided. As a result, over the last few months staff has presented the information to both City Councils and the business community through a direct mailing and discussion at a couple of meetings (Local Issues Chamber of Commerce and SSP Lions Club). We have also received feedback through numerous emails and phone calls.

The associated feedback has been compiled and an overview is provided below. With the exception of two people, there didn't appear to be concerns or objections to conducting the life safety fire inspections; instead, the concerns raised were specific to the implementation of the new fee.

- The most often asked question is why are these fees being implemented now since the fire inspections have been occurring for years?
- Inspections aren't beyond the basic services of the fire department, so there shouldn't be a charge.
  - o Property taxes should be the funding source, not another fee.
- If this is going to be implemented, then a business owning more than one building or leasing more than one occupancy should have the square footage grouped together when determining the fee.
  - o A strip mall should pay one fee, not charge each individual business.
- \$75 fee too high for small offices.
  - o Small businesses struggle to pay their share of the taxes, let alone another fee.

There has been considerable negative feedback from private hangar owners at the SSP Airport. Although these private hangars don't operate businesses, annual inspections are required in their lease agreements.

- Concerns regarding the direct mailing notification.
  - o Most of the letters were sent to the hangar addresses; the Post Office returned many as undeliverable. South Metro staff hand delivered as many of these letters as possible once they were returned.
  - o The letter was addressed to "Business Owner", so many hangar owners discarded the letter since they didn't consider themselves as business owners or having commercial property.
- It's just another tax that will push people out of the airport.
- The \$75 fee is excessive since a typical inspection takes less than 5 minutes.
- They already pay lease fees and property taxes that should pay for the fire department services.

In addition to seeking feedback on the proposed fees, we also explored the necessary steps required to implement the inspection fees. From a process perspective, Ms. Land has determined that each City Council will need to amend its fire prevention ordinance to provide the authority to allow the collection of fire prevention inspection fees. Once the authority has been established, the Board would then need to adopt a resolution implementing the fees.

Following discussions at the December Board meeting, the Board requested this topic be brought back to the Councils at their respective worksessions for further discussions. We look forward to this discussion at your upcoming worksession.