



**CITY OF KIRKLAND**

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**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Kurt Triplett, City Manager

**From:** Joe Sanford, Fire Chief  
 Dave Van Valkenburg, Deputy Fire Chief  
 Bill Newbold, Deputy Fire Chief  
 Michael Olson, Director of Finance and Administration  
 Sri Krishnan, Deputy Director of Finance and Administration  
 Veronica Hill, Senior Financial Analyst, Public Safety

**Date:** October 19, 2022

**Subject:** FIRE OPERATIONS OVERTIME

Fire Operations overtime is reviewed on an ongoing basis and reported out to Council in monthly dashboards, budgetary staff memos, and often with substantive analysis included as an issue paper during the biennial budget process. The overtime expenses in other divisions (e.g., Training Division) of the Kirkland Fire Department are not included in this issue paper. The focus during the last few budget cycles has been on obtaining an understanding of the primary drivers impacting Fire Operations and thereby contributing to the increased need for overtime. That analysis resulted in recommendations of specific strategies to implement to address the adverse impacts that excessive overtime can have on personnel.

The 2020-2021 Issue Paper identified the following recommendations:

- Recognize salary savings created by vacancies
- Continue to authorize over-hire positions
- Administrative changes

Despite the implementation of these recommendations overtime costs have continued to increase, as the table below shows:

Fire Operations Overtime Costs

	2019	2020	2021	2022 (Estimate)
Overtime	\$1,456,581	\$1,784,274	\$2,221,911	\$2,672,470
	% chg	22%	25%	20%

This issue paper will provide a continued review of the causes of fire overtime, a look at the progress of the previous recommendations and why overtime has continued to increase, and a look at recommendations moving forward.

## **Background**

Before looking at how and why overtime occurs, it is important to understand the shift structure of fire operations in Kirkland, and how this has changed in recent years.

### **Fire and EMS Levy Proposition 1 (Prop 1) & Fire Station 24**

The Fire and Emergency Medical Services Proposition 1 (Prop 1) ballot measure passed on November 3, 2020 and authorized a single permanent levy lid lift to fund both operating and capital ballot measure elements. The measure's operations element funds the hiring of 20 additional full-time equivalent (FTE) firefighters/emergency medical technicians (EMTs). The firefighter/EMT hiring timeline provided for five FTEs to be hired in 2021, an additional 10 FTEs to be hired in 2022, and five firefighters/EMTs in 2023. At this time, 10 firefighters have graduated from the academy and five are currently in academy. Interviews are underway for the remaining five positions funded by the measure.

Station 24, Kirkland Fire Department's (KFD) newest station became operational in January of 2022. Station 24 is the first new station to become operational since the 1990s. KFD now operates six stations, all staffed 24/7. Additional information on the changes to the level of service funded by Prop 1 can be found on the [City's Prop1 webpage](#).

### **Fire Operations Structure**

Following the addition of the 20 new firefighters, the Kirkland Fire Department will have a total of 125 firefighter positions. The vast majority of these (114) are assigned to operations and split evenly between three shifts (A/B/C). Each operations shift is 24 hours, beginning and ending at 7:00 a.m. Two 24-hour shifts are worked consecutively to produce a 48-hour work period, followed by four consecutive days off duty; this cycle then repeats. An example two-week period from June 13th to June 26th is shown below. Shift A works from 7:00 am on Sunday the 13<sup>th</sup> until 7:00 am on Tuesday the 15<sup>th</sup>, at which point shift B takes over, and so on.

#### **JUNE**

<b>S</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>Th</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>

#### **A SHIFT - B SHIFT - C Shift**

Prior to the additional positions authorized by Prop 1, the department had 31 or 32 firefighters assigned to each shift (two shifts have 32 firefighters, one has 31 firefighters). On each day the minimum staffing is 20, made up of a three-person crew at stations (21/22/26/27), a four-person crew at station 25, plus a second crew at Station 27, and the Battalion Chief at Station 26. In 2023, the department will increase its daily operations staffing to 24 personnel (24x7x365); this is sometimes referred to as "fully staffed". Depending on how many current firefighters leave the department through retirement or any other reason, the fire academy graduating class of June 2023 should allow the department to increase personnel assignments. If full staffing is achieved, there will

be 38 firefighters assigned to each shift. This will raise the daily minimum staffing to 24, made up of three-person jump crews at Stations 21, 24, and 25, a four-person crew at Station 26, and five-person crews at Stations 22 and 27. Stations with a staffing level of five firefighters will have a staffing for both an engine or ladder and an aid car. The Battalion Chief will continue to operate from Station 26. This position supervises all fire stations and personnel on duty and is a stand-alone supervisory/command response unit. The operations staffing model beginning in 2023 is shown in the figure below:



