

**SELECT BOARD/FINCOM MEETING MINUTES  
MINUTES AUGUST 6, 2018  
S.B. & FINCOM APPROVED**

**BOS Members Present:** Barry A. Pease, Chair; Alison S. Manugian, Vice Chair; John R. Giger, Clerk; Joshua A. Degen, Member; Rebecca H. Pine, Member

**FinCom Members Present:** Gary Green, David Manugian, Bud Robertson, Art Prest, Lorraine Leonard and Colby Doody

**Also Present:** Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant; Fire Chief Steele McCurdy; Lt. Mike Culley; Lt. Art Cheeks; Town Accountant Patricia Dufresne; Finance Committee Members; Fire Department Task Force Members Jenifer Evans, An Hee Foley, John Kane, Ryan Monat, and Peter Myette

Ms. Manugian called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

Mr. Myette called the meeting of the Task Force to order.

Mr. Green called the meeting of the Finance Committee to order.

Mr. Haddad said that he had met with Mr. Degen and Chief McCurdy the week before and thought it was best to have everyone in that night to discuss some numbers and issues that had come to light. Mr. Degen explained how the Select Board had put together a Task Force to study the future needs of the department. He said that this situation that had been brewing for many years and has come to a head. He said that this was a public safety issue adding the Fire Department may not be able to protect structures and save lives going forward unless something was done. He said that his didn't negate the need for the Task Force and looking at the long-term needs of the department adding that this would address the short-term current needs.

Chief McCurdy said that the Department had seen a number of injuries and staffing issues over the summer adding they had also lost personnel to full-time jobs in other communities which was leaving major holes in their organizations. He said that two members of the department had really stepped up over the summer, Lt. Michael Culley and Lt. Art Cheeks adding that both had been burning both ends of the candle this summer. Chief McCurdy took a minute to thank both for the time they had dedicated to the department over the summer. He said that Lt. Culley and Lt. Cheeks were two of the on-call Lieutenants who over the summer had worked 20 of 31 shifts (12 hours shift) and were tiring out. Lt. Culley said that he had been on the department for 13 years and had not seen a shortage like this in all his years on the department. He explained how he was a father and a husband and how much this had been taxing his household. He said that they really needed some additional help. He said that he was happy to do the job and loved the department but thought they need to provide better service. Lt. Cheeks said that their job was to provide the best service they could but that they needed adequate staffing to do that. He said that he had 3 children and loved coming in to help but that it was taxing. He said that he had been on the department for 10 years adding that a majority of them had full time jobs that put roofs over their heads and with working all the extra shifts, run the risk of getting hurt on duty.

Chief McCurdy said that this was becoming a safety issue for their personnel and the community. He said that he had provided, within his memo, 3 staffing options. Chief McCurdy said that option 1 would allow them to hire per diem staff from other communities. He said that you would be bringing in staff with different levels of experience who were not familiar with their community. He said that the department would need to equip them and train them, familiarize them with the community and to the departments standards. He said he was opposed to this idea adding there was no guarantee of success and their return. He said that option 2 would add two additional day staff which would expand into the evenings somewhat. He said that the cost from January 1, 2019 – June 30, 2019 would cost \$80K including benefits. He said that this would only provide 1 person which didn't alleviate the need for the call members to pick up the extra shifts. Chief McCurdy said that option 3 would add 4 additional career personnel for a cost of \$122K for 6 months. He said that with this option, they would also see a savings of \$37K (offset in call incentive pay) that would be relocated from existing budget numbers. He said that these personnel would have to be trained at the fire academy. Mr. Haddad said that in FY20 they wouldn't have to re-budget for gear and uniforms. Chief McCurdy said that that number would also start to come down a little. He said that they could also use money from their EMS receipts to pay for the 6 months left in FY19.

Chief McCurdy stated again that this was a safety issue within his organization and for the community. He said that they were reaching the edge of failure and needed to address this critical need. Mr. Degen said that at the meeting he had with the Chief and Town Manager a week ago, they had also spoken about a typical day for the Chief right now. He said that Chief McCurdy was not performing his typical duties as Chief because of the shortages. Chief McCurdy said that they had diminished capabilities during the day time. He said that often times he was the 4th person on duty where he would be responding to calls and/or performing maintenance on the trucks or driving the trucks. He said that there were a few days that he was also 1 of 2 people able to work. He said that during the night time hours they had fewer call people available due to vacations, work, etc. Mr. Haddad asked how mutual aid was being affected. Chief McCurdy said that they were relying more on mutual aid and had been true for the past several months. He said that as their staffing levels dropped down they were not able to reciprocate which had an impact on their relationship with other towns.

