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# Keeping vigil for fire grant

## *Orange hoping it makes the list*

By Chris Sykes  
Staff Writer

City officials and members of the union representing the rank-and-file members of the Orange Fire Department are hoping Orange might be among the next New Jersey municipalities to receive a federal grant to retain positions after the city was not included in last week's list of recipients.

East Orange was on Friday's list of awardees under the SAFER grant program. The funding, provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is to be used for hiring or training firefighters.

East Orange was awarded \$1.9 million, while a week earlier Irvington was named as the recipient of a \$2.5 million grant.

While municipal and fire union officials have been informed Orange remains eligible for future rounds of grant awards, Elvin Padilla, firefighter and president of FMBA Local 10, said receiving a grant would be "scary" because it would force the city government to figure out a way to use it properly.

"We're afraid that if we do get it, what would happen this time around? I just can't see anybody giving us a two-year free anything at this point," said Padilla. "I think the Irvington firefighters we have spoken to about their grant mentioned to us that the position we are in now they were in three weeks ago. So if things are the same, then we should be getting a grant sometime this week."

Although Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. could not be reached for comment, a spokesman did release a limited statement Monday night.

"We have not been officially informed, but we are expecting to hear something soon," said the spokesman. "I was just told by the chief of staff that the new list of grant awards and recipients will be released tonight. She said that she's not sure that we are on the list for this week, but she has been told that it is coming."

The mayor, through his spokesman, said the "unions must know something," because they have been "quiet lately." Padilla confirmed that assessment.

"It looks as though the progress we've made as far as speaking out and going to City Council meetings and the rally numbers in Trenton last week and people calling their congressmen has been making a difference," Padilla said. "It would be an unbelievable addition to our department to get an additional 24 guys when we're already down 32 people. It would be great."

"We are down to 50 guys currently but we're usually budgeted for 80. It's a win-win situation for Orange and the Fire Department if we get this grant," Padilla continued. "We would be able to bring back the 12 guys who were laid off and hire an additional 12 that are desperately needed."

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