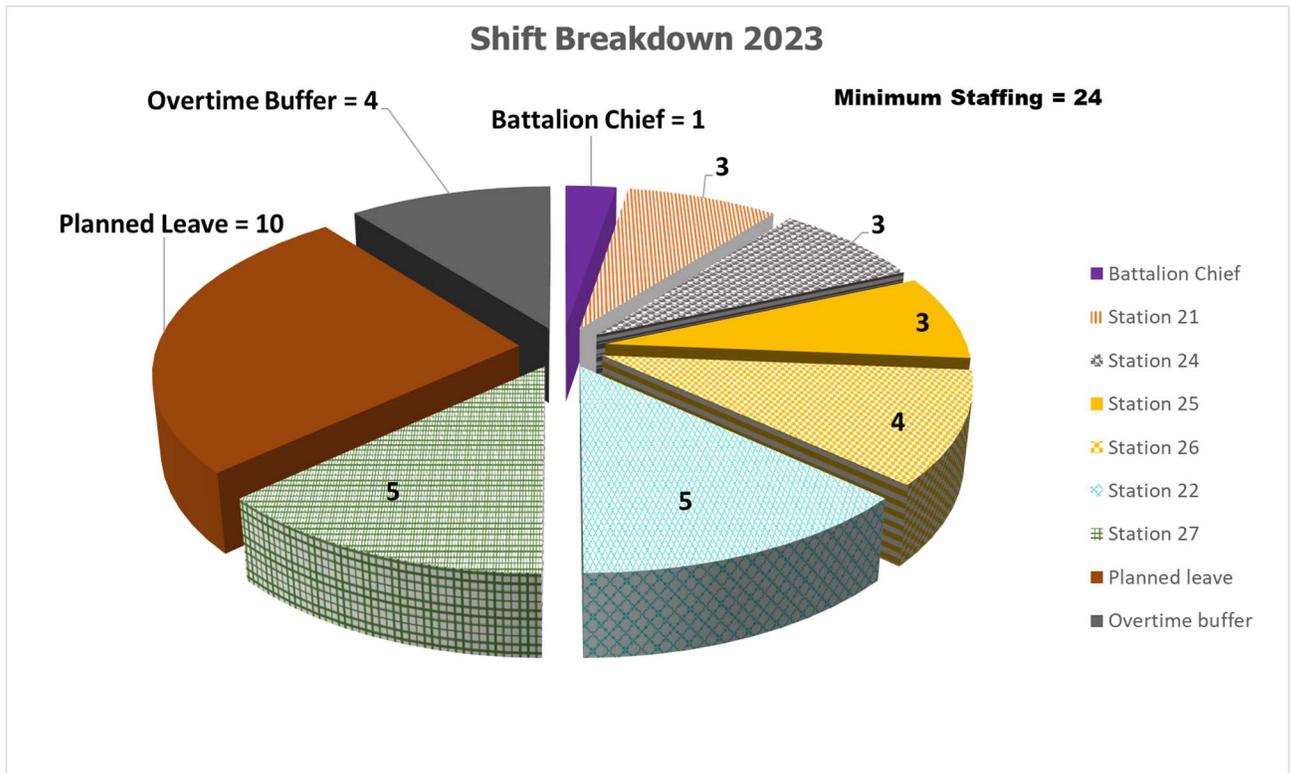
## Leave and Other Impacts on Overtime

The requirement for minimum staffing in fire departments creates the possibility of large amounts of overtime, while the ratio of total staffing, allowable leave, and required minimum staffing dictates the amount of overtime. For example, as there must always be 24 personnel on shift, inclusive of company officers (those in charge at each station), and a Battalion Chief, each personnel absence brings the total number of staff available closer to the daily minimum requirement. There are a wide variety of work absences, which are broadly broken down (by department policy and the labor contract) into two categories:

1. **Planned Leave** – vacation, holiday and 'Kelly Days'<sup>1</sup>
2. **Other Leave & Vacancies** –
  - a. **Overtime-causing leave** -including sick leave, Family Medical Leave (FMLA), Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML), on or off duty injury, light duty, training backfill and other leaves which are not part of the bidding process
  - b. **Unvaccinated Firefighter Shifts**
  - c. **Vacancies** – unfilled positions
  - d. **Pandemic Leave and Wildland Fire Mobilizations**

<sup>1</sup> Kelly Days are common in fire departments. This leave type provides for additional time off to ensure a shift structure remains compliant with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) guidelines governing overtime. In the case of Kirkland, each firefighter receives two Kelly shifts off after every six scheduled sets (48-hr set). This makes work hours no more than 48 hours per week on an average annual basis.

To ensure firefighters can take leave they are contractually obligated to, 'planned leaves' account for ten of the 14 available. As referenced, changes to the 'planned leaves' slots must be negotiated for inclusion in the collective bargaining agreement (CBA). This provides 4 slots for other leave, known as the 'overtime buffer'. The chart below shows the assumed allocation of staffing when the department is operating at minimum staffing.



### 1. Planned Leaves

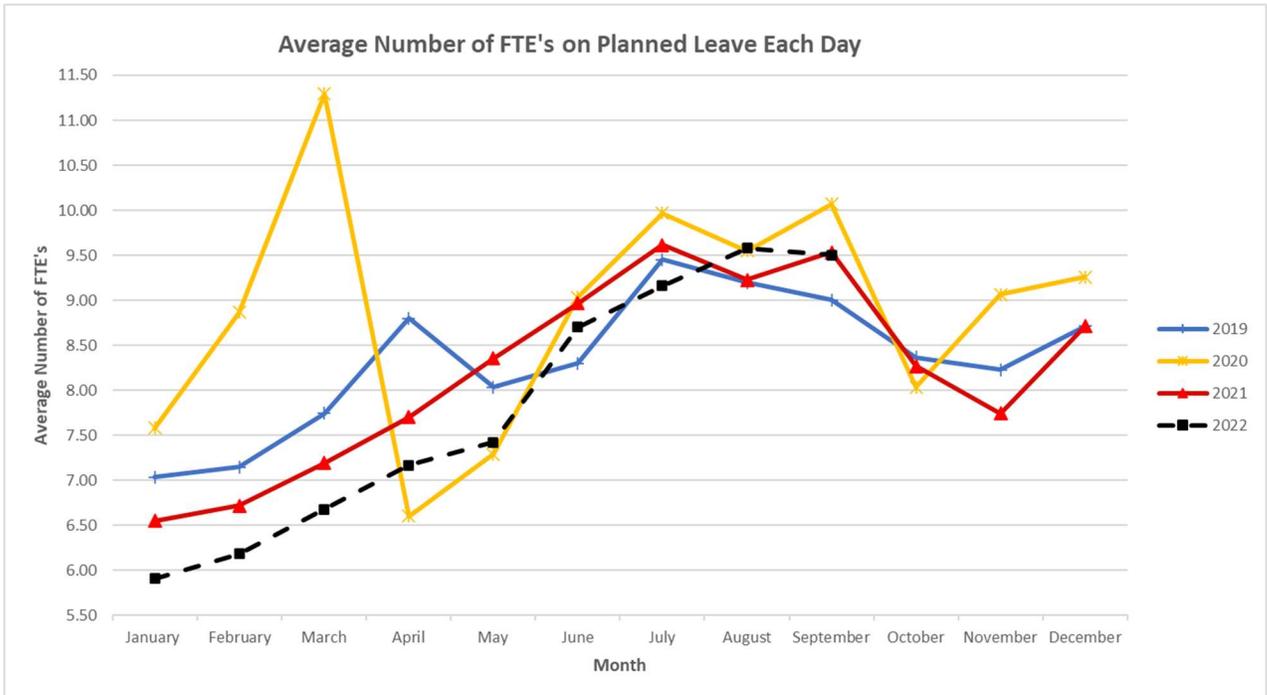
As mentioned, assuming a fully staffed shift of 38, ten of the 14 slots above the required minimum staffing fall into the category of planned leave. These are split between Kelly Days, vacation days, and holidays, with most time being allocated through an annual bidding process, established in the collective bargaining agreement. Firefighters bid for Kelly Days annually, with a maximum of 5 people away on Kelly leave each day. Once Kelly Days have been issued there is a process of vacation and holiday bidding. Following this bid either all 10 slots are taken on a certain day, or the remainder are available for 'routine' vacation, which can be used as needed any time there is a spare planned leave slot.

