

Town of Rye  
Fire Rescue  
*Memorandum*

To: Becky Bergeron  
Cc: Select Board, Matt Scruton  
From: Mark Cotreau  
Date: October 16, 2023  
RE: 2024 Fire, EMS, Lifeguard and Building Budget submission

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit our 2024 budget request for the Fire Rescue, Ambulance, Public Safety Building and Lifeguard budgets. We appreciate your support and work hard to be good stewards of our budgets. Below are some YTD highlights from the present budget year:

- Structure Fires: On receiving any report of a possible structure fire in Rye, we respond immediately while simultaneously calling in off-duty firefighters and surrounding mutual aid communities. This system approach enables us to have sufficient on-scene resources to extinguish the fire efficiently. This year we finished the three-year phase in of our per-diem program. Per-diem staffing allows us to have three firefighters in the station responding immediately instead of two. This additional staffing helps significantly in our ability to minimize damage!
  - On July 21, lightning caused a small fire in the basement of a West Street home. Fire/smoke damage was contained to the basement.
  - We also have responded on mutual aid for structure fires 19 times YTD to Hampton (4), Kittery (2), Newmarket (2), Greenland (7), Stratham, North Hampton, Newcastle, and Seabrook.
- Other Notable Incidents:
  - Brush Fires: Two notable brush fires on Ocean Boulevard and Frontier Road.
  - Hazmat Incidents:
    - We responded to Epping with the regional hazmat team for an overturned fuel truck.
    - We responded to Durham with the regional hazmat team for unknown chemical hazards in a home.
  - Swat Team: We responded to Hampton as paramedic support for a swat team response.
  - Flooding: During an August heavy rain event we responded to 9 homes for flooding issues.
  - Water Rescue calls: YTD we have responded to 8 calls for water rescue. This includes 2 responses to North Hampton and 1 response to New Castle.

- In April we responded to Wallis Sands Beach for a truck fire. On arrival we found a heavily damaged pickup truck which had driven off the northern rocks onto the beach. The fire was extinguished and occupant transported to the hospital.
  - In late 2022 (after last year's budget memo) Rye Fire hosted a series of bottled water distribution clinics after the Rye Water District water ban. We would like to thank Rye Police, Rye Public Works, and the Rye Lions club for their support of this effort.
- Personnel: Rye Fire Rescue had many staffing changes this year. Congratulations to the below personnel who have been hired or promoted!
    - Our long-time senior Fire Lieutenant Jeff DiBartolomeo retired June 1<sup>st</sup>. We wish him a long and healthy retirement!
    - FF/Paramedic Mike Rivet was promoted to Lieutenant to fill the vacancy left by LT DiBartolomeo's retirement.
    - Per-Diem Firefighter/Paramedic Kaitlyn Pidgeon was hired full-time to fill the vacancy left by Lt. Rivets promotion.
    - On October 1<sup>st</sup>, LT/Paramedic Kevin Wunderly was promoted to Deputy Fire Chief. Kevin will be working a normal 5 day work week and assisting the fire chief with day-to-day duties as well as spearheading the fire prevention program.
    - Firefighter Peter Anania has been promoted to Lieutenant to fill the vacancy left by Deputy Wunderly's promotion.
    - Per-Diem Firefighter Becca Obrien has been hired full-time to fill the vacancy left by LT Ananias promotion.
    - Per-Diem Firefighters EMT's: The national shortage of candidates continues to make challenging recruiting. I am pleased to announce we have 3 additional per-diem firefighters/ EMT's. They are Garret Mathews, Jack Sullivan and Becca Obrien (now hired full-time). Congratulations to all our new per-diem firefighters!
  - Training: Rye Fire Rescue conducts regular in-service training of various sorts to maintain our basic skills. We also have members who maintain membership in various regional teams such as the Seacoast START (hazmat) response team, Seacoast SERT (swat) team, and FEMA Task Force 1 team. Each of these teams conduct regular training in their specific discipline. Below are a few of this year's training highlights:
    - Bethany Training: Rye, North Hampton and Greenland fire departments train together twice per month at Bethany Church. Training is more effective and efficient when our three small departments train together, but the challenge is to find a suitable training site that is close to all our response areas. We are extremely thankful to the folks at Bethany Church for allowing us to train on their property!
    - Ocean Search and Rescue Training: May 23<sup>rd</sup>, Rye hosted the USCG and other area seacoast water rescue assets for a second annual day long training on search patterns and rescue techniques. The practical rescue scenarios held between Rye Harbor and Star Island were very beneficial to all agencies attending.

