TOWN OF PRESCOTT VALLEY
REQUEST FOR COUNCIL ACTION
Date: October 17, 2013

SUBJECT: False Alarm Introductory Period and Contract

SUBMITTING DEPARTMENT: Police Department

PREPARED BY: James Edelstein, Interim Chief of Police

AGENDA LOCATION: Comments/Communications ☐, Consent ☐, Work/Study☒, New Business ☐, Public Hearing ☐, Second Reading ☐

ATTACHMENTS: None

SUMMARY/BACKGROUND: The Police Department has responded to approximately 1200 calls for burglar and robbery alarms from residences and businesses each year for the last decade. Less than 1% of these calls are actual criminal events. The rest are commonly known as false alarms. A study placed the cost of a two Officer response to a false alarm call at $85.00. Doing the math, response to false alarms has cost the Town of Prescott Valley approximately $969,000 in that decade.

Most false alarms are caused by failure to maintain, properly arm/disarm, and train employees in the proper operation of the systems. These systems are very common and normally involve a combination of contacts that, if severed, trigger an alarm, glass breakage alarms that are triggered by noise and motion detectors. Once the alarm is triggered, a signal is sent to a monitoring station. An employee at the monitoring station calls one phone number contact for the location, and unless they reach someone responsible for the location who tells them not to send the Police, the monitoring station calls our dispatch center. Our dispatchers create a call for service and dispatch two Police Officers to the location to check and see if there is something going on. Our Officers respond and 99% of the time find it was a false alarm caused by someone who is still on site; or they find the location secure and no one is present leaving us to wonder what caused the alarm; or the building is unsecure and we have to enter and clear the building wherein we normally don't find anyone in the building. In the last case we attempt to contact the building's owner and make them aware of the unsecure nature of the building.

Currently, Town Code provides a criminal penalty after more than two false alarms in the same month of $8.00. The fine increases to a maximum of $24.00 if the incidents are repeated often enough in the same month. This code is not used by the agency because our prosecutor and Judge find it difficult to assign criminal liability to someone who may not be the individual responsible for the alarm.

Besides the cost to the Town of Prescott Valley created by false alarms, the citizens suffer due to the time our Officers spend responding to these alarm calls. In 2011, approximately 620 hours of time was spent responding to these false alarms instead of providing other pro-active patrol or more time conducting investigations.

There are several solutions to this problem (The chosen solution could include a transition period wherein those who might normally have to pay a fine would receive a notice of warning):

1. Revise Town Code, create a civil fine and registration process for those who have false alarms, require the monitoring station to make two phone calls before contacting the Police Department

and enforce the new Town Code through a third party vendor (no cost). We have contacted several vendors who currently provide this service to hundreds of jurisdictions. The vendor already has the capacity to perform the work, would take the burden of starting up the process, and we could take the process from them and administer it as a Town once we have the means of purchasing the software package and creating the necessary infrastructure to enforce the code. This option creates a cost recovery method for those costs created by unneeded response to false alarms.

2. Revise Town Code, create a civil fine and registration process for those who have false alarms, require the monitoring station to make two phone calls before contacting the Police Department and enforce the new town Code with current personnel. We can update code, but we don't have the personnel or budget to start this process. In order to solve the problem in this fashion, we would have to budget for the personnel, software, and infrastructure to enforce the code. Additionally we would have to spend countless hours tracking down the owners of businesses and residences in order to assess the fine against the right person.

3. Commence "Verified response," a process several jurisdictions have initiated in order to require every alarm except holdup, panic and robbery alarms, to respond a private person to check the location first in person, and only call the Police if they are truly needed. An example would be if Business "X" had an alarm, the business owner(s) would get a call from the monitoring station, drive to the location, and only if they found a criminal event or something suspicious would they contact the Police. This solution places citizenry in danger and is unacceptable.

4. Do nothing. This is not a recommended option as the cost to the town is currently approximately $106,675.00 per year, and as we continue to grow this number will increase.

Staff believes solution one to be most advantageous, and believes during the first twelve months of enforcement false alarm calls would reduce in frequency by nearly 50%. Over the course of time, other jurisdictions who have taken the same approach have seen nearly a 75% reduction.

Staff firmly believes it is our responsibility as a Police Department to operate in a manner that is most efficient in providing public safety services to all residents of the Town. Currently, the cost equivalent of almost two of our Officers, are lost each year responding to these calls.

This problem is not widespread among our business or residential population. In fact, only a small number of residences and businesses have repeated alarms that would result in a fine. In 2011, the Police Department responded to approximately 1,275 alarm calls at approximately 510 locations. Of those 510 locations, about half of them were repeats, some with nearly 20 false alarm calls. So, if we had taken enforcement action in 2011, only approximately 255 fines would have been issued.

Staff believes the interests of public safety require us to continue response to these calls, and we ask Council's direction on a solution so we may continue to respond to these calls, but do so in a manner that reduces the number of false alarms thereby increasing Officer available time. The fines recommended create a cost recovery mechanism so that all of our taxpayers are not burdened with paying for response to a proportionately small number of our customers who are not responsible in the operation of their alarm systems.

During council's work study on August 15, 2013, council provided direction to staff to pursue option one. Staff has identified a vendor, continues work on an ordinance for presentation at a future council meeting, and has determined that a six month grace period during which no assessments would be assessed is longer than the norm. In fact, two weeks to a month is the standard based on staff research. Staff desires council

input on a grace period of one month during which no registration or assessments would be assessed based on false alarms, as well as to inform council of the progress with the identified vendor.

OPTIONS ANALYSIS: For discussion only

ACTION OPTION: For discussion only

RECOMMENDATION: For discussion only

FISCAL ANALYSIS: No impact

REVIEWED BY:

Management Services Director _____

Town Clerk _____

Town Attorney _____

Town Manager _____

COUNCIL ACTION:

☐ Approved ☐ Denied ☐ Tabled/Deferred ☐ Assigned to _____