

FY24 Budget Review - Fire/Rescue (220) and Emergency Mgmt Depts (291)

Interview with Fire Chief Geof Deering and Deputy Chief Tim Gula (2/3/23)
Finance Committee: Nick Athanassiou, Lynn Bruneau and Chris Kanaga

Proposed FY24 Budget

Revenue and Expense Summary for the Fire/Rescue Dept:

- Estimated Annual Revenue for FY24: \$700k in Ambulance Receipts; \$20k from Permits/Inspections (same as FY23 and FY22 though up from FY21 estimate of \$17k due to increased real estate turn-overs w/ required fire safety home inspections)
- Estimated FY24 Expenses: \$3.1M for Salaries; \$412k for Operating Expenses

Revenue and Expense Summary for Emergency Mgmt Dept:

- Estimated Annual Revenue for FY24: 0
- Estimated FY24 Expenses: \$6k for Salaries (same as FY23 though down from \$65k in FY21 due to transfer of most beach EMT costs to Beaches Enterprise Fund); \$13.1k for Operating Expenses (just a little up from FY23).

Operating Expense History

Fire/Rescue Department:

	<u>FY19 Expd</u>	<u>FY20 Expd</u>	<u>FY21 Expd</u>	<u>FY22 Expd</u>	<u>FY23 Adp</u>	<u>FY24 Reqst</u>	<u>Avg Incr</u>
Sal	\$2.44m	\$2.56m	\$2.73m	\$2.9m	\$3.0m	\$3.1m	\$132k
Exp	352k	331k	367k	392k	402k	412k	12k
Tot	\$2.79m	\$2.89m	\$3.1m	\$3.3m	\$3.4m	\$3.53m	\$144k

Emergency Mgmt Department (Capital Outlay included w/ Expenses):

	<u>FY18 Expd</u>	<u>FY19 Expd</u>	<u>FY20 Expd</u>	<u>FY21 Expd</u>	<u>FY22 Adptd</u>	<u>FY23 Reqst</u>	<u>Avg Incr</u>
Sal	\$51.5k	\$60.96k	\$57.5k	\$6k	\$6k	\$6k	(\$9.1k)
Exp	13.7k	13.9k	13.3k	6.4k	12.75k	13.1k	(0.12k)
Tot	\$65.2k	\$74.9k	\$70.8k	\$12.4k	\$18.75k	\$19.1k	(\$9k)

Expense Considerations/History

Since FY19, the average annual increase of the total expenses (Salaries plus Operating Expenses) for the Fire/Rescue Department has been \$144k (against a total budget request for FY24 of \$3.53 million) and for the EMS Department, an average annual decrease in total expenses (Salaries plus Operating Expenses) of \$9k against a total budget request for FY24 of just over \$19k.

The numbers shown here for the Fire/Rescue Department do include the union contract increases for the firefighters/paramedics approved at the October 2022 Fall/Special Town Meeting but do not include the recently approved contract adjustments for the Fire Chief and Deputy Chief (approved at the 2/8/23 Select Board meeting) which will add \$3.8k to the Chief's FY24 compensation and \$14.9k to the Deputy Chief's compensation. Another \$2.5k for the Fire Chief will be allocated to the Emergency Management budget.

The FY24 budgets outlined above also do not include a number of other Fire/Rescue Department requests for FY24, included in their 5-Year "Future Growth" material and discussed at some length during the 2/8/23 Select Board meeting. All of these line items are currently listed on the "Budget Changes"/"Wish List" for FY24 updated before/after each Select Board meeting by Finance Director Cathy Doane. The 2/15/23 list includes the following for the Fire/Rescue Dept:

- \$20k - Promotional testing (required per collective bargaining contract); listed as a "voted budget adjustment" but no vote date given on the 2/15/23 listing; exams held every 2-3 years and must be conducted by a 3rd party vendor (postponed - see below)
- \$30k - Paramedic training (FY24 cost provides funding to cover back-fill/overtime for staff already enrolled in paramedic training; in subsequent years, similar funding w/be used to send department members to paramedic training) (postponed - see below)
- \$150k - Overtime/shift staffing (\$100k included as a Warrant Article)
- \$96,040 - New hire on-boarding costs plus fringe benefits (\$70k salary plus \$26,040 in fringe benefits) (postponed - see below)
- \$15k - Professional development (postponed - see below)
- \$743,544 - 8 new firefighters/paramedics (funded through grants/override) (SAFER grant application submitted on 3/17/23)

- \$276,598 - 8 new firefighters/paramedics w/ fringe benefits (override) (further costs TBD - postponed - see below)

The Finance Committee sent a memo to Fire Chief Geof Deering and Deputy Chief Tim Gula on January 6, 2023, recognizing the need for the 8 new firefighters/paramedics and endorsing the Departments plan to apply for the “SAFER” grant for the funding of these new resources. The memo was copied to Interim Town Manager Charlie Sumner and the Select Board.