- As reported last year, Peter Anania, was accepted into a paramedic program. Peter has completed this challenging program and is waiting for his final certification testing. Our Staffing plan calls for a minimum of six full-time paramedics, Peter will be our fifth!
  - ICS 300/400 are Incident command system courses required by FEMA for shift commanders and anyone who acts as fire chief. LT DiBartolomeo, LT Gallant, LT MacGlashing, Deputy Wunderly and LT Rivet all received this training.
  - On October 21<sup>st</sup>, Deputy Chief Wunderly traveled to the National Fire Academy (NFA) in Emmitsburg MD to take a 6-day course entitled 'Command and Control of Multiple Alarm Incidents'
  - Earlier this year, LT Rivet completed a two-year NFA course entitled Managing Officer. This challenging program is designed for emerging fire service leaders.
  - Firefighter Klanchesser and LT MacGlashing both received Safety Officer pro board certification.
  - LT Peter Anania received Instructor I and Fire Officer I pro board certifications.
  - FF Kaitlyn Pidgeon received her Instructor I, II, III and Fire Officer I Pro Board Certifications.
  - FF Becca Obrien completed her Firefighter I and II fire academy. She is currently in her Advanced-EMT class. We plan on sending her to paramedic school in the 2025 budget.
  - LT Rivet, our ocean rescue coordinator, completed a one-week USCG search and rescue course.
  - Webster At Rye emergency Drill: On September 14<sup>th</sup> Rye Fire Rescue along with Greenland Fire and Webster at Rye staff took part in a practical emergency drill. The scenario was a propane fuel truck on fire while filling at the building. Utilizing a retired Propane truck as a prop, we practiced laying supply lines and putting out the fire, coordinating with on-site staff and evacuating patients to a safer area in the building. These types of drills are critical to our operational readiness! Thanks goes to the Webster at Rye staff for being part of the response team! Thanks also to National Wrecker for providing the prop!
- Deputy Fire Chief: The Deputy Chief position has been filled as of October 1, 2023. The Deputy Chief position had been discontinued in the 1990's and is one of the final components of our strategic plan. Along with the fire chief, this reinstated position will provide critical leadership, administration, and operational support, while providing professional development succession planning for the next fire chief promotional process. Our staffing needs assessment (11/2020) can be found at [https://www.town.rye.nh.us/sites/g/files/vyhlf3751/f/uploads/rye\\_fire\\_rescue\\_final\\_draft\\_strategic\\_plan\\_november\\_2020\\_edition-june\\_7\\_2021.pdf](https://www.town.rye.nh.us/sites/g/files/vyhlf3751/f/uploads/rye_fire_rescue_final_draft_strategic_plan_november_2020_edition-june_7_2021.pdf)
  - Shark Receivers: The town has 4 data shark receivers. They are located below an orange buoy near Sawyer, Cable, Foss and Wallis Beaches. These receivers will detect and register any 'tagged' great white shark within 1500 feet of the buoy. The receivers are pulled from the ocean in November and read by the Great White Shark Conservancy. This information

helps us in our beach safety hazard assessment. In 2022 one tagged great white shark was identified off Foss Beach. 2023 data should be out some time this winter. A big thanks goes to Jack Farrell for his help in deploying and retrieving these buoys!

