Town of Rye
Fire Rescue
Memorandum

To: Selectboard
Cc: Matt Scruton, Alicia Griffin
From: Mark Cotreau, Fire Chief
Date: October 27, 2025
RE: Proposed Rye Fire Rescue business/operating model Change

Executive Summary

Rye Fire Rescue respectfully requests the Selectboards consideration to move to a new staffing plan which will enhance operational capabilities, create efficiencies and control cost for the future.

Our current staffing model includes recall overtime of off duty firefighters for most of our emergency responses. The last contractual movement from a two hour to a three-hour minimum recall significantly increased our overtime cost. This impact will get more significant as our emergency runs continue to increase (figure #1 below). A significant driver to the need for recall overtime is the frequency of overlapping emergency calls (figure #2 below). Interestingly, 83%-89% of our overlapping calls occur from 8AM-8PM.

As we noticed the Recall OT impact on our budget this year, we decided to take a closer look at our staffing model to see what benefits we are yielding and what liabilities lie ahead.

Our research questions focus on our current staffing model, specifically, in (1) maintaining or improving our service, especially our EMS service to our residents; and (2) Are there improvements that can be made through our existing proposed 2026 budget. These are the questions:

1. What are the benefits and liabilities contained within our current fire and EMS staffing model?
2. Can our current fire and EMS staffing model be significantly improved with little or no additional funds above and beyond our current 2026 proposed ambulance (4215) and fire (4220) budgets.

We performed a SWOT analysis to examine our CURRENT staffing model (figure #3 below). You will notice that the weaknesses and threats to the system are significant.

We then developed and conducted a SWOT analysis on our PROPOSED staffing model (Figure#4 below). You will notice that this model improves the system by moving most of the weaknesses and threats to strengths. Key changes to adopting this model are:

- Recall overtime is significantly reduced. It also contains overtime growth for most of our increasing volume.
- Two new full-time firefighter/EMT's will be hired, leaving all shifts covered by 3 FT firefighters. Costs including benefits are paid for by reduced overtime costs.
- In addition, Per-diem firefighters will cover 8am-8pm, enabling second ambulance coverage for 83%-89% of our overlapping calls.
- Financial: The overtime cost has reached the 'tipping point' for consideration of a new model. The cost of this proposed model is approximately the same as the proposed 2026 budget for EMS and Fire. Alicia has taken a high-level look. Assuming this meets with your approval, she will take a deeper dive.