Kelly Days fall on the same two days throughout the year for each individual. For example, if a firefighter bids and receives Saturday and Sunday, they would be off each time their shift rotation would have them working Saturday and Sunday (shift A on the June 19/20 in the example shown above). As there are a maximum of 5 slots per day, this gives 35 slots per week. Historically, all 5 slots tend to be taken around the weekend, with fewer in midweek. Because Kelly shifts are the same two days throughout the year, there is no seasonal peak.

The second planned leave is vacation, which does have a clear seasonal trend. The lowest amounts are taken in winter and early spring, with peaks in July and December. Vacation days

are also based on a bidding process completed at the start of the year, and the maximum number of slots available each day is 5. After the bidding process is complete, firefighters can use their vacation time for any shift which has available slots.

The final type of planned leave is holiday leave. Because fire stations must be staffed 365 days per year, firefighters are required to work their regular shift regardless of whether that day falls on a holiday. In recognition of this firefighters are given 10 hours per holiday as provided in the CBA each year, which can either be used or cashed out. Holiday leave can be taken when there is an available planned leave slot or as part of the regular bidding process.



The chart above shows the average number of people on planned leave, including Kelly, vacation and holiday leave, in each month from January 1, 2019 to September 30, 2022. The seasonal pattern is clearly visible in the chart, with the exception of 2020. As restrictions are removed it is anticipated that planned leave will return to pre-pandemic seasonal patterns going forward.

Except for 2020, each year in February there were around six personnel on planned leave. If there are no vacancies, sickness, or other unplanned leaves during this time of year, there would be 30 or 31 firefighters available for work, six-seven more than required for minimum staffing. In contrast, in July, the average number of people away on leave was over nine. During this time period, if there are ever more than four people on any other leave, the overtime buffer would be exceeded, and overtime would be needed to maintain minimum staffing. This is significant, as there are times during the year when the City has a high risk of overtime being generated.

Current department practice works with the assumption that all leave slots can be filled without causing overtime. While this is true, the increase in scheduled leaves during more desirable seasons (e.g., summer, December) puts pressure on the overtime buffer, creating an increase in the amount of overtime in these months. Strategies to help smooth out the seasonal trend in leave, such as pushing more leave into the spring months, could reduce overtime. This would

require changes to the bidding system and would need to be negotiated between labor and management.

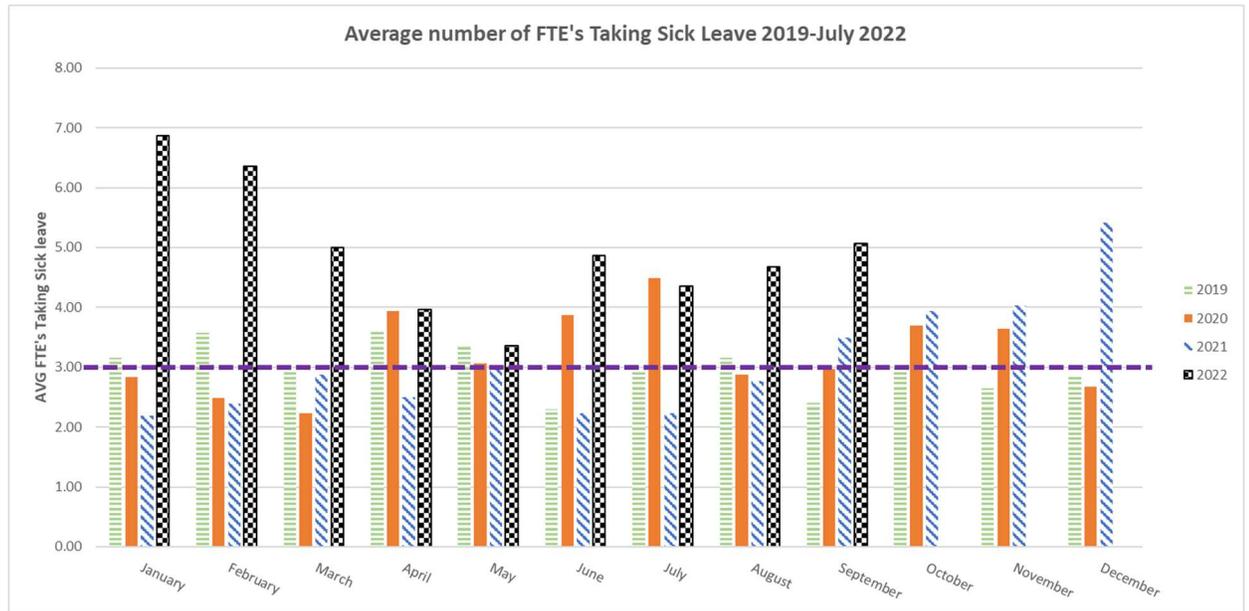
## 2. Other Leave & Vacancies

Under the current practice, if the maximum allowable number of personnel are on planned leave, there are two to three remaining positions above minimum staffing. These slots constitute the “overtime buffer” to protect the city from incurring overtime costs every time there is a vacancy or use of any “overtime-causing leave”. In recent years this overtime buffer was used in a few major ways:

### a) Overtime-Causing Leave

Current department practice and policy separates the planned leaves described above from ‘overtime causing leave’, which is essentially any leave that is not part of a bidding process.<sup>2</sup> The most significant of these categories is sick leave. However, this also includes a range of other leaves such as light duty, on-duty injury, administrative, well child/FMLA, bereavement, and emergency leave.

The bar graph below depicts the average number of FTEs taking sick leave per day from 2019 to July 2022. Note, the bar graph includes family sick leave, but it does not depict the average number of FTEs taking pandemic leave. The dotted line across the chart shows the ‘overtime buffer’, set at three, thus each time the bar chart is above that line the average number of people on sick leave triggers a need for overtime if all planned leave slots were taken.



