



## Groton Fire Department

*Fire ~ EMS ~ Rescue*

*"Together We Serve the Community"*

45 Farmers Row  
Groton, Massachusetts 01450  
Tel: (978) 448-6333  
Fax: (978) 448-1116



### Fire Department Budget Narrative- Fiscal Year 2019

The FY 2019 operating budget reflects a significant increase in the Groton Fire Department. While it is understood that the budget scenario for this year is tight, the fire department is in need of staffing in order to reduce response times and ensure coverage for fire and medical emergencies.

It has been identified in the budget narratives in FY 17 and FY 18 that additional staffing would be required in the near future to support a community the size of Groton. The FY 19 budget is requesting an additional \$278,719 to add 5 additional career firefighter/EMT's and expand the per-diem coverage by 20 hours per week. That said some offset can be accomplished through a potential regional agreement with Dunstable.

Currently the Groton Fire Department is staffed by 5 career firefighter/EMT's and 45 on-call firefighters and EMT's. The headquarters station on Farmers Row is staffed only 12 hours per day 7 days per week with no staffing at the Lost Lake Station. This coverage is further supported by a career position and a per-diem position that work Monday through Friday 8am-4pm. The remaining time, emergencies are answered by a 45 member call department which is called in from their homes. This group of dedicated firefighters and EMT's has and will continue to serve the community well for years to come. That said, development of the community and extreme challenges in the recruitment of on-call personnel points to the current method of business being unsustainable.

While we have a strong call department, the cracks are showing. These cracks are created by personal obligations such as work and family and increased need for services. In 2017 the Groton Fire Department ran a recruit class netting 5 additional on-call firefighters, 2 of which were already EMT's on the department. These additional personnel merely helped fill the gaps that have been created by members that have left the service of the department or have had a decreased participation level.



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Throughout the summer of 2017, the department continued to recruit more actively than ever before, in order to run a second recruit class. This class would be to build the department as expressed in the strategic planning process. This recruiting blitz resulted in 12 interested persons that attended the first ever recruitment night at the Groton Fire Department. This evening provided the perspective applicants with an outline of what and how the department operates, the training process and the ongoing commitments of the organization. Unfortunately, out of the 12 that attended the informational session only 2 have completed the entire application and hiring process. Due to the limited applicants, they will need to attend the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy starting in February rather than an in-house program. While this avenue brings us well trained firefighters, the Town of Groton will not realize their benefit until June of 2018.

While maintaining a strong call department is a primary goal of the Groton Fire Department, we need to accept the fact that the current model is not sustainable in the years to come. This coupled with a need to improve our overall response time to emergencies reflects the necessity to add additional career staff to the department. The management letter developed by Municipal Resources Incorporated points out that the overall average response time of the department is above average and "should be of concern to the community."

Overall response times to emergencies in Groton varies minimally year to year based on the location of the call, time of day, and other factors. In general, the 5 year average response time for the Groton Fire Department is 8:53. This further broken down the average response was 6:34 between 6am and 6pm and 11:44 from 6pm through 6am. The target benchmark/accepted practice for combination fire departments is to have an average response time of 8 minutes or less.

Response times are one of the standards that fire and medical services are judged by. Most people are aware or have heard that the time it takes responders to arrive on scene can be the difference between life and death. However, the response time can also have a direct impact on pain, suffering, anxiety, general long-term health outcomes, loss of property, loss of pets, environmental damage and impact to infrastructure.



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One of the biggest changes in recent years, is research on how today's fuels behave under fire conditions. What has resulted is scientific evidence that fires today burn hotter and faster than 20-30 years ago. A fire today reaches a critical threshold often within 5 minutes of it starting versus a fire in 1980 at almost 30 minutes. The application of water needs to occur faster than ever before in order to preserve life and property.

### **Development impacts**

In the past, the development in Groton has been focused primarily in 3 areas of town, Groton Center, Lost Lake and West Groton. Now large developments are occurring in the distal reaches of the community such as Academy Hill, Old Dunstable Rd, Nashua Rd and the Shri Shirdi Sai Baba Temple. This does not include the single residences that are popping up around town. As the push of development continues to occur at our borders, the challenges faced with providing a timely response and maintaining safety of residents will increase.

There are some specific questions as to the impact of the Indian Hill project; the impact to the number of responses is estimated to be 10-15 emergency calls and quarterly inspections each year. Of these emergency responses around 5-7 will be medical emergencies which provide some offset due to billing for services. Depending on the size of events, a billed detail will be required in order to cover the influx of people. The estimated numbers of calls was arrived at by analyzing the activity at Tanglewood and other educational facilities.

Looking at total growth of non-residential properties in Groton we see a much greater number of emergency calls being generated. Between Indian Hill, the Groton Inn, the Shri Shirdi Sai Baba Temple and development at 4 corners, the Groton Fire Department will see a likely increase of around 100 emergency calls and 20 additional inspections throughout the course of each year. This is considered a significant increase in the call volume and should be of concern going forward.



