

Town of Rye
Fire Rescue
Memorandum

To: Rye Budget Committee
Cc: Matt Scruton, Becky Bergeron, Selectboard
From: Mark Cotreau, Fire Chief
Date: November 10, 2022
RE: Proposal to fill the Deputy Chief position

Hello Budget Committee.

As mentioned in our budget narrative, the fire department is requesting to fill the long vacant Deputy/Assistant Fire Chief's position. I write today to provide you with important background information before we meet on November 16th. I use the term 'deputy/assistant fire chief' because the position has historically been referred to as a deputy position, but it seems the position was certified long ago as an assistant chief's position.

Upon taking over as your fire chief 5 years ago, we performed a SWAT analysis of all aspects of Rye Fire Rescue. This revealed significant areas of needed improvement such as:

- Much of our equipment was outdated and in poor condition.
- There was a lack of long-term capital planning. One of the fire apparatus was inadequate for continued service.
- Shift staffing was still below minimum levels on 3 of 4 shifts.
- We had little or no capability for coastal water rescue.
- Operational policies and procedures were insufficient to support modern accepted practices.

Together with your support, Rye Fire Rescue has done much over the last five years to improve the department in terms of apparatus, equipment, staffing, and programs offered such as:

- New equipment: Patient life pak monitors, gas meters, vehicle extrication tools, airbag system, forestry tools, flooding pumps, generators and breathing apparatus (SCBA grant).
- Capital plan development and funding plan. We now utilize a 20-year internal capital plan as well as the requested 6-year plan. New apparatus such as the pumper ladder replacement and the mini pumper (Engine 1 replacement). The high water/brush truck was acquired for nearly zero dollars and equipped as our brush truck, freeing up the utility truck for other missions.
- Development of a staffing assessment and strategic plan. Phase in of Per-diem staffing to bring our operational shift strength to 3/shift:
https://www.town.rye.nh.us/sites/g/files/vyhlf3751/f/uploads/rye_fire_rescue_final_draft_strategic_plan_november_2020_edtion-june_7_2021.pdf
- New EMS initiatives: Prehospital ultrasound and prehospital ventilator capability.
- Ocean rescue jet ski program: equipment purchase, training, and regional approach.

A couple of notes regarding how critical our EMS initiatives are; Nearly 29% of our Rye residents are over the age of 65. This is second only to Newcastle in our seacoast area comparable communities. It is also important to note that many of these folks live alone. This results in Rye Fire Rescue transporting a high number of very sick patients. To illustrate this point, below is a quote from a letter of support we received in April 2022 from Portsmouth Regional Hospital who holds our medical direction. The statistics really tell the story:

“From January 1st 2021 to April 14th 2022 Rye Fire and Rescue has transported a large sum of acuity ill patients to Portsmouth Regional Hospital. In the United States, the average admission percentage for patients brought to the hospital by EMS is 20% (Low End) to 40% (High End). Rye Fire and Rescue has had a staggering 49% of their patients admitted to our hospital. 94% of those patients were categorized as ESI Level 2’s and 3’s. **(ESI=Emergency Severity Index-it is a rating from 1 to 5, where 1 is severe acuity and 5 is stable)**. The patients that fall into the tier of ESI 2’s and 3’s, require a large amount of resources upon arrival at the hospital, and in the pre-hospital environment.” Malachi Fisher, MBA-HCAD, NRP, EMS Outreach, Portsmouth Regional Hospital.

The good news is that the department has been transformed from an organization that had been lacking investment in the above areas into a modern, more progressive, well-trained agency on par with most other departments our size. This is a good thing but brings us to a fork in the road. To maintain this level of capability and readiness while continuing to move the department forward, takes much oversight and leadership. Our present leadership model, with a long vacant Deputy/Assistant Chief position and no administrative assistant, leaves this component solely to the fire chief. It is no longer adequate or sustainable for the Fire Chief to perform these duties alone with little coordination. The addition of a Deputy/Assistant Fire Chief will substantially complete our 5-year plan and ensure continued progression in the future.

A Deputy/ Assistant Fire Chief works under the direction of the Fire Chief and aids him/her in overall management/leadership of the fire department. The Deputy/Assistant Fire Chief will provide:

- The needed leadership bandwidth to ensure we continue to serve the community in the manner the residents have come to expect while we continue to improve and make a significant difference to those in need.
- Much better leadership sustainability in long-term or large incidents. Recent examples would include the covid pandemic response, large storms such as the October windstorm, extended water rescues, and the water boil restriction town response to name a few.
- A path for future internal secession to the position of Fire Chief. Although future Select Board’s may decide to have an external recruitment for a fire chiefs’ position, it is organizationally healthy and prudent to have an option to recruit from within. This position will allow the current Fire Chief to develop that high level leadership needed for the next Rye Fire Chief.

Below are just a few specific examples of tasks that are not currently adequately done but would be improved with the addition of a Deputy/Assistant Fire Chief:

- Fire Prevention will be available 5 days per week. Phone calls returned promptly. Occupancy and business inspections conducted regularly as required. This is our largest source of complaints.
- Better coordination between all shifts; better continuity of information, projects, training etc. All are current issues we have.