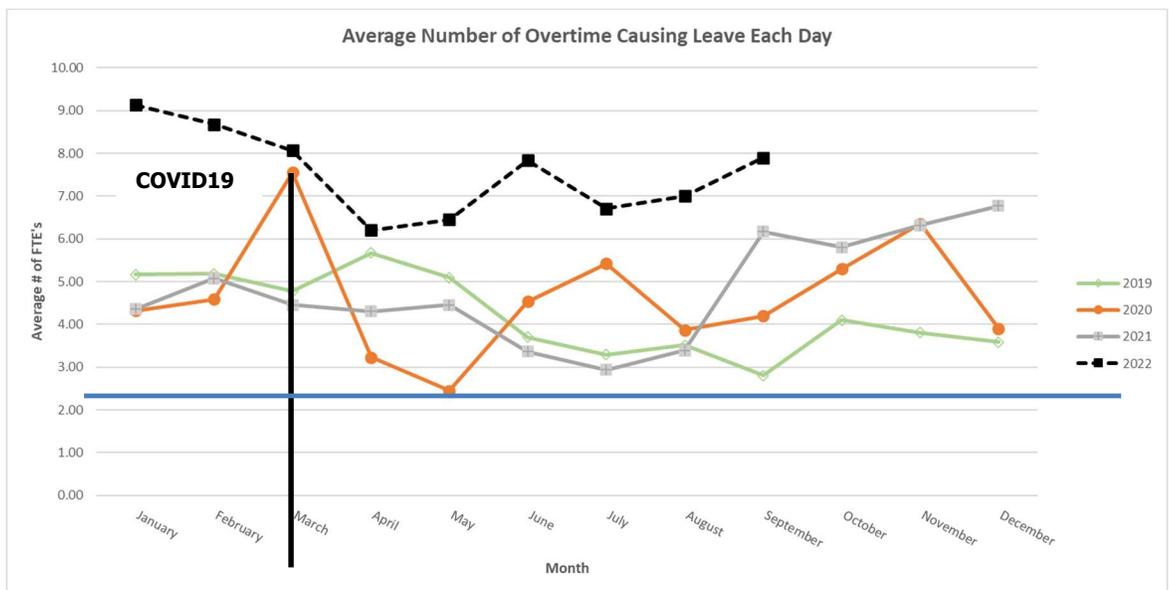
Significant spikes in late 2021 and early 2022 coincided with nine separations due to vaccine mandates. This reduced the overall number of FTEs and created additional unplanned shift vacancies needing to be covered with overtime.

<sup>2</sup> This is defined in Department policy 3.001

Training backfill falls under overtime causing leave as it isn't always known who will attend training on what days, who will be instructing on which days, or even if backfill will be needed regardless of if the training was scheduled or not. Training opportunities, conferences, education classes, etc. may come up without preplanned notice; these in turn may or may not cause OT due to attendance or backfill, if approved.

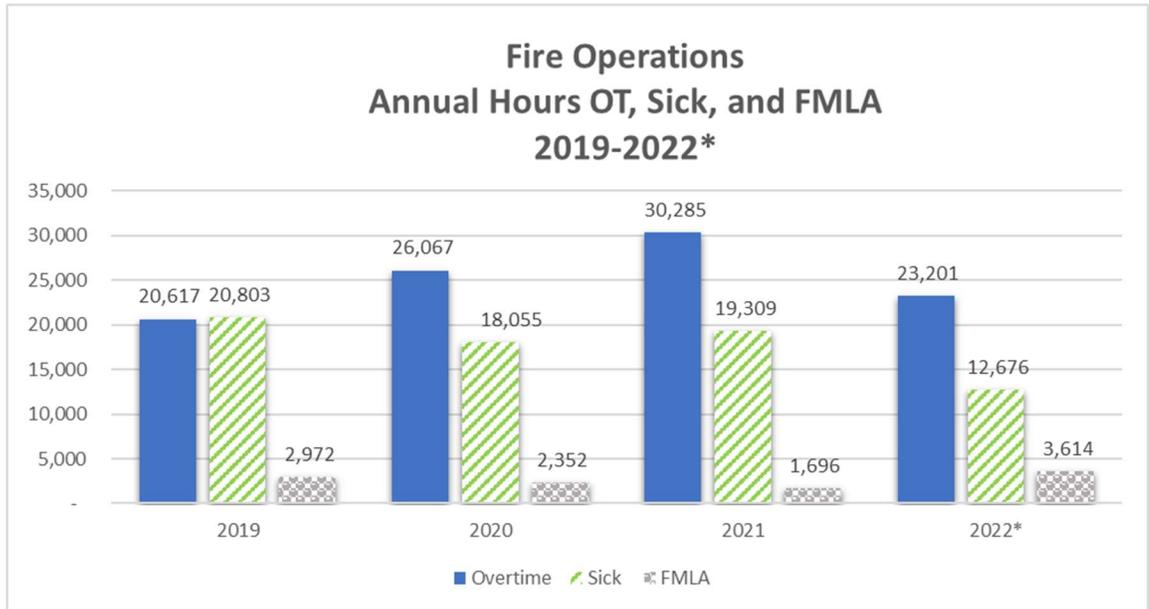
The previous issue paper on fire overtime also highlighted the issue of a relatively high average FTE taking sick leave and suggested a long-term wellness strategy, working with employees to reduce sick leave usage over time. This option is still being explored as the department moves forward with staffing and other planning.

Below is a graph showing the average number of overtime-causing leaves per day by month through July 2022. The buffer represents 9% of total staffing per day. Overtime-causing leave consists of any unplanned leave. Since 2019, the average amount of overtime causing leave has exceeded the buffer of FTEs available. In addition to sick leave, unplanned leave consists of administrative leave, bereavement, emergency leave, light duty, military leave (paid/unpaid), training backfill, and all on duty leave. Note, when COVID-19 impacted Kirkland, pandemic leave was coded as administrative leave. However, 2020 showed sharp increases and decreases unlike the previous year. Most notably, March of 2020 showed a sharp increase then decrease going into April, and a steady increase until December. Just as with sick leave, it is important to note that other types of overtime causing leave averaged higher than the daily buffer of 9%. The average percentage of overtime causing leave for 2019 was 11%; 2020 and 2021 were 13.1%, and 2022 through July is averaging 21.1%. Meaning that in each of those years the average day had more people out on overtime causing leave than there were slots available.