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### **Regionalization**

With these issues in mind the Groton Fire Department and the Dunstable Fire Department have been looking at regionalizing to accomplish better coverage for both communities. The first step in the regionalization efforts involves answering medical calls for the Town of Dunstable. This would involve the Town of Groton providing transport of patients with medical emergencies to local hospitals. By providing this service to the Town of Dunstable we would see an approximate 120 call increase in medical emergencies generating \$80,000-\$90,000 in EMS revenue. This money should be utilized to offset the cost of the career staff. It should be noted that regardless of the calls being answered in Dunstable that the budget request would remain the same in FY 19.

Step two of the regionalization efforts while not decided in detail will involve sharing tasks such as fire prevention duties and/or training.

Step three will be the overall integration of the two fire departments into one regional entity that operates under a single chain of command. The overall regionalization will create efficiencies that will be gained more so as the communities grow.

If step 1 of the regionalization plan is accomplished, work can then begin on the subsequent steps between the communities. Chief Rich and I are committed to thoroughly evaluating and planning out each step to make regionalization a reality. This will require significant involvement of the leaders of each community as the finer details and costs are established.

### **Other offsets**

The Groton Fire Department is working to capture grant money to pay for the first 3 years of career staffing. The SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grant is conducted on a competitive basis to retain, hire back or hire new firefighters. While this grant would provide a great benefit for the Town of Groton, history would suggest that the median household income and



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financial stability of Groton works against our application. That said the possibility of regionalization should enhance our chances of receiving a grant. The grant period has not been established for 2018, but is likely during the spring.

Some money from within the current budget will be utilized in order to offset the cost of additional career staff and per-diem hours. This reallocation involves the movement of money that would provide a redundant cost to the community if staffing is increased. Being a goal of the department, it should be noted that the money for on-call personnel will remain sufficient to support the call personnel and continue to promote the engagement of call personnel department.

State grants for regionalizing the Fire Department, Town Manager and BOS liaison are looking at the possibility of an offset in cost in order to regionalize services.

### **Payroll**

Wages increase by \$273,719 in order to accomplish the following objectives.

- Increase career staff by 5
- 2% increase for on-call staff
- 2 additional days of per-diem coverage for on-call staff

This will provide a minimum of 2 Firefighter/EMT's 24 hours per day to provide a rapid response crew for emergency calls. These firefighters will be joined by the on-call personnel on scene as needed to complete the calls in a safe and effective manner. The call personnel will continue to be utilized to answer many calls in the community and actively engaged in the department.

### **Expenses**

*Postage* remains at \$100.00 for FY 19. Postage is utilized for delivery of letters of violation or other certified mailing needs.

*Office Supplies* remains at \$500.00 to support office product needs.



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*Dues and Memberships* remains at \$4,000. The Groton Fire Department maintains memberships to the National Fire Protection Association, International Fire Chiefs, Massachusetts Fire Chiefs and District 6 fire mutual aid. These entities provide extensive resources such as continuing education, access to fire codes and standards and resources from other communities.

*Travel and Conferences* remains at \$750 to pay for members to attend classes and conferences.

*Equipment Maintenance* remains at \$4,300 and is used to maintain breathing apparatus, small engines and Jaws of Life.

*Software* remains at \$8,500 is used for maintenance of EMS reporting software, as well as fire reporting and tracking software.

*Training* remains \$30,000 the account is used for training of new members of the department, leadership training, on-line education, National Core EMS training, and supplies for training of department members.

*Vehicle Costs* remain at \$20,000 for fuel. With somewhat stabilized fuel prices no increase is foreseen at this time.

*Other Expenses* has no change over previous year. The account provides for items not classified under other lines such as incident rehab materials, drinking water, cable service, and decontamination supplies.

*Vehicle Maintenance* remains at \$20,000. Vehicle maintenance covers cost to keep EMS and Fire vehicles in service and safe for operations. A 3 year history of expense ranges from \$29,876 to \$31,657 annually.

*Medical Supplies* remain the same at \$15,000. Medical supplies are the costs associated with keeping the ambulances stocked with oxygen, bandages, and medications needed for patient care.

*Uniforms* stay at increases by \$5,000 to \$17,000 to meet the needs of additional career personnel.

*Books and Periodicals* remain the same to maintain trade journals and purchase books needed for classes attended by personnel.



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*Parts and Equipment* remains the same at \$10,000. This line maintains the non-motorized equipment such as hoses, nozzles, hand tools, fire extinguishers and ladders.

*Building Maintenance* remains at \$3,100 and is utilized for small odd jobs or equipment related to running of the stations.

### **Minor Capital**

Minor capital remains at \$23,000 this year in order to replace 10 sets of firefighting gear. 8-10 sets of gear are required to be replaced each year in order to keep personnel in safe and up-to-date gear.

### **Capital**

No capital items are on this year's budget. The subsequent year's capital plans have been adjusted in order to meet operational needs.