The “Budget Changes”/“Wish List” also includes as “wish list” item for Emergency Management - \$4560 for funding intern support for updating/maintaining the Town’s emergency management plan. The objective w/be to fund interns from the MA Maritime Academy at a competitive rate-per-hour. Update: this funding has been approved by the Select Board as part of the FY24 budget.

Update (3/22/23): the Select Board voted to support the Fire Department application for a SAFER grant for 8 additional firefighters/paramedics. The Warrant for the Annual Town Meeting in May 2023 will include funding for a new ambulance and the 100’ ladder truck as outlined below as well as \$35k to build out bunk space for the anticipated new hires (\$35k) and an additional \$100k to cover overtime shifts through the summer until the Department learns whether their application for the SAFER grant is successful. Further funding for staff (including gear and training, etc. would be considered at Fall Town meeting if needed.

Also - funding for the design of a new Fire Station as noted in the CIP (\$3M) has been postponed until Fall Town Meeting.

Several other cost considerations not included in the “budget”:

- If the Fire/Rescue Department is successful in applying for and receiving grant funding for up to 8 additional firefighters/paramedics - or if the Department gets Town Meeting approval for these new positions, even without grant funding - the Department will need to convert their “conference room” into a “bunk room” for these additional hires - adding bunk space and much-needed locker storage space - \$35k. (Warrant Article - above)
- The FY24 Capital Plan includes a new ambulance that w/be funded from Ambulance Reserves (\$410k). If approved at May Town Meeting, the new

ambulance w/be ordered on/after July 1 with a likely 2-2 1/2 year lead time before delivery. (Warrant Article - above)

- The Capital Plan also includes a new 100' ladder truck (to replace the no-that-old but too short 70' ladder truck) at an estimated cost of \$1.6M which w/be funded through debt exclusion. Per the Chief, the current lead time is about 900 days - almost 3 years. (Warrant Article - above)

FY24 Budget/operating expense considerations: the biggest FY24 changes in percentages and dollars are primarily for utilities (Electricity - up 11%; Heating Fuel - up 33%) and Maintenance Contracts (up 14.5%). However, the change in the Maintenance Contract in part reflects a change in the classification of the Mitel and Sonic Wall costs (into "Maintenance Contracts" and out of "Computer Supplies").

The Emergency Mgmt Department budget for FY24 is essentially the same as last year. As noted above, the big decrease was between FY21 and FY22 with the transfer of most of the cost for beach EMS resources (personnel and equipment) to the Beaches Enterprise Fund (thus an overall budget reduction then from almost \$83k to just over \$18k).

Background

The Fire/Rescue Department includes 24 full-time personnel (chief, deputy chief, 4 shift captains, 4 shift lieutenants, an EMS coordinator, a fire inspector, 12 firefighters, and a principal account clerk). This group includes 20 full-time paramedics, 4 full-time EMTs, and 3 call firefighters.

Key equipment - 3 fully-equipped Advanced Life Support ambulances, 2 fire pumper trucks, an aerial 70' tower ladder truck, an off-road forestry truck, a special hazards truck, 2 rescue boats and various support vehicles.

Always a minimum of 4 full-time members on duty (per 2020 staffing study). The station is also covered by off-duty personnel whenever the duty crew is committed to a call. Department responses continue to be 75% EMS/Rescue and 25% fire-related. The Department continues to participate in numerous regional initiatives (see Budget Schedule A for examples).

In 2021 - 2749 calls, including 700 fire and service-related emergencies, 1200 patients transported in ambulances to CCH; 600 patients treated and assisted at scenes. Ambulance transports are billed, but not on-scene calls.

The facility is over 30 years old and requires significant repairs for department health and safety. The Station is the main operations center for the Department and Emergency Services. The Station houses all the staff and most vehicles. Additional emergency equipment is stored on the property in shipping containers or outdoors year-round. The Station includes crew quarters, first aid room/EMS office, training and meeting room and office space. It is equipped with an emergency generator that powers the Station. The Station does not meet modern emergency facility standards.

The Emergency Mgmt Department provides logistical and deployment planning and coordination during town-wide emergencies, whether natural or man-made. The Department is also responsible for the hiring, training and deployment of seasonal EMT resources at Nauset Beach and the cooperative effort to improve rescue response capabilities at the Town's waterfront and remote areas. Beginning in FY22, the cost of seasonal EMT resources was shifted to the Beaches Enterprise Fund.

Revenues Drivers

As noted above, estimated FY24 revenue for the Fire/Rescue Department for ambulance transports is \$700k. An increase in per-transport fees, which are based on Blue Cross-approved rates, was recently approved by the Select Board. The FY24 budget also estimates \$20k in revenue from Permits/Inspections - the same as anticipated for FY23. Applications for Fire Department burn permits are now available on-line on the Town website.

