



Town of Boxford

**Boxford Fire Department
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Matthew Coogan
Town Administrator
Town of Boxford
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RE: Staff Increase Plan

Matthew Coogan

We have discussed informally the need to add career firefighters to the department. Please allow this letter to serve as plan to hire two additional career firefighters within the next 2 years.

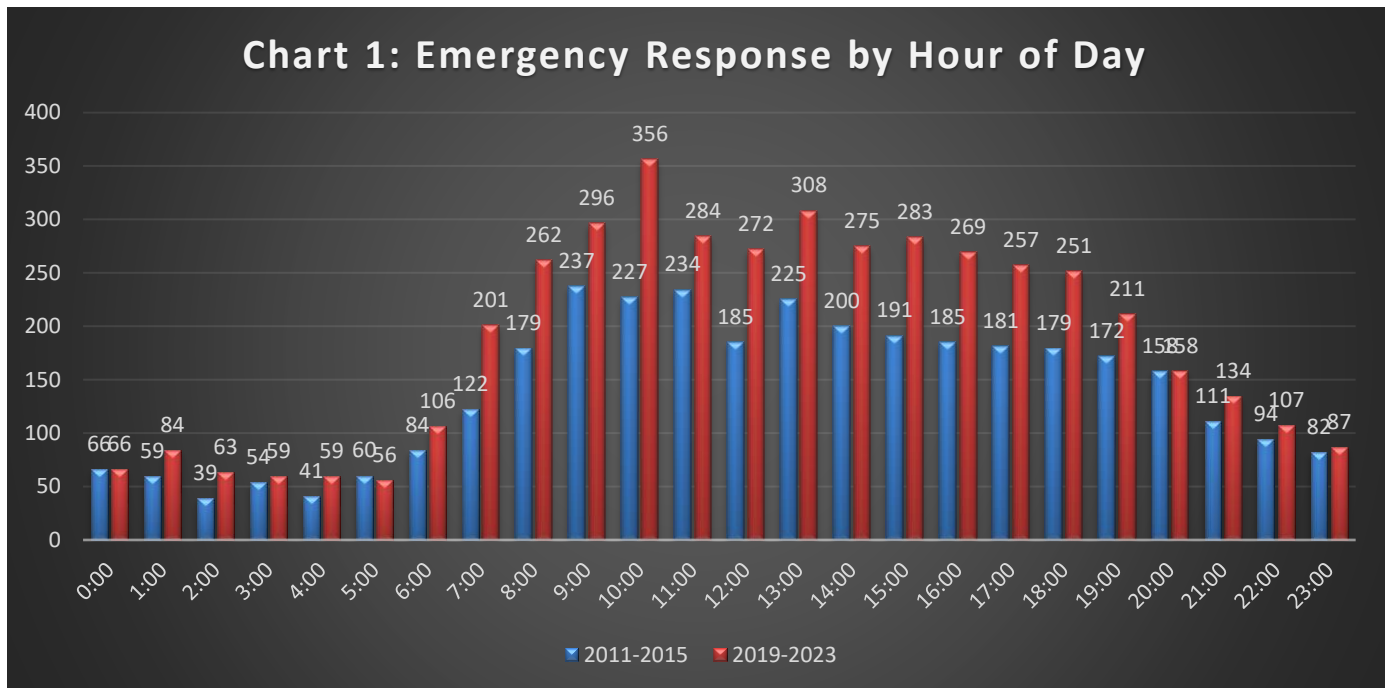
The last time the career firefighter was increased was back in 2016 when we hired two additional members to bring our total up to four (not including the fire chief). Back in 2016, statistics showed an increasing call volume with a decreasing attendance by the call firefighters during the mid-day hours. The new members were added to the Monday-Friday day schedule, however the staff changed from 8-hour days to 10-hour days to increase staffed hours.

Since the 2016 hiring, the Fire Department has had three major changes.

- 1) Implementation of Still Alarm tones. This new method eliminated the need to request call firefighters during hours covered by career members, unless the emergency was severe such as a structure fire, car accident, or occurring in the West side of Town. The practice has shown to be a savings for the budget.
- 2) The Town created an on-duty position to staff at least 1 member on duty during hours not covered by the career members. This position started in September 2021.
- 3) The career staffed have unionized, forming Local 5305 (PFFM) of the International Association of Fire Fighters. This change was effective on July 1, 2023.

This past year, the department responded to 1,013 emergency calls, a historic high point in response. In comparison, the total call response in 2016 was 806. The additional demand for the fire department service has strained our members, specifically the call firefighters.