Mr. Green asked if they had the data that showed the number of missed shifts a year ago and now for both fulltime and call members. Chief McCurdy said that this was not new information adding it had existed for 4 years. He said it had reached a critical point and saw it sliding down further. He said that he was the third man on many shifts last year. He said that they would see a significant number of vacancies this year and could get them the numbers. Mr. Manugian asked if other towns charged them if they were unable to meet staffing for support purposes. Chief McCurdy said that there were not any repercussions if they couldn't support mutual aid but if you have utilized it more than you provided it, you need to pay it back. He said that their other communities were happy to help for now but that they would get to that point eventually. Ms. Pine asked about the per diem option and if they were competitive in pay. Mr. Haddad said that their call salaries were competitive but may not compete with career salaries. Ms. Manugian asked if the per diems would come from mutual aid. Chief McCurdy said not necessarily. Mr. Giger said that mutual aid was for handling a catastrophe adding that the notion of using it to fill staffing was stretching the intent of it. Mr. Giger said that five people was just not enough adding this was how they got to where they were that day. Ms. Manugian said that the Select Board bared some responsibility for this too. She said that both Chiefs had come to them and they voted 4-1 to shut the request down. She said that the Board didn't listen to the Chief's concerns. Mr. Haddad said that he wanted to fall on the sword. He said he thought both the Police and Fire Chiefs had valid concerns at the time, but that if he could do it all over again he would have concentrated on the Fire Department. He said they would have had a much better discussion if he had brought forward only the Fire Department. Mr. Haddad said that the Fire Chief was also putting in a lot of hours. He said that he was worried about him also and his level of anxiety and burnout. Mr. Green said he was very concerned when he read the memos but said it was very easy to say there was a risk and just hire 4 more people. He said they had been there a long time without a 24/7 department adding that the right number for the department was subjective. He said that the Chief could not bring the risk level down to zero. He asked if this was a temp problem or if there was a long-term issue. Mr. Degen said that the needs of the Fire Department were very much of a concern to him. He said that this model used to work well when people worked close to the community adding that was not the case anymore as people commuted distances for work. Mr. Degen said he didn't support option number 3 right now adding that the gaps in coverage warranted hiring a couple of full-time employees right now. Ms. Leonard asked if they would be able to take advantage of a staffing grant in FY20. Chief McCurdy said that the household income was too high to take advantage of that.

Mr. Peter Myette said that the charge of the Task Force was to look at the future need, not the present need. He said that the Town needed to concentrate on what needed to be done today adding the Committee didn't have a lot of answers yet.

Mr. Pease arrived at 6:42pm.

Ms. Jenifer Evans said that the Task Force had only had 3 meetings so far adding they were still fact finding. She said she believed their work was still at least 3-6 months out. She said that they needed to address the call department and recruitment adding they needed to support the department. Mr. Giger said that his focus was not on the work of the committee but rather how they met the requirement of 6am-6pm 5 days a week. He said that this had become dangerous adding they needed to decide that night and buy time for the committee to do their job. Ms. Pine said that she was aware of the need but could not support option 3 at this point. Ms. Manugian said that option 2 was where people sounded to be most comfortable with. She asked if that was a reasonable temporary short-term solution. Chief McCurdy said that any additional staffing was greatly beneficial. He said that they couldn't sustain the way they were operating today for an elongated period of time. He said that this wasn't just a summer issue. He said that they had an issue 24 hours a day right now because they were taxing their staff.

He said that they wouldn't utilizing the biggest savings by only adding 2 but it would provide the assistance needed. Ms. Manugian asked if they could you hire on 6-month contracts. Chief McCurdy said that there could be contractual issues by doing that. Mr. Degen said that the amount of missed days by full time staff over the last few years along with per diems and call members taking shifts was in the thousands of hours. Mr. Robertson asked if they were to hire one FT person and one per diem person if that would alleviate the hole until the study was done. Chief McCurdy said that any relief was critical at this point.

Mr. Haddad said that they were looking for guidance on how to move forward. He said that they were not trying to overrun the committee but rather bring a critical need forward. He asked for a couple of weeks to come back with iron clad information.