When looking at the hours of overtime causing leave in comparison to the OT hours earned, steady increases occurred in all categories. In 2022, overtime increased 84%

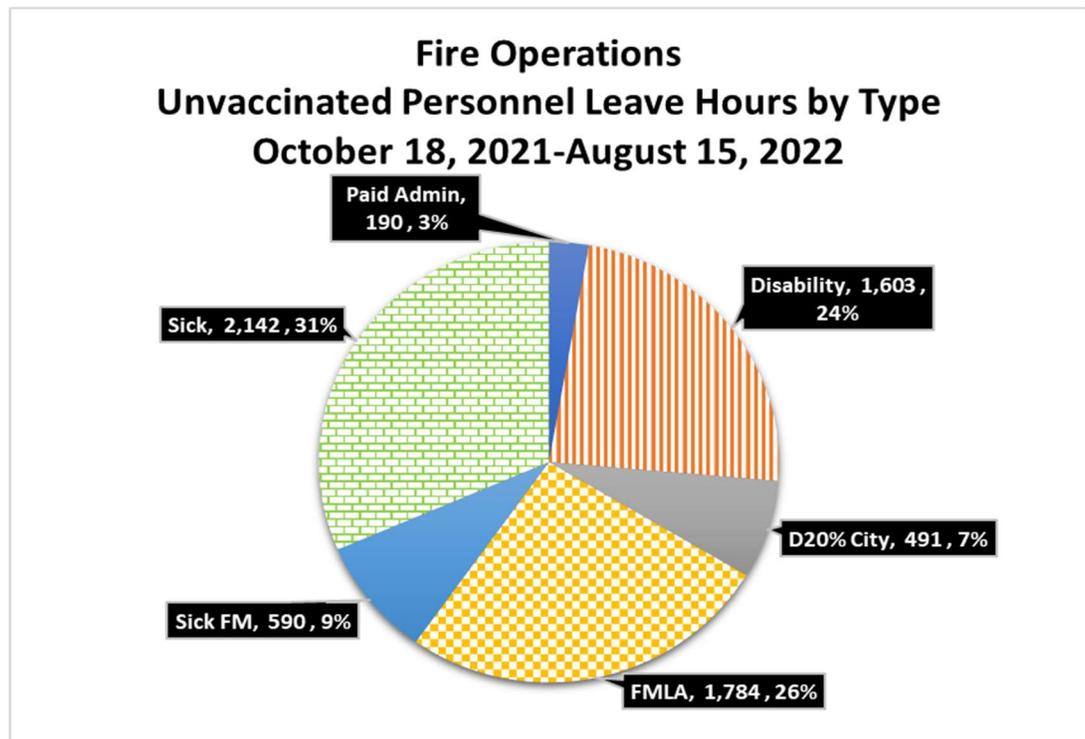
over 2021 during the period of January-July, while Sick and FMLA increased 23% and 318%, respectively. A comparison of July 2021 to July 2022 indicates increased OT, in part, attributed to increases in leaves causing OT. In July 2021, 81.50 OT hours were reported, while in July 2022 133.50 OT hours were reported, or a 64% increase in total hours. The correlation between Sick Leave taken and Overtime earned has been a consistent cause and effect pattern, however, 2021 and 2022, are showing indications that other factors are at play for increases in overtime. Those factors include use of pandemic leave and other types of leave like paid administrative leave. The graph below shows the annual hours taken and earned:



\*2022 through July 31, 2022

## b) Unvaccinated Firefighter Shifts

In accordance with the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) requirements, first responders are required to be vaccinated against severe impacts from a COVID-19 infection. The vaccination deadline for International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) personnel was October 18, 2021. Those personnel not vaccinated were removed from on-shift work. The following table shows the leave hours by type of leave for unvaccinated personnel removed from on-shift work during the period of October 18, 2021 – August 15, 2022:



A total of 6,800 leave hours were taken, which equates to roughly 282 24-hour shifts missed. This represents the equivalent of 2.71 FTE. The additional cost of this unplanned overtime causing leave amounted to approximately, \$550k.

New recruits must show proof of vaccination in order to be eligible for hire and entry to the fire academy and so this significant spike in overtime costs will most likely be a one-time event.

## c) Vacancies

In the Kirkland Fire Department, most vacancies are the result of retirements, which, due to state retirement rules, generally happen between January and June. These vacancies can last for months as firefighters have to be hired and go through the academy, which happens twice per year, before they can be added to a shift. There is

an approximate ten-month period between interviewing for a vacancy and having a trained firefighter coming out of the academy to fill that vacancy. In addition, the department often provides instructors to the academy. Some of these instructors have been taken from line positions, which also impact the overtime buffer.

In the last year, the department has been able to secure an increased number of fire academy slots to help with filling vacancies and the increased number of positions authorized through the Fire Prop. 1 measure. In the last two academies, the department was provided 8 and 10 slots, respectively. Twelve slots will be available to the department in the January/February 2023 fire academy.

As there are three shifts, one vacancy means that two shifts will still have the full complement of staffing, and as there is no guarantee that retirements happen evenly across the three shifts, there can be multiple retirements from the same shift, leaving unbalanced shifts for long periods.

As mentioned above, each additional vacancy likely requires a greater percentage of shifts to be covered by overtime, as it reduces the overtime buffer. One option for overtime management is to recognize when overtime is less expensive than hiring a new staff member. Based on a model that calculates average overtime cost, and the ongoing salary and benefit cost of a firefighter, it is cheaper for the City of Kirkland to staff with overtime if fewer than 77% of shifts require overtime. In the last issue paper this analysis indicated that it was cheaper for the City to staff with overtime if fewer than 89% of shifts require overtime. The reduction in the tipping point is a reflection of the increasing costs and supports the City’s current policy to fill vacancies in a timely fashion and not rely on overtime to meet staffing requirements.

The City could choose not to hire to full staffing levels and instead carry vacancies with the explicit recognition that salary savings would cover the increased overtime. Only after a certain number of vacancies are opened would the new hires be added. This would be a significant departure from current policy, and would require further study, and would need to be negotiated and bargained with the IAFF. However, as discussed above, on average all shifts currently require overtime which exceeds salary expenditures, as shown in the table below.

	Salary	Benefits	Total
Firefighter V Max. Longevity	8,757	4,348	13,105
100% Overtime Coverage*	14,888	2,032	16,920

\*Average overtime Rate

The department continues to have 3.0 FTE “over-hire” that allows the department to act on upcoming retirements and hire replacements to prevent long periods of understaffing. The department has previously used these positions to hire additional firefighters for the academy based on known retirements in the current year, normally via a formal letter from the employee. However, as the department grows and the length of time from hiring to starting on the line also grows, the department could consider basing annual hiring on historical averages of retirements. The potential downside of this approach would be the dilemma created if the anticipated retirement

does not actually occur. This could create a budgetary issue if insufficient budget capacity from vacancy fails to generate at levels needed to cover the over-hire cost.

Currently, there are 12 vacancies in Fire Operations. By the January fire academy, it is anticipated that number will reduce to 4 with increased academy slots and the last 5 Fire Prop. 1 funded positions added to the FTE totals.