- CMS Medicare Ambulance Cost Data Collection Survey: Rye along with many other ambulance agencies have been mandated by the federal government to complete an in-depth report focused on the cost of providing our ambulance service. The survey was based on 2022 activity and due to CMS (Medicare) by May 2023. Completing this data collection project required significant resources on the towns part. I would like to thank Becky Bergeron, LT MacGlashing, Deputy Wunderly, Kaitlyn Pidgeon and Chris Bohling for a great team effort!
- Goss Farm Prescribed Burn: In April, at the request of our conservation folks, we held a controlled burn on the lower field at Goss Farm. We are happy to be able to assist while honing our brush firefighting skills!
- Capital Plan: Our capital plan as submitted to CIP is attached. Rye Fire Rescue puts much effort in maintaining a long-term, carefully developed and value-driven capital plan. This year's proposed capital purchase:
  - Deputy Chief's Vehicle: (\$38,000) The re-establishment of the Deputy Fire Chiefs position in this year's budget will require the Deputy Fire Chief to utilize a vehicle for his essential duties, which include:
    - responding to calls both from home (both Rye and mutual aid) and in-town (on-duty and off-duty).
    - traveling to various meetings in and out of town.
    - Conducting inspections and other fire prevention related duties.
    - Performing incident command functions as required.

The Deputy will initially use the department's utility truck. This needs to be a temporary situation as the truck currently serves some of our other operational needs such as towing our jet ski etc. The funding requested will provide a used vehicle suitable for the above duties.

- Lifeguard budget: 2023 was the first season in which the town of Rye provided Lifeguard certification classes to maintain full staffing. While the classes were met with some success, staffing a full complement of lifeguards was a challenge again this year. Although the guards we had were good, we just did not have enough personnel. This resulted in many days where one or more beaches went without lifeguards. We were able to cover approximately 80% of the 3500 budgeted hours. The lifeguards did a terrific job of preventative guarding. There were nine rescues from riptides. With this exception, aside from minor situations and some boarders blown east with the winds, their season was uneventful. The jet ski assisted a few times with the boarders.

We surveyed our guards (many of which were senior guards not returning) at the end of the year and here is some of their thoughtful feedback:

- Wages are important. Many guards were concerned about taking the job with Rye because of the low pay. Even with our increased wage scale we have fallen behind. The Selectboard has been working with us over the past few years to address this issue.
- Rainout days are hurting the guards financially.
- Training was good this year.
- Morale among the guards was good this year.

We have a recruiting/retention plan for next year which includes:

- Wage increase:
    - Currently our lifeguards start at \$16.50/ hr. and our head guards (2) at \$19.50/hr.
    - Our main competition is Hampton State Lifeguards, who start at just under \$19/hr. Other ocean lifeguards along the coast start between \$18/hr. and \$20/hr. with some planned increases for next year. Last year even the water parks were paying \$20.00/hr.! It is readily apparent that Rye needs to be a leader in this area to attract both the number and caliber lifeguards required.
    - We are proposing the following increase in our lifeguard wage scale. Rye lifeguards' new scale would then start at \$21.00/ hr. and our head guards would start at \$24.00/hr. The cost of this proposal will add \$5,390 to our Lifeguard wage line item.
  - Rainout Days: We have included 3 hours' pay for each rainout day into this year's budget. During this time, guards will do their fitness training, followed by two hours of training.
  - Lifeguard classes:
    - We certified two Rye Fire members as instructors this past year. We put on three classes in the off season. We have budgeted for at least two classes in 2024. The cost of this proposal will add \$5,452 to our Lifeguard wage line item. It will also add \$500 to Supplies.
  - Expanded administration/recruiting: We are proposing to add a part-time lifeguard coordinator position for 2024 at up to 8 hours per week. This position will support the lifeguard program recruiting, training, and administrative functions. Please see the attached Job Description for detailed information. The cost of this proposal will add \$9,301 to our Lifeguard wage line item.
- Public Safety Building: This year we again had several expensive repairs to our heating/AC systems in addition to the usual variety of maintenance expenses. We also had to replace our boiler and one hot water tank.
  - Staffing Assessment: In 2023 we completed the phase in of our per-diem firefighter coverage bringing our shift staffing to three via additional per-diem firefighter/EMT's. This

additional staffing has dramatically improved our operational efficiency, safety margins and availability to the community, especially during simultaneous responses. The challenge in this recruiting environment will be to maintain per-diem coverage. While the program has been successful, we've lost one per-diem to a full-time spot in another town. We also had another two per-diem staff members go full-time in Rye. At this point we are attempting to fill multiple vacancies. We have been relatively successful so far but will continue to monitor this important data point. The Rye Fire Rescue Staffing assessment can be found on the town's website and is the product of months of work both internally and externally. The document contains a data-based analysis of our present staffing model, identifies our challenges, and offers practical value-driven strategies for moving forward.