Figure #1-Total Emergency Runs

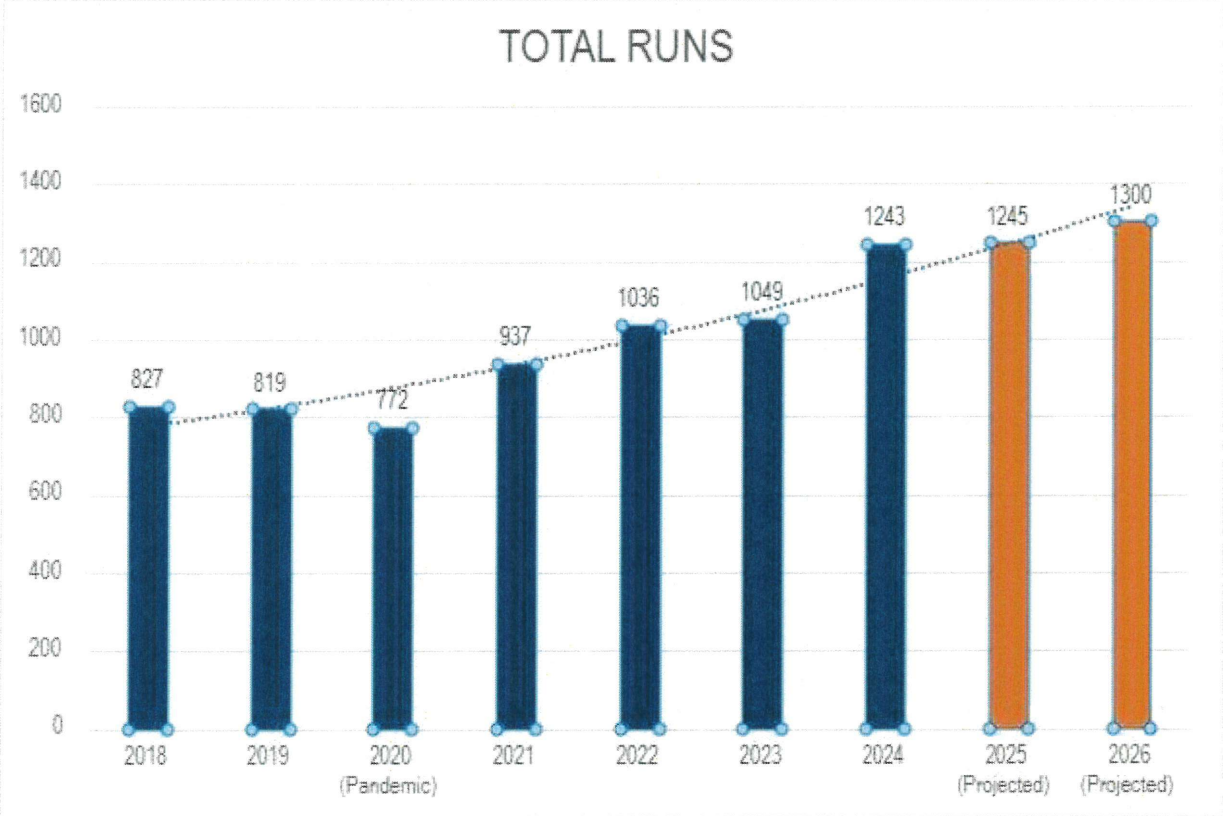
