



MEDIA RELEASE

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GRAND RAPIDS ACCEPTS SAFER GRANT

The City of Grand Rapids has accepted a federal SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grant for \$2,962,553, which was awarded on April 23, 2010. Over 2,100 applications requesting over \$1.249 billion in assistance were submitted. Grand Rapids Firefighter Ryan Sparks was the grant writer who helped the Grand Rapids Fire Department receive the 7th highest award in the country. Ryan and a team of four others, including Battalion Chief Frank Verburg, retired Deputy Chief Jeff VanDellen, and Strategic Planning Officers Brad Brown and Rob Pease, worked for months on this competitive process. Commissioner Elias Lumpkins stated, "The SAFER grant is the result of the hard work and ingenuity of the men and women of the Fire Department. I am hopeful for the future of our great City."

In making the announcement, Mayor George Heartwell said, "The SAFER grant represents much more than dollars and cents; it brings a welcome reprieve for the fire department whose work we highly value. Thanks to the fire department's work in transforming this grant from a vision into a reality. It's sufficient to say that this grant brings a sense of stability to our citizens during uncertain times." Commissioner Dave Shaffer stated, "This is an exciting moment for the City of Grand Rapids. The SAFER grant will help the men and women of the Fire Department improve response time."

The federal grant program was created to provide funding directly to fire departments to help them increase the number of trained, frontline firefighters available in their communities. Conditions of acceptance include a commitment to retain SAFER funded firefighters for two years. Commissioner Walt Gutowski commented, "I am pleased to know that the Fire Department will be able to restore firefighter fighters to help keep our City safe."

The passing of the income tax increase was key to ensuring the City of Grand Rapids could meet these requirements. This grant will enable the GRFD to recall 6 personnel that are currently laid off and hire 11 additional firefighters. Commissioner Ruth E. Kelly noted, "Although we have much work ahead of us to ensure our organization is sustainable, the SAFER grant and the support of our residents reminds me that we are not alone in our efforts to transform the City."

This comes at a time when the future of the Fire Department has been challenged. Commissioner Rosalyn Bliss said, "I applaud the work of staff and the support of our citizens. We must continue to concentrate in providing core services. I am glad to see new resources coming into the Fire Department."

Commissioner James White added, "Grand Rapids is and will continue to be a leader in our nation. The SAFER grant is another feather in our cap."

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