One way of measuring the impact of vacancies on overtime is to assume that most overtime caused by vacancies is offset by savings in regular salaries. Although the relationship isn't completely one for one, vacancies do create salary savings. The table below shows how far under budget regular salaries have been from 2019 to 2022.<sup>3</sup>

<b>Regular Salaries to Budget</b>				
	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Actuals</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>% of Bud.</b>
<b>2019</b>	\$9,967,324	\$9,846,710	(\$120,614)	99%
<b>2020</b>	\$10,572,208	\$10,342,462	(\$229,746)	98%
<b>2021</b>	\$11,848,787	\$10,804,081	(\$1,044,706)	91%
<b>2022 Est.</b>	\$12,981,076	\$10,753,169	(\$2,227,907)	83%

**d) Pandemic Leave and Wildfire Mobilizations**

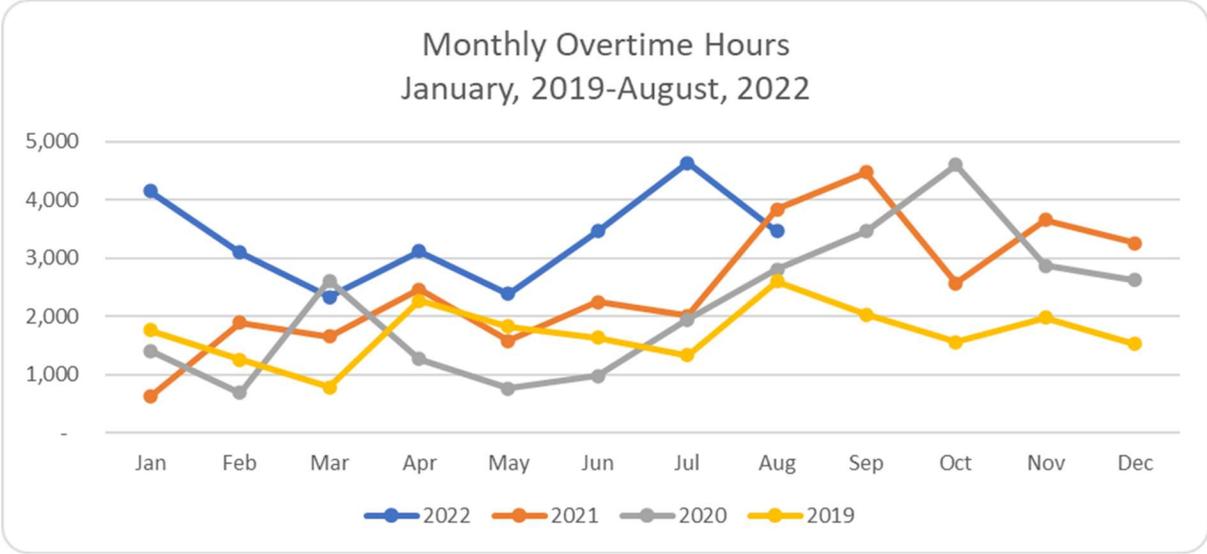
As the Pandemic continues to bring challenges to operations for the department and personnel are impacted by the numerous variants of COVID-19 that have developed, the use of Pandemic leave remains a concern for its impact on overtime. The process and procedure for use of Pandemic Leave has not changed and is available to all firefighters who have been exposed to or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and must quarantine. Pandemic leave covers 48 hours of work, or an entire shift "set" in terms of the firefighter's schedule. Note, pandemic leave is separate from sick leave, and planned leave. The science around "long COVID" is still in review and research stages, so it is too early to tell if those personnel who have been infected with COVID-19 may be suffering from any continued impacts which could increase Overtime-Causing Leave totals. The availability of vaccines created a lessened probability of the severity of symptoms of a COVID-19 infection. More recently, changes in the guidance on quarantining and social distancing may begin to close the gap on days personnel must be away from shift work, therefore, a change to the Pandemic leave policy that coincides with the revised guidance seems an appropriate consideration.

Mobilizations to wildfires across the region typically cause significant overtime costs during the months of July, August, and September. However, the state reimburses for firefighters deployed, including firefighters used for backfilling. One of the impacts of the separation of unvaccinated firefighters in 2022 was an increase in overtime worked per firefighter. In an effort to reduce workforce stress, Kirkland did not deploy any firefighters to wildland fires in June, July, August or September. The rate is determined by the fully loaded pay rate for each employee deployed and the employee

<sup>3</sup> 2022 totals are estimated.

that works the backfill overtime. The 2023-2024 Base Budget includes anticipated deployments by increasing the Overtime line item.