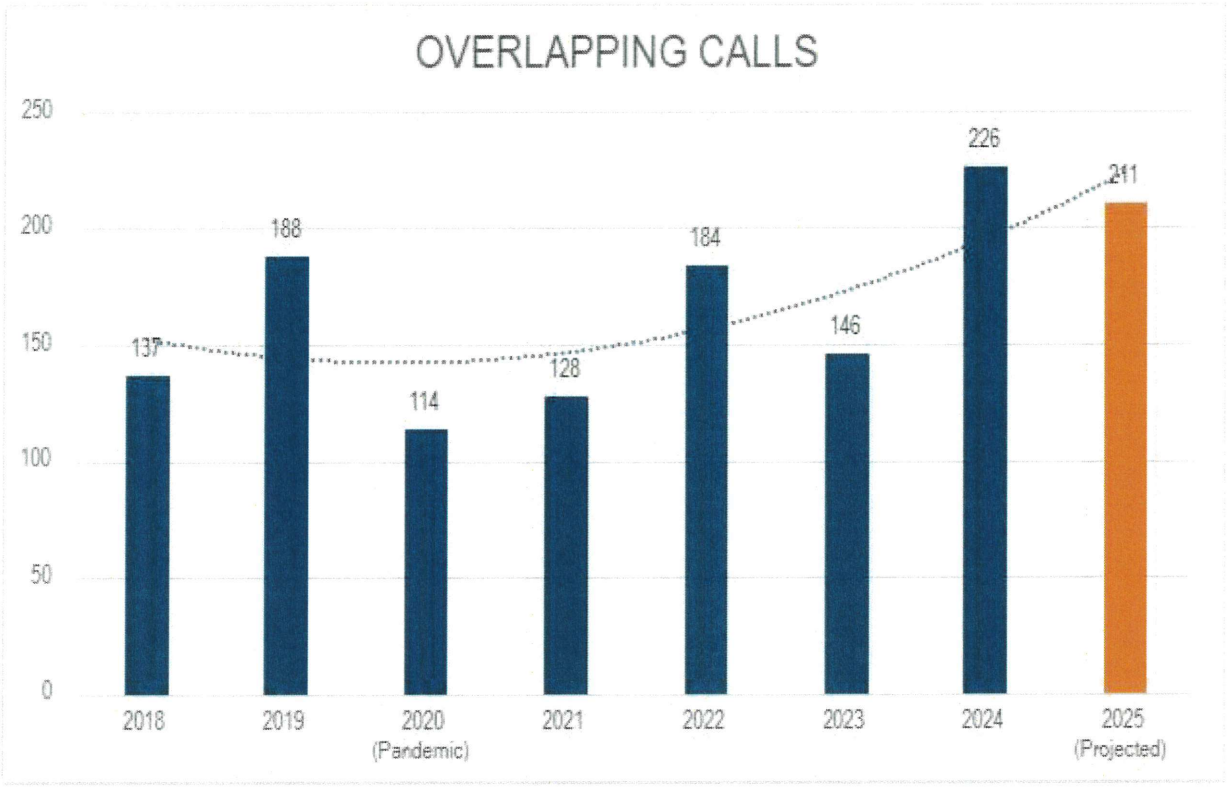
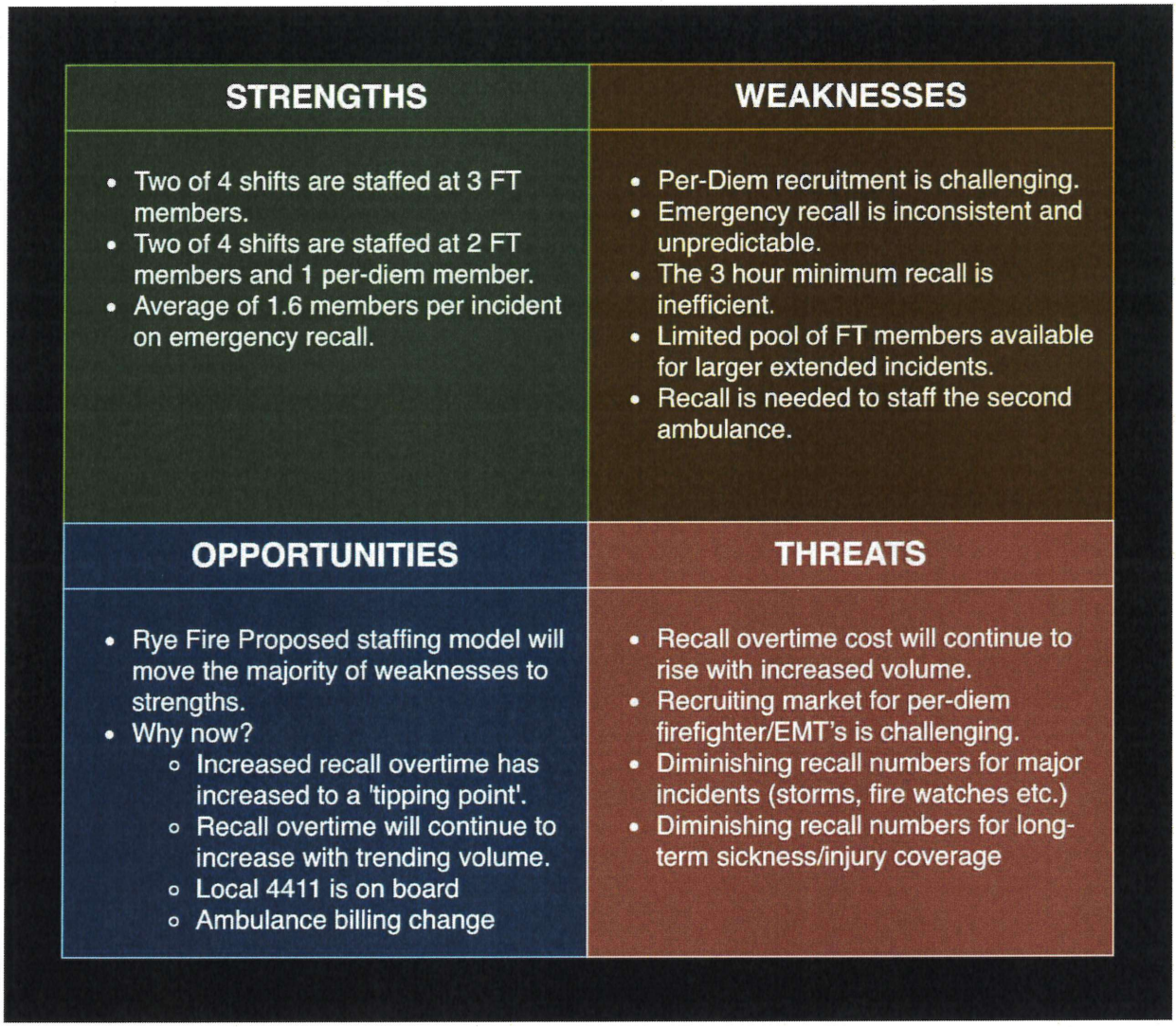