*Ms. Pine moved that they allow the Town Manager and Fire Chief to look at option 1 and option 2 with a further breakdown of option 2 for further clarification for the Board to review. Mr. Pease seconded the motion for discussion.*

Mr. Giger said that hope didn't put out fires adding he wanted to vote on something in 2 weeks. Ms. Manugian said that she was having trouble with option 1. Mr. Haddad said that they had not approached surrounding departments to ask for their help. Ms. Manugian said that they would not think to do that with teachers and wondered why they would here either. Mr. Degen said that kicking this can down the road was not a smart idea. He said that spending money without knowing budget issues wasn't smart either. He thought they should authorize per diems now and discuss option 2 two weeks from now. Mr. Green asked if there was money in the budget for this now. Mr. Haddad said there was. Ms. Manugian said that they could always post a meeting sooner if they could get the numbers together. Mr. Prest said that no department more important than the Fire Department in his opinion. He said he agreed with Mr. Degen that they couldn't keep kicking this down the road. He said that they needed to do something now and thought option 2 as an interim solution was what they needed to do. Ms. Manugian agreed adding she would support option 2 with 2 people. She said she didn't think they needed to wait 2 weeks adding there was an awful lot that couldn't be put into a spreadsheet. Mr. Haddad said that he was not trying to kick this down the road adding there was money in ambulance receipts to pay for this in FY19. He requested a week or 2 to look at FY20 with my team. Mr. Haddad said he agreed that option 2 is the best.

Mr. Haddad requested that they revise the motion to move to authorize the Town Manager to come back with a funding scenario for 2 FT personnel. He said that the earliest they could do anything would be October 1<sup>st</sup>. Chief McCurdy said that even if it was October 1st there would still be 2 months of hiring, fitness tests, etc. Lt. Culley said that he was one of 2 people left from his recruitment class adding that their call department was getting older. He said that training under Chief McCurdy had been so well done that their call members were getting hired in other towns as FT personnel. He said that the Town of Groton had always been good to the department adding that they had also worked hard and would continue to work hard as best as they could. Lt. Cheeks said there was no guarantee they would get per diems from other towns. He said that he and Lt. Culley would be going back to their fulltime jobs in 3 weeks adding they were currently filling per diem roles now. He said that they were using per diems on a regular basis which was not a solid option. He said that they were looking for a solid option and that was option 2. Chief McCurdy said that hiring internally was beneficial. Mr. Myette asked what they did for an immediate need. Chief McCurdy said that they pray a lot that they didn't have a major event. He said that they anticipated shortages but not to this magnitude.

Ms. Manugian said that there was a motion on the table and called for a vote of the Select Board.

*The motion carried unanimously.*

Mr. Green adjourned the meeting of the Finance Committee at this time (7:20 p.m.)

Respectfully Submitted,

Dawn Dunbar  
Executive Assistant



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## Select Board

Barry A. Pease, *Chairman*  
Alison S. Manugian, *Vice-Chairman*  
John R. Giger, *Clerk*  
Joshua A. Degen, *Member*  
Rebecca H. Pine, *Member*

**Town Manager**  
Mark W. Haddad

**To:** *Select Board  
Finance Committee*

**From:** *Mark W. Haddad – Town Manager*

**Subject:** *Increasing Firefighter Staffing in Fiscal Years 2019 and 2020*

**Date:** *August 14, 2018*

Based on the discussion and the outcome of the joint meeting between the Select Board, Finance Committee and Fire Department Task Force Study Committee on August 6, 2018, Fire Chief Steele McCurdy and I are recommending that the Select Board and Finance Committee authorize increasing the staffing of full time Firefighter/EMT's by two firefighters in FY 2019. We believe this is a necessary first step to protect the Town and its residents due to staffing shortages that the Town has been facing for the last several years. While we have been able to address these shortages with our dedicated Call Department Members, it is becoming increasingly difficult to fill these shifts on a regular basis. That said, Chief McCurdy strongly believes that adding two additional full-time Firefighter/EMT's would help address this immediately.