- Better per-diem recruitment and retention efforts. Scheduling and training oversight. The onboarding process is better coordinated.
- Command redundancy on emergency calls. Currently the Fire Chief has no Chief Officer to leave in charge during vacations and other absences. Currently no redundancy for long-term major events, major incidents etc. Recent examples include windstorms, the boil water bottled water distribution, pandemic general response, and vaccination clinics. These are some of the major ones, but redundancy is needed on lesser, but serious calls as well.
- Performance evaluations and coaching. Quality performance evaluations are an important component to any healthy, progressive fire agency. We currently do not have the resources to have a quality evaluation program. I look forward to closing this gap.

The attached 'Member Responsibilities' chart is a great way to illustrate the ancillary workload, beyond their shift duties, already existing on our current members. These ancillary duties must be done in addition to the members' regular shift duties such as:

- Responding to EMS and fire emergencies. Our typical EMS transport turnaround time is 1-1.5 hours depending on the emergency and hospital transporting to.
- Filling out the fire and EMS reports. An EMS report can take anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour to properly fill out.
- Daily and weekly truck checks.
- Daily and weekly equipment checks.
- Daily Jet Ski checks.
- Inservice water rescue training.
- Inservice Fire Training.
- Inservice EMS training.
- Inservice fire prevention inspections.
- Issuing burn permits.
- Answering phone calls.
- School fire drills and other routine projects.

As you can see the members already have more responsibilities than they can effectively perform. This often results in projects started and dropped. There is little coordination between shifts on many of these projects. There is little bandwidth at the administrative level to coordinate between groups and monitor the status of projects. Adding to this issue is the regular work schedule which contains 24-hour shifts and 5 days off in a row. Once a member leaves for their 5 days the projects they were working on often get dropped for the 'new important projects'.

The comparable selection below was drawn from several criteria:

- Rye Fire comparable based on service population and infrastructure.
- Area fire departments.
- Fire departments used by Town of Rye for comparisons.

Community	Deputy/Assistant Chief Position	Administrative Assistant
Rye, NH	No	No
North Hampton, NH	Yes	No
Exeter, NH	Yes	Yes
Hampton, NH	Yes	Yes
Portsmouth, NH	Yes	Yes
Greenland, NH	Vacant	No
Manchester By the Sea, MA	No	Yes
Wolfeboro, NH	Yes	Yes
Eastham, MA	Yes	Yes
Marion, MA	Yes	Yes
Wellfleet, MA	Yes	Yes
Ogunquit, ME	Yes	No
Moultonborough, NH	Yes	Yes
Gilford, NH	Yes	Yes
Newington, NH	Yes	Yes
New Castle, NH	Yes	No
Kensington, NH	Yes	No
Hampton Falls, NH	Yes	No
Barrington, NH	Yes	No
South Hampton, NH	Yes	No
Seabrook, NH	Yes	Yes
Epping, NH	Yes	Yes
Stratham, NH	Yes	No
Newmarket, NH	Yes	Yes
Newburyport, MA	Yes	Yes
Wells, ME	No	Yes
Kennebunkport, ME	Yes	Yes
Meredith, NH	Yes	No
Kittery, ME	Yes	No
Total Communities 29	26-Yes/3-No	18-Yes/11-No
Community	Deputy/Assistant Chief Position	Administrative Assistant

The above table illustrates that of the 29 communities contacted, only Rye and three others do not use either a Deputy Chief or Assistant Chief to aid in leading the department. Of interest, although Wells, ME and Manchester by The Sea don't utilize a Deputy Chief position, the administration does benefit from having an administrative assistant. Assuming the addition of a Deputy/Assistant Fire Chief and given my present administrative load, I see no compelling reason to have an administrative assistant.

A Deputy/ Assistant Fire Chief works under the direction of the fire chief and aides him/her in overall management/leadership of the fire department. The following table illustrates the proposed job tasks of a

Deputy/Assistant Fire Chief. Included is an estimate of time needed weekly to accomplish the task completely (if money was no object) and an estimate of the time the new position would commit to that task

Deputy/ Assistant Fire Chief Job Task Analysis	Estimated total	Proposed Deputy
Job Task	hours needed	weekly hours
Accountability and Chain of Command oversight	15	8
Ensure required tasks are being completed and coordinated over all four shifts.		
Evaluation program/coaching/Discipline		
Fire Prevention and Inspections	15	8
Oversight and continuity		
Plan reviews, Assembly occupancies		
Public, contractor communication improvement		
School programs		
Fire/EMS/All-Hazards Training	20	6
Coordinate all department training		
Conduct training as needed		
Operational Response Support	As required	As Required
Administrative	20	8
Policy Development and implementation		
Area chief meetings as needed		
Represent department at town/region meetings		
Ad hoc projects as required		
Community Relations	10	3
Community Outreach to high-risk populations such as Elderly, mental health, special risk		
Budget Preparation/ Implementation	8	3
Assist in preparing and implementing budget		
Assist in preparing and implementing CIP plan		
Assist in equipment review and purchasing		
EMS Program coordination	5	2
Assure EMS program remains progressive, well equipped and personnel well trained through EMS Coordinators.		
Ocean Rescue Program Coordination	4	2
Assure Ocean Rescue program remains, well equipped and personnel well trained and continuous improvement.		
	Est. Max.	Total Workweek
	97 hours	40 hours

Working together, Rye Fire Rescue has come a long way! As with any organization Rye Fire Rescue will not remain stationary. We will either progress further or slide back. What's at stake here is the continued quality of our current programs and progressive movement of the department in ways that increase the quality of life of our residents.

Thank you for your past and present support and I look forward to our discussion!

Be well, Mark