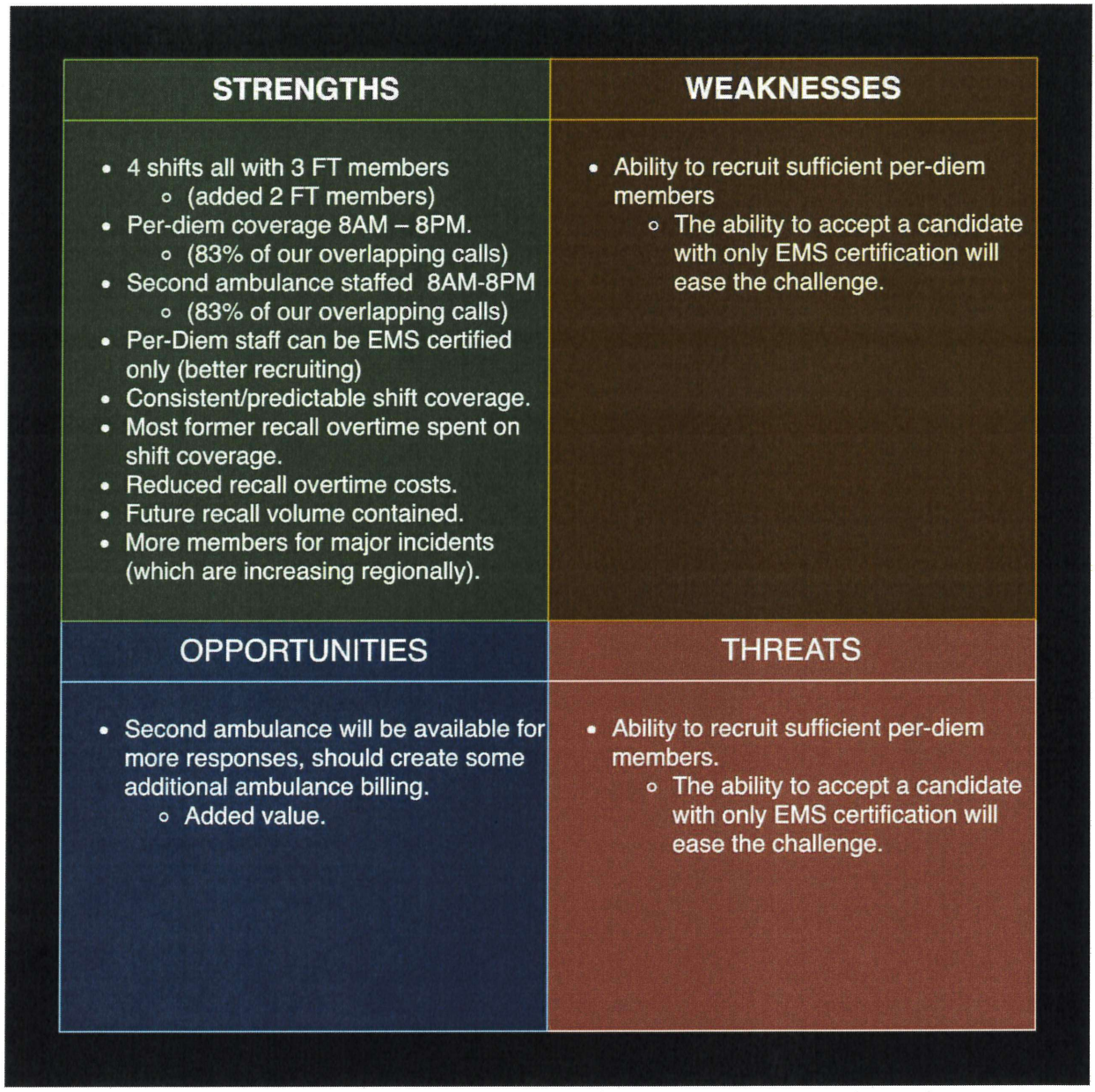
Figure #2-Overlapping Emergency Runs



Figure#3-Current Staffing Model SWOT Analysis



Figure#4-Proposed Staffing Model SWOT Analysis



The proposed staffing model change will move most weaknesses to strengths. Threats to the system are diminished.

End of Executive Summary

The Details

Below contains more detailed information if you are interested. NOTE: While we are confident in our proposal and budget figures are nearly complete but may be adjusted as we do a final review.

Current Service Demands:

- Total Emergency Responses:
  - 2024: 1243 Responses
  - 2025 (Projected): 1245 Responses
  - 2026 (Projected): 1300 Responses (Benchmark Expansion)
- Total Overlapping Calls:
  - 2024: 226 (18% of total responses)
    - 188 calls between 8AM-8PM (83% of total overlapping)
    - 38 Calls between 8PM-8AM (17% of total overlapping)
  - 2025 Projected: 211 (17% of total responses)
    - 187 calls between 8AM-8PM (89% of total overlapping)
    - 24 Calls between 8PM-8AM (11% of total overlapping)
- Emergency Response Profile:
  - 2024: 61% EMS emergency responses
  - 2025(Projected): 60% EMS emergency responses
- Trending Data compared to 2018:
  - Total Emergency Responses in 2024 (1243) have increased 34% since 2018 (827).
  - Total Overlapping calls in 2018(137) as compared to 2024(226):
    - The raw number of overlapping calls increased significantly by 89 calls.
    - Although the number of calls increased the percentage of overlapping calls compared to total responses between 2018(17%) and 2024(18%) were fairly consistent.
  - Emergency Response Profile in 2018 (59% EMS emergency responses) as a percentage of total responses remains consistent with 2024 Profile.

Current Operational/Staffing Model:

- Current Shift Staffing is:
  - 'A' Shift
    - Lieutenant/Medic Full-Time
    - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
    - Per-Diem (Part-Time) Firefighter/EMT
  - 'B' Shift
    - Lieutenant/AEMT Full-Time
    - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
    - Firefighter/EMT Full-Time