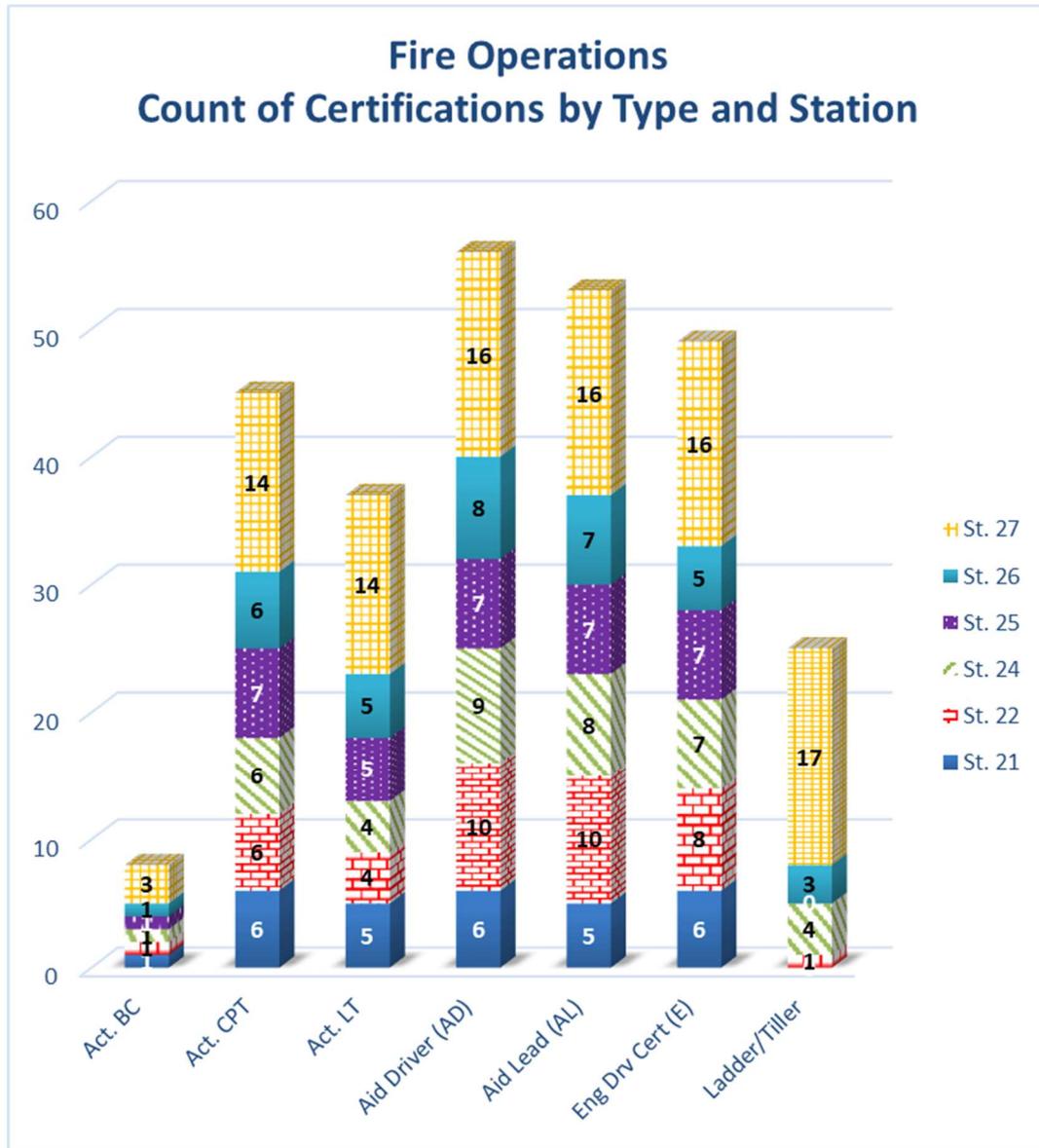
The graph below depicts the monthly overtime hours from January 1, 2019 through August 31, 2022. Trend analysis indicates that spikes tend to occur in the Spring, Summer, and early Fall. These months can be best attributed to planned leave and wildland fire mobilizations. In 2020, spikes in March were the beginning of the Pandemic and in October for vaccine distribution. Overtime in 2022 is trending higher than all prior years. This began in late 2021 with multiple separations due to vaccine mandates, as well as increases in service due to the opening of Fire Station 24. As mentioned, the City anticipates that hiring will ease the burden caused by the vaccine mandate separations and the increase in service.



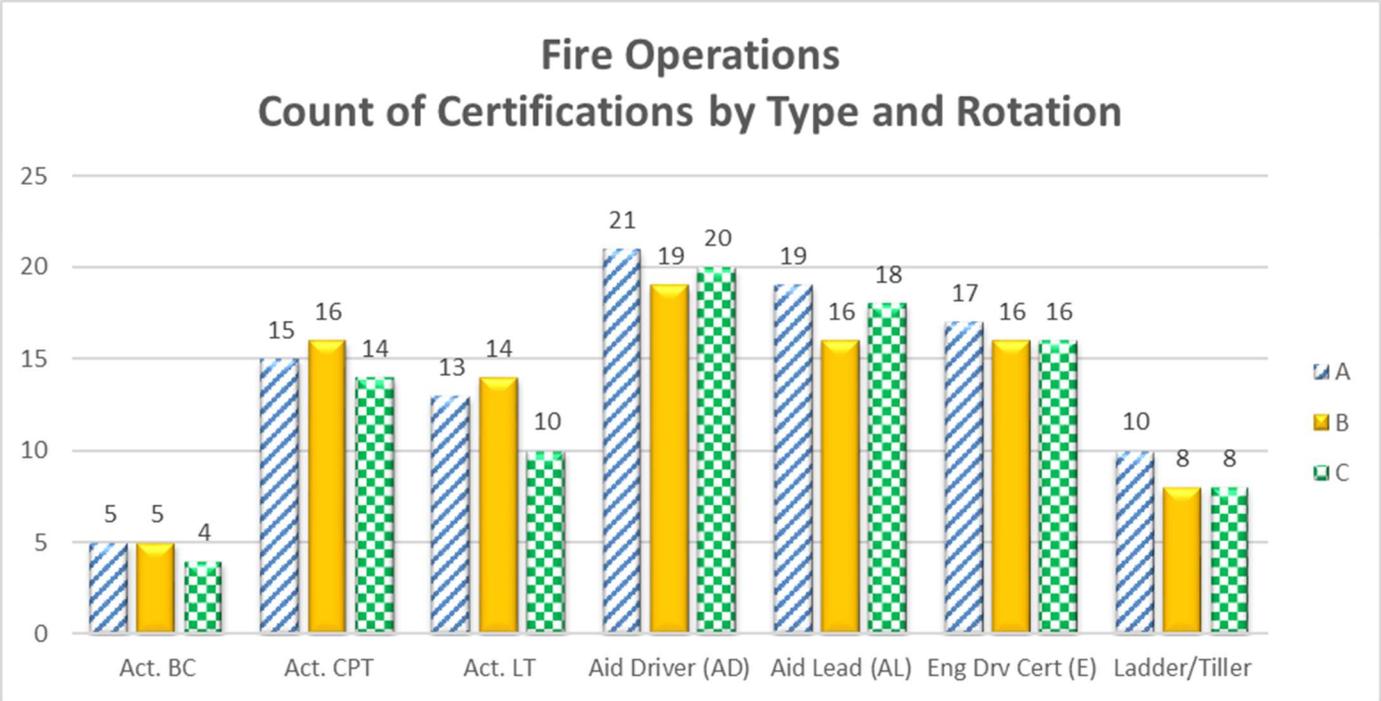
**Other Impacts on Overtime**

**Properly Certified Personnel On-Shift**

The unique challenges of scheduling a 24/7 operational model includes ensuring that personnel that have specific certifications are on-shift at all stations. For example, Station 27 houses the Ladder Truck. Operation of the Ladder requires certification as a Ladder Driver and/or a Tiller. If properly trained personnel are not available, then overtime may be approved to ensure sufficient certified staffing. The table below shows the number of Certified Personnel by type and station.



Redundancy of certified personnel is also key for each rotation to ensure 24/7 coverage. Increasing depth at each type of certification can minimize impacts to the overtime buffer. The chart below shows counts of certified personnel for each of the three shift rotations.



