



# CITY OF KENNER

## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

**EDMOND J. "ED" MUNIZ**  
MAYOR

August 12, 2009

To All Firefighters:

Approximately a year ago, I held a meeting with a delegation of interested members of the fire department to discuss several issues involving your department, including salaries paid to members of the City of Kenner Fire Department. We also discussed capital improvements and equipment needs.

I committed to these members that I would address their concerns and determine what actions, if any, were required and determine if the funding was available. I was also told by these members that entry firefighters were underpaid in comparison to other fire departments in the state. Relating to the compensation issue, I explained that before I would even consider recommending a salary increase, I would require justification that the increase was needed and I would authorize a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a compensation study. The members stated that they were in the process of having a salary study performed to support their claims and they would provide it to my office so it could be included in the comparison data of the City's compensation study.

On several occasions during the intervening months, members of my staff requested a copy of the member's study. To date, no such study has been presented to me. However, in keeping with my commitments, I have allocated significant amounts of funds in our operating budget as well as appropriating additional funds by ordinance into our capital budgets to address the stated capital improvement and equipment needs. The Finance Department has prepared a detailed report that lists the equipment and improvements with their description and the cost allocation by the city (Attachment 1). To date, \$2,085,384.16 has been spent with an additional \$240,000 committed to resolving these issues. Additionally, I authorized a contract with Solutient Corporation to perform the compensation study.

As you know, at the Council Meeting held Thursday, August 6, 2009, hard copies of the "City of Kenner Firefighter Compensation Study," prepared by the Solutient Corporation, was presented to the City Council, members of the media, and certain members of the Kenner Fire Department. The entire study, including all attachments, is currently available online on our website <http://www.kenner.la.us/>.

The Solutient study used only Louisiana fire departments for comparison due to the unique nature of the laws and policies related to fire departments' salary structures. Simply looking at the annual salary of a firefighter in another state would be of little use in a compensation study unless we undertook a review of all of the applicable state laws that could be affecting that salary. For instance, Louisiana LSA RS 33:1992 sets the minimum salaries for firefighters and requires a particular percentage increase for each rank above that of firefighter; LSA RS 33:2002 provides for Extra Compensation, commonly referred to as Supplemental Pay, for firefighters after the first year of service and the Louisiana

Supreme Court has determined that regularly scheduled overtime must be included in the definition of full pay when a firefighter is on sick leave.

At the start of the compensation study, one aspect of the Kenner Fire Department's salary structure set it apart from all other comparison fire departments in the State of Louisiana and that is: **the number of hours worked**. In all of the other comparison fire departments, a firefighter works either a 53, 56, or in the case of Jefferson Parish firefighters, a 56.5-hour week; whereas, in the Kenner Fire Department, firefighters work a 48-hour week.

In all of the other comparison fire departments, firefighters do not begin to earn overtime until after they have worked at least 53 hours per week based on LSA RS 33:1994 the FLSA "special 7(k) work periods" for overtime compensation. In the City of Kenner, firefighters earn overtime for any hours worked in excess of 48 hours per week.

The Solutient study determined that in the first year of service, only the annual salaries of firefighters in two other municipalities exceeded that of a Kenner firefighter. In year two, the annual salary of a Kenner firefighter was exceeded in all other comparison fire departments. However, when the hourly salaries were compared, in the first year Kenner firefighters are paid the highest hourly pay of any municipal fire department because the City of Kenner pays the Supplemental Pay during the first year and no other municipal fire department does so. In the second year, three (3) comparison fire departments have higher hourly pay and four (4) comparison fire departments have lower hourly pay.

The findings of the study can be summarized as follows: Firefighters in the comparison fire departments have a higher annual salary because they work more hours, not because Kenner's hourly pay is low. Kenner firefighters do not make the highest hourly pay; however, they do not make the lowest hourly pay. A Kenner firefighter's hourly pay is above the average of the comparison fire departments.

The following chart provides the current annual salary and hourly pay for a second year firefighter in Kenner and the comparison fire departments. The bold letters and numerals show what the annual salary of a second year Kenner firefighter would be if he worked 53 or 56 hours per week at his current hourly pay:

<u>Fire Department</u>	<u>Annual</u>	<u>Hours</u>	<u>Hourly</u>
Alexandria	\$30,637	56	\$10.25
Baton Rouge	\$34,911	56	\$11.68
Kenner	\$27,931	48	\$11.19
<b>Kenner</b>	<b>\$30,840</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>\$11.19</b>
<b>Kenner</b>	<b>\$33,458</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>\$11.19</b>
Lafayette	\$31,110	53	\$11.29
Lake Charles	\$29,901	56	\$10.00
Monroe	\$29,580	56	\$ 9.89
Shreveport	\$36,342	56	\$12.16
Jefferson Parish	\$28,509	56.5	\$ 9.41

The issue presented to me at that initial meeting over a year ago was one of compensation for the current members of the Kenner Fire Department. It is my understanding that for as far back as our records indicate, which is at least 50 years, firefighters in the City of Kenner have worked a 48-hour week. Accordingly, all of the current firefighters took the job knowing the number of hours they would work per week, which is 48 hours. The study that I authorized was a compensation study only. It was not, nor was it intended to be a manpower or staffing study. Once again, before I recommend an increase in the manpower hours worked or staffing of the Kenner Fire Department, I will require justification that increased staffing or manpower hours worked is needed and that a recurring funding source is available, since Kenner's current fiscal crisis does not allow for additional expenditures of that magnitude. However, if it is shown that additional staffing or manpower hours is needed, I will support a recommendation to the City Council for a referendum to be placed before the voters to increase the current millage rate of 7.40.

When the Kenner Fire Department's staffing and manpower is compared to the East Bank Consolidated Fire Department (JPF), it is clear that the JPF has more firefighters per company than the City of Kenner. However, to attain this staffing and manpower, the voters of unincorporated East Jefferson approved a fire millage rate of 25 mills – currently rolled back to 17.84 mills. In comparison, the City of Kenner has an approved millage rate of 11.02 mills for fire – currently rolled back to 7.40 mills. Because the revenues generated by the dedicated fire millage falls short of necessary expenditures, the Kenner Fire Department is also funded by the use of 50% of the Cox Cable Franchise Fee, a portion of the airport parking tax, and the General Fund.

Due to the current financial crisis, the City of Kenner has suffered a decrease in sales tax revenue for 15 out of the past 15 months, and the 2008 - 2009 fiscal year saw a budget reduction of \$3.3 million, which resulted in cutbacks in many department budgets. There are no funds available from any current source to fund an increase in the Fire Department budget. If it is shown that the Kenner Fire Department could benefit from additional staffing and manpower, I will support a referendum to impose a higher millage rate for that dedicated purpose.

I would be happy to meet in my conference room with a delegation of fire department members to discuss the results of this compensation study or any other concerns. We acknowledge that the Kenner Fire Department is a key component in providing vital services to the citizens of Kenner and I stand ready and willing to work with our firefighters to solve any problem.

Sincerely,  
THE CITY OF KENNER



Edmond J. "Ed" Muniz  
Mayor

EJM/MDQ/lzd

CC: All Councilmembers  
Michael Yenni, Chief Administrative Officer  
Michael Quigley, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer