



TOWN OF GROTON

173 Main Street
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Tel: (978) 448-1111
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Select Board

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

Town Manager
Mark W. Haddad

To: *Select Board*

From: *Mark W. Haddad – Town Manager*

Subject: *Weekly Report*

Date: *August 20, 2018*

1. In addition to the Town Manager's Report and a review of On-going Issues list, there is one additional Agenda Item. The Select Board will meet in joint session with the Finance Committee to conduct the public hearing on the Warrants for both the 2018 Fall Town Meeting and the October 1, 2018 Special Town Meeting. Enclosed with this report are the latest drafts of the Warrants for both meetings.
2. The Cultural Council is recommending that the Select Board appoint Berta Erickson to the Council. This would be for a five-year term, ending in 2023. I would respectfully request that the Board consider making this appointment at Monday's meeting.
3. As directed by the Board at your last meeting, in consultation with the Fire Chief, I have prepared a memorandum providing a recommendation to hire two (2) additional Firefighter/EMT's in FY 2019. The memo is attached to this report for your review and consideration. I would like to have this discussion as part of the review of the budget adjustments under Article 2 of the October 1, 2018 Special Town Meeting Warrant with the Select Board and Finance Committee, as Town Meeting would have to approve any additional funding for this purpose. Both Steele and I look forward to discussing this with both Boards in more detail.
4. Select Board Member Giger has updated the Fee Waiver Policy based on feedback from your last meeting. I have enclosed a copy of the proposed Policy for your review. I would respectfully request that the Board approve this policy at Monday's meeting.
5. Kevin Lindemer and Jack Petropoulos have requested time on a future Agenda before Town Meeting to make a presentation on Groton's economic development potential. They have been working on a project to study Groton's potential for commercial development. They have presented the results of their work to the Board of Assessors, Economic Development Committee, the Groton Business Association and the Planning Board. Their objective is to provide a valuable and fact-based asset to the Select Board and ultimately to the Town for use in future planning. Select Board Chair Pease has asked that the Board determine if this is something you want scheduled. We can discuss this further at Monday's meeting.
6. The Board has received the attached Open Meeting Law Violation from Jack Petropoulos. Also attached is a response prepared by Town Counsel for the Board's review and approval. The Board needs to address this complaint at Monday's meeting in order to meet the required response timeline. We can discuss this further at Monday's meeting.

MWH/rjb

enclosures



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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.

It is important to note that the Fire Department Task Force Study Committee has begun its work to determine whether or not to recommend a permanent increase in staffing to provide for 24/7 coverage. They will need several months to complete their work and make a final recommendation to the Select Board and Finance Committee. However, the immediate need for two additional Firefighter/EMT's cannot wait. To illustrate the need, one needs to look no further than what has transpired over the last two and one-half years (since January, 2016). The following chart shows the number of weekday shifts, shifts where the Department ran with less than the optimum number of Firefighter/EMT's (four), and the number of vacant full-time shifts:

Year/Period	Number of Weekday Shifts	Shifts with less than Optimum Coverage	Vacant Full-Time Shifts
Jan, 2016 – Dec, 2016	262	28	234
Jan, 2017 – Dec, 2017	260	53	155
Jan, 2018 – Present	152	35	140

This cannot continue for several reasons. First, the Full-Time Staff is experiencing a high level of overtime that is leading to burnout and errors. Second, the Fire Chief is forced to serve as a Firefighter/EMT (serving as fourth, third or in some instances second Firefighter/EMT for coverage). Third, we have lost 11 per diem Firefighter/EMT's over the last two years, further exacerbating the issue by reducing coverage. Chief McCurdy strongly believes that adding two additional full-time Firefighter/EMT's would help address this immediately.

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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 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 a higher call volume with limited on-call support.

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
Uniform Costs	\$ 4,400
Health Insurance (2 family plans at 70% Town Cost)	<u>\$ 28,795</u>
Total	\$149,077

The Department would expect the Firefighters to start working full time around January 1, 2019, therefore, it is anticipated that the FY 2019 cost would be half, or \$74,539. 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):

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Ambulance Receipt Account											
10 Year Plan											
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
<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
<i>Operational Expenses</i>											
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)
<i>Capital Expenses</i>											
Two Additional Firefighter/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)

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 \$55,000 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	\$149,077
Ambulance Revenue	(\$ 75,000)
Increased Meals Tax	(\$ 20,000)
Levy Capacity – Tax Revenue	<u>(\$ 54,077)</u>
Balance	\$ 0

Thank you for your consideration of this very important request. Both Steele 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
Fire Department Task Force Study Committee