**State Legislative Impacts on Attrition due to Retirement**

Recent legislation at the state level has the potential of increasing attrition due to retirement. The adopted legislation created an incentive of sorts. For a firefighter with twenty-five years of experience, 5%, or 2.5 years of service was added to their LEOFF retirement calculations. This incentive may entice people to leave a little sooner because they have hit the 70% threshold. The impact could be a significantly higher pace of early retirements. In the next decade, 10% of total personnel will be retirement eligible. If higher numbers of eligible personnel decide to retire early, the department could see an immediate impact to staffing availability and the buffer allowance would shift downward in order to minimize the impact of mass separations. This could occur in the form of increased mandatory overtime to offset reduced staffing.

## **Progress on Prior Recommendations**

The progress made on recommendations from the prior biennium issue paper are summarized below:

### **1. Recognize Salary Savings Created by Vacancies**

Monitoring of the impact of vacancies on salary savings is in progress. The 2021-2022 projections show that salary savings will cover the anticipated increases in needed overtime. The table below shows the calculated balance for personnel costs:

<b>Fire Operations</b>	<b>2021-22 Estimates</b>	<b>2021-22 Budget</b>	<b>% of Budget</b>	<b>\$ Variance (Over) Under</b>
<b>Personnel</b>				
Salaries & Wages	\$21,557,250	\$24,829,863	86.8%	\$3,272,613
Overtime	4,786,461	2,189,937	218.6%	(2,596,524)
Benefits	10,426,453	11,776,928	88.5%	1,350,475
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$36,770,164</b>	<b>\$38,796,728</b>	<b>94.8%</b>	<b>\$2,026,564</b>

This is a continuing issue that will benefit from ongoing analysis.

### **2. Continue to Authorize Over-Hire Positions**

The department continues to have authorization for a total of 3 over-hire positions. This authority provides the department with flexibility needed to respond timely to retirements and other separations.

### **3. Administrative Changes**

The implementation of an on-the-job injury reporting system was completed in 2021. The information gathered has been helpful to management in gaining a better understanding and identification of problem areas that can and have led to on-duty injuries. The Association of Washington Cities (AWC) Worker Compensation Program information showed an extended period of time between injury and return to work for on-the-job injuries. The following strategies have been identified:

- Improve paperwork and reporting systems with Fire Admin and Human Resources (HR) – Interactions between Fire Admin and HR have been successfully improved and continue to work well. Communication is consistent and ongoing and has increased efficiencies in the systems.
- Proactively requiring Doctor's notes and Activity Prescription Form (APFs) from employees – HR has obtained access to and monitors leave reports and increased communications with Fire Admin.
- Educating employees on use of FMLA and Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) – Trainings have been conducted for all staff and additional refreshers are planned to build on the knowledge base of employees.

- Explore use of Ready REBOUND program to reduce disability timelines. – The exploratory process has been completed and the City is moving into the implementation phase. This includes submission of a Service Package for the 23-24 Budget by HR.

## **Next Steps**

As we head into the next biennium, the following recommendations can be used to help manage the fiscal impacts of overtime costs:

### **1. Continue to leverage salary savings created by vacancies**

The ability to leverage salary savings in support of increased overtime costs due to vacancies is an important component of budget management. The department should continue to monitor the movement of the delta between the two cost components to ensure that savings remain higher than additional costs. Utilizing a variety of management reporting tools to communicate status and identify points at which actions should be taken to minimize the budget overruns are important budget analysis techniques that staff should employ.

### **2. Enhance Training Program**

Fire Administration recognizes that properly trained and certified personnel are critical to sustainment of an optimal level of service. Enhancing the training program will provide the opportunities for new recruits to obtain necessary training and certifications in a timely fashion, while also providing ongoing professional development for existing personnel. Higher numbers of trained staff require less overlap of staffing to ensure appropriately certified staff are on-shift at each station and on each rotation. To enhance Kirkland's training and certification programs, the proposed budget includes a new dedicated Training Lieutenant and Administrative Assistant for the Training Division, a reserve engine for training, and two new training props near Station 24.

### **3. Lateral Hiring**

As challenges related to retention and hiring have become increasingly problematic, the department has looked into lateral hires. Advantages include having personnel who are experienced and hold mandatory certifications. While this is a departure from standard practice, it can be beneficial to fill vacancies in a shorter timeframe. Lateral hires would not require attendance in the Fire Academy, so adding personnel to on-shift rotations would occur at shortened turnaround times and would provide relief to the overtime buffer. Hiring laterals beyond Firefighter 1 requires bargaining with the IAFF.

### **4. Proactive Hiring to Minimize Impacts of Attrition Due to Retirements**

In 2022, an analysis of optimal hiring rates was conducted to determine if the departments current hiring and recruitment efforts should be revised. The purpose was to minimize the inevitable impacts that come with retirements, such as increased OT and less experienced personnel requiring additional oversight and support. The overall conclusion drawn was that the department should continue with a rate of new hiring at a pace of at least 5 per academy until all vacancies were filled. In addition, it is recommended that the department continue to analyze its personnel years of service, which is a key indicator of potential retirements. This would better

position the department to respond with increased recruiting efforts. Utilization of existing over-hire positions could support potential overlaps in timing of retirements and hiring as long as vacancies exist to provide sufficient budget capacity.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

Fire overtime in Kirkland has continued to rise in recent years. Some of that is attributable to new wildland fire deployments, while there have been significant spikes in overtime associated with the pandemic, vaccine separations and increases in minimum staffing. Kirkland's higher utilization of sick leave is also a cause for concern and an area for improvement in partnership with the IAFF. However, underpinning all of this is the structure within all fire departments that requires 24/7 coverage and therefore makes overtime a necessary tool.

Overtime in the fire department is a product of the requirement for minimum staffing and will always occur at some level. The key to successfully managing overtime involves understanding the drivers and the challenges of a system that requires adequate coverage across the full year. It is important to study and analyze the changes affecting the operations and the consequences of those changes.

The department's ability to increase hiring and obtain additional fire academy slots will greatly help reduce impacts from other external factors like the pandemic and internal factors as naturally occurring attrition due to retirements. The increase in staffing also provides the department with an opportunity to increase the OT buffer to alleviate impacts for overtime causing leave. Employing strategies like leveraging salary savings, creating a baseline by which to assess the overall impact, and increasing lateral hiring to shorten timeline of getting experienced and trained personnel on-shift, can help the department navigate scheduling challenges now and into the future. While the City has employed several strategies to manage this expenditure and mitigate the impact of overtime on staff, solutions generated in partnerships with the International Association of Firefighters are needed to identify sustainable strategies to substantively address the issue in the long run.