- Warrant Articles: We propose one warrant article this year:
  - \$200,000 to capital reserve to fund our Apparatus capital plan.

2024 will be a busy year for Rye Fire Rescue. In no particular order, below are a few of our goals:

- Continue to implement the planned improvements relative to the Deputy Fire Chiefs position. This will include fire prevention, training and operational improvements outlined in our staffing needs assessment.
- Take delivery of our ordered mini pumper. Outfit the truck and train all our members.

Below are a few notes as you peruse our budget requests:

#### FIRE (4220)

- Wages (401) have been increased to fund the remainder (9 months) of the Deputy Fire Chief.
- Uniforms (432) were increased to \$12,000 to account for contractual adjustments and additional per-diem firefighters.
- Protective Gear (433) was increased by \$1492 to reflect another planned 8% cost increase. In 2012 the town purchased a substantial quantity of turnout gear via a warrant article. Turnout gear has a national standard lifespan of 10 years. For the last few years, we have been buying several sets per year to guard against another large purchase. These purchases are part of that effort.
- Vehicle Fuel and Oil (635) decreased to \$8270. This is due to projected fuel cost of \$3.50/gallon for diesel and \$3.00/gallon for gasoline.
- Vehicle Repairs (639) increased 5% due to increasing repair costs.
- Mileage (437) increased by \$500 to \$800 to accommodate expected increase in costs.
- Department head expense (436) increased by \$300 to \$500 due to historical need.
- Member dues (560) increased by \$1,000 to account for dues increases and the addition of the Deputy Fire Chief.

- Background checks (430) increased by \$700 to \$1200. The addition of per-diem employees as well as new full-time employees made this necessary.

#### AMBULANCE (4215)

- Software licensing fees (474) reduced to zero as there is no EMS budget related software fees.
- Vehicle Fuel and Oil (635) decreased to \$6300. This is due to the projected fuel cost of \$3.50/gallon for diesel.
- Patient Billing/Collection (466) increased from \$8000 to \$13250 to reflect the increasing number of ambulance transports. Comstar, our billing company, service fee has remained constant at 5% of the funds collected.
- Equipment contracts (478) have increased from \$4000 to \$4700 to reflect increasing cost. This covers preventative service agreements for our more expensive critical equipment such as cardiac monitors, Lucas machine, ventilator, stretchers, stair chairs and the like.

#### LIFEGUARDS (4520)

- Wages (401) increased by \$20145 to \$91475 for the following reasons:
  - Proposed wage adjustment as noted in the above narrative \$76722.
  - Proposed Lifeguard administration and recruiting as noted in the above narrative (\$9301).
  - Lifeguard class instructor wages for two classes (\$5452).
- Equipment Maintenance (490) increased from \$500 to \$1600. This is due to the inspection and maintenance costs for the 4 shark buoys off Sawyer, Cable, Foss and Wallis beaches.
- Supplies (600) increased from \$1500 to \$2000. This was due to Lifeguard class expenses such as certifications and manuals.
- Equipment Purchases (679) has increased from \$1500 to \$1600 to compensate for inflation.

#### PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING

- Heating Fuel (481) decreased to \$17373. This is due to the projected fuel cost of \$2.82/gallon for blended fuel and a projected usage of 6160 gallons.
- Maintenance Supplies (483) has a 5% increase from \$2625 to \$2756 to compensate for inflation.
- Building Maintenance (484) has also increased 5% from \$30000 to \$31500 to compensate for inflation.

Thank you for your support and please contact me with any questions or concerns!