Adding these two positions would allow the Chief to assign them to opposite 12-hour shifts working the four (4) on, four (4) off schedules. These two shifts will mirror the shifts currently filled by Lieutenant Crocker and Lieutenant Shute. This will provide consistency in supervision. The 12 hours shifts will run from 8:00 a.m. through 8:00 p.m. This schedule will allow the Department to bolster their coverage seven (7) days a week to prevent any further staffing crisis such as those the Department has experienced this summer. Further, it will provide a control mechanism to hold overtime usage within budget. In addition, it will provide one (1) person in the station from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., which are the absolute toughest hours for the Department to find Fire and EMS coverage.

That said, one (1) person on duty does not accomplish total coverage. This means that the on-duty person will need to wait for additional personnel to arrive prior to responding to a call. Based on this, the budget for the Call Department must stay intact as is, since their utilization will remain relatively unchanged. In addition to the extended coverage, the two (2) additional personnel allows for three (3) people on duty during weekend hours where the Department experiences virtually the same call volume as week day hours and significantly limited availability of call staff.

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To understand the budgetary impact of this recommendation, the following full year budget is offered (based on FY 2020 Firefighter Union Contract):

Full-time Salaries (2 Firefighters at \$57,941)	\$115,882
Anticipated Overtime	\$ 9,748
Uniform Costs	\$ 4,400
Health Insurance (2 family plans at 70% Town Cost)	<u>\$ 28,795</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$158,825</b>

The Department would expect the Firefighters to start working full time in January 1, 2019, therefore, it is anticipated that the FY 2019 cost would be half, or \$79,413. This can be paid for out of Ambulance Revenues, which currently has a balance (as of July 1, 2018) of \$535,000. To pay for FY 2020, we believe a combination of recurring Ambulance Revenue, increased Meals Tax and levy limit tax capacity, will provide sufficient funding to pay for these positions in FY 2020 and beyond.

We anticipate being able to increase the amount taken from Ambulance Revenues from \$225,000 to \$300,000 in FY 2020. The following chart shows anticipated revenue, less anticipated expenses over the next ten years (this is a very conservative estimate as we are currently collecting a higher rate):

	Ambulance Receipt Account 10 Year Plan										
	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026</u>	<u>2027</u>	<u>2028</u>	<u>2029</u>
<i>Revenue(net of costs/refunds)</i>											
Balance forward each 7/1	\$535,000	\$803,000	\$491,000	\$214,000	\$262,000	\$310,000	\$33,000	\$81,000	\$129,000	\$157,000	(\$120,000)
FY 19 to 29 @ \$29K/mo	\$348,000	\$348,000	\$348,000	\$348,000	\$348,000	\$348,000	\$348,000	\$348,000	\$348,000	\$348,000	\$348,000
<b>Operational Expenses</b>											
Ops Encumb for next fiscal yr		(\$300,000)	(\$300,000)	(\$300,000)	(\$300,000)	(\$300,000)	(\$300,000)	(\$300,000)	(\$300,000)	(\$300,000)	(\$300,000)
<b>Capital Expenses</b>											
Two Additional Firefightr/EMT's	(\$80,000)										
Engine 3 Replacement		(\$300,000)									
Ambulance 2 Replacement			(\$325,000)							(\$325,000)	
Rescue Tools									(\$20,000)		
Ambulance 1 Replacement						(\$325,000)					
Service 1 Replacement		(\$60,000)									(\$60,000)
	\$803,000	\$491,000	\$214,000	\$262,000	\$310,000	\$33,000	\$81,000	\$129,000	\$157,000	(\$120,000)	(\$132,000)

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We also anticipate an increase in meals tax revenue from the current budgeted amount of \$120,000 in FY 2019 to \$140,000 in FY 2020. These two revenue sources would require a tax contribution of \$65,000 from the general fund to cover the full year cost. I believe we will be able to set aside the necessary tax revenue (combination of new growth and other revenues) to cover this cost. It is too early to determine the impact of the Room Occupancy Tax as we do not have enough information at this time to determine the anticipated revenue from this tax. We may have better information on this tax income during the FY 2020 Budget Process.

Revenue Estimates are as follows:

Amount Needed in FY 2020	\$158,825
Ambulance Revenue	(\$ 75,000)
Increased Meals Tax	(\$ 20,000)
Levy Capacity – Tax Revenue	<u>(\$ 63,825)</u>
Balance	\$ 0

Thank you for your consideration of this very important request. Both Steel and I look forward to discussing this in more detail with the Select Board and Finance Committee.

MWH/rjb

cc: A. Steele McCurdy – Fire Chief  
Patricia Dufrene – Town Accountant