Challenges and Known Staffing Changes

-There is currently 1 staff vacancy in the Department, with another firefighter meeting retirement requirements this Spring. At present, many Cape departments are looking to hire additional firefighters, with little luck. As noted previously, the most recent union contract adjustment to the Orleans firefighter compensation "plan" brought the Department to about "average" Cape-wide, but likely that ranking will slip over the next few years as other departments make their own upward adjustments. Other Cape departments continue to pay more, some have better benefit programs, and several have new/newer fire stations - both attractions to young firefighters.

-If the Department is successful with its grant application for hiring 8 more fire-fighters - and is able to fill those positions - then perhaps the current driving-distance-from-home could be relaxed and the housing challenges might be less concerning.

Vehicles & Equipment / Capital Expenses

-Ambulance and ladder truck replacement plans as noted above.

-There was a separate Warrant Article for the May 2022 Town Meeting to provide \$30k for portable laptops for the 3 ambulances. Going forward, this equipment will be provided w/ new ambulances, as part of the purchase price.

-As noted previously, most of the Department's vehicles require certified repair work - thus they don't use the DPW mechanic or local town resources very often. A certified Harwich-based mechanic (and firefighter) provides on-site quality service as needed. In recent Select Board meeting discussions re "regionalization" of resources and tasks, it was suggested that the repair of Fire Department vehicles is something that c/be shared sub-regionally as is done at other off-Cape locations. The Orleans DPW facility has the right heavy-duty "lift" equipment - but an appropriately certified mechanic w/be needed.

-**Fire Station Feasibility Study** - A Warrant Article was passed at the October 2021 Town Meeting to "Approve Funding for (an) Expanded Fire Station Feasibility Study" (\$100k) that would shift the focus of the feasibility study from addition/renovation to locating and building a new Fire/Rescue Station. The Assessment of Existing Conditions milestone of the earlier Feasibility Study was completed with a determination that renovation and/or adding to the existing building was not practical. The Feasibility Study was completed and presented to the Select Board in the Fall of 2022. Earlier, the Orleans Elementary School Committee has stepped away from the project when they perceived that the needs of the School had not been considered. Most agree that a new Station is needed; however, no site has been identified, although a recent independent study confirmed that near the current location w/be best for best response times. The Feasibility Study Committee has been "furloughed" - at least temporarily. The Select Board has the ball.

Other Considerations

- The Department continues to address the action steps outlined in its Strategic Plan for FY21-FY25 published in 2021. One goal that they continue to work toward is national accreditation, with funding provided to develop/implement departmental policies and procedures that ensure compliance w/ a variety of standards (eg, OSHA, MA GL, national accreditation).
- The Department actively pursues grant opportunities. State grants for safety education for students and seniors provide about \$6k/year. Other grants can help to fund specific equipment needs (eg, \$202k received for self-contained breathing apparatus).
- The Department does not currently have a 501(c) 3 “friends” group such as those associated with the Council on Aging and Snow Library. This apparently was suggested several times by those who previewed the new Strategic Plan. A “friends” group c/ perhaps help to organize fund-raising for things like paramedic training and to support community engagement activities, including website, newsletters, etc.

Emergency Mgmt Department

-Regarding the Town’s Emergency Plan - overall responsibility for Emergency Planning and Emergency Operations is assigned to the Fire Chief, supported by the Police Chief and other Town departments and staff. Chief Deering has noted previously that there is a standard for emergency planning; however, it needs to be customized and right-sized for each municipality. He noted in particular that the Orleans year-round population is heavily weighted toward seniors, many of whom are fiercely independent (and who thus might prefer to stay in their homes, rather than going to a shelter during an emergency situation). Biggest challenges include power failures, communications, and the need for adequate, near-by warming centers during fall and winter storms. In a Budget Review discussion with the MIS/Media Ops team, Fin Comm learned that one objective w/be a video capability for the Town’s Emergency Operations Center at the Police Station. With video capability, the Chief/others could provide real-time video updates to residents during emergency situations (eg, winter storms) - providing information re. power outages (and repairs), warming centers and how to get help. Real-time video updates could be very reassuring for the Town’s aging population.

Findings and Recommendations

--The Town needs to move forward, committing the right (probably few) resources to “locating” and funding a new Fire Station. This s/be the top priority.

-As noted previously, the Department has acted on most of the short-term recommendations included in the Staffing Study presented to the Select Board on 3/4/20 or included follow-up activities in the Department’s recently released Strategic Plan for FY21-FY25.

-Although a new union contract was approved at the recent Fall/Special Town Meeting (October 2022), keeping up with compensation and providing a safe, modern Fire Station would help to attract and retain an outstanding team of firefighters, paramedics and EMTs.

-As noted previously and discussed at a recent Select Board meeting, the best opportunities for “regionalization” include training, vehicle repair. Chief Deering noted that Falmouth has a certified fire and police department mechanic. Every Friday, the oil is changed on 5 police cars - thus preventive maintenance (not waiting for the oil light to come on). His services are (or could be) out-sourced to neighboring towns as a revenue source.