Chart 1: Emergency Response by Hour of Day, illustrates the growing demand for emergency services. The numbers of calls has increased greatly since 2019 starting about 700am and lasting until 800pm.



The call firefighters are often unavailable to respond to calls between 600am-800pm due to work, family or other personal obligations. We have seen this with the new on-duty shift. Many call firefighters have not signed up for shifts due to their obligations. Those who do sign up for on-duty shifts request accommodations to start the shift later or earlier. We have also had an increase in calls where individual firefighters have responded alone due to lack of response.

Another concern is career members working alone from 600am-700am and from 500pm-600pm. To date, the Union understands the current staffing model but has expressed an interest in hiring additional firefighters so that each hour has at least two members working. In the past year, Captain Brown has found himself working alone at an MVA on Route 95 as well as attending to a serious medical aid that required advance interventions. Neither of which was an appropriate or safe response for those emergencies.

One of the fire departments biggest challenges in the next five years is the loss of 12 call members due to mandatory retirement age of 65. A few facts about the 12 members;

1. 8 of the 12 have more than 20 years of service
2. 5 of the 12 are Officers, including the Deputy and Captain
3. Of the 12 members retiring, at least 9 are key members who respond to a significant number of calls throughout any given year. Two of the members represent the top responder of their respective stations with 77% calls attended out of East and 57% calls attended out of West.

The loss of these individuals will not be made up by the current call firefighters or new members added. Since 2019, new firefighters have an average of 2.2 years of service. Below is a table illustrating the hiring and drop out rate since 2019. We have had an average of 30% drop out of all call firefighters since 2019. Of the members who left, 3 moved out of the area, 2 joined other fire departments and 2 were unable to make the commitment due to work/family obligations.

Table 1

Year	Hired	Resigned	%	Avg. YOS
2019	5	2	40%	3.7
2020	5	2	40%	3.4
2021	2	1	50%	2.0
2022	8	2	25%	1.5
2023	3	0	0%	0.4
Total	23	7	30%	2.2

PROPOSAL

Hiring 2 additional full-time firefighters would create evening shifts Tuesday through Friday from 1100am to 900pm. In addition, we would look to add two call firefighters shifts on Monday from 500pm-900pm and add coverage on the weekends from 600am-600pm with two call firefighters.

The new staffing will help reduce times where firefighters work alone, specifically the 600am-700am and 500pm-600pm shifts. It also will push back the start of the OIC shifts Monday-Friday to 900pm which might help the program or at least raise the value of the stipend due to less hours. In addition, two OIC shifts on the weekend would be eliminated due to coverage.

Two new hires would bring our daytime total to 5 members. This will allow the department to;

1. Staff West Station from 1100am-400pm on Tuesday-Friday. The West Station is currently closed with all emergency response coming from East Station with the career members and by toning West Firefighters. We often do not get a consistent or sufficient response. Having members staffed at West will reduce response times by roughly 8 minutes. According to google maps, West Fire Station is 11 minutes from East Fire Station.
2. Station coverage would be limited, because the two new members shifts will overlap the other career members shifts by 50%. This means we will not need to request help when members call out sick or during other planned days off. Historically, shift coverage has been problematic as the department does not have a sufficient pool of available members to work during the day.

The cost projections are included in Table 2. Table 2 also included projected savings due to implementing the Still Alarm policy to cover the new shifts.

Cost of Change	2 FF
2 Full Time Firefighters	\$ 151,944.00
Monday Call FF	\$ 10,816.00
Sat/Sun. Call FF	\$ 64,896.00
Savings (Stills Weekday)	\$ (19,000.00)
Savings (Stills Weekend)	\$ (22,000.00)
Savings From OIC	\$ (15,600.00)
Savings From C48/C49	\$ (12,756.00)
Total Cost	\$ 158,300.00

FUNDING THE PROPOSAL

- Apply for a Safer grant this year for 2 additional firefighters. Grant would cover salaries for positions for 3 years.
- Work on funding increase proposal for FY26 for weekend coverage.
- Meet with the Select Board and Finance Committee during the Spring, Summer and Fall to provide enough information to move forward with additional staff over the next few years.

In conclusion, the Fire Department strives to provide the highest level of service to our community. As you are aware, there are several residents who have expressed an interest in improving the level of service from public safety. The Select Board has created the Emergency Response Advisory Committee to evaluate public safety. As a member of the committee and as fire chief, I would anticipate fire department staffing will be one of those recommendations. We need to prepare for a significant change in the fire department organization to continue to provide high quality service our residents expect. I look forward to working with the Select Board on reviewing and implementing this plan.

Sincerely,



Chief Brian Geiger