  - 'C' Shift
    - Lieutenant/Medic Full-Time
    - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
    - Per-Diem (Part-Time) Firefighter/EMT
  - 'D' Shift
    - Lieutenant/EMT Full-Time
    - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
    - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
- Current Operational Model:
  - Our 2020 Staffing Needs Assessment (updated in 2024) reflects a need for one Paramedic per shift. Due to turnover, we fell below this level. Currently we have 2 front-line paramedics. We have one Lieutenant who should have his paramedic certification by late 2025 and one firefighter is entering paramedic school in January. We will have replaced this coverage by late 2026.
  - Emergency Recall: Emergency recall of our membership is important to effectively and efficiently operate at many emergency incidents to which Rye Fire Rescue responds. Emergency recall of our membership is also an important tool we use to cover the many overlapping calls for service received while we are out on extended incidents.

        - We recall off duty personnel for approximately 90% of all our emergency responses. While the number of members responding back on any recall varies, the average recall for 2024 and the first six months of 2025 was very consistent at 1.6 members per incident.
        - Emergency Recall has the largest impact on non-shift coverage overtime. This is where the impact of the negotiated 3-hour minimum recall (up from a 2-hour minimum) is felt.
        - Most emergency recall is preplanned via our internal emergency recall policy. We also can and do occasionally recall a member for misc. reasons such as taking a truck to a dealer for service etc.
    - Keeping a minimum shift of 3 members on duty is critical to both our fire and ambulance operations. Further information on this can be found in The Rye Fire Rescue Staffing Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan – https://www.town.rye.nh.us/sites/g/files/vyhlif3751/f/uploads/rye_fire_rescue_final_draft_strategic_plan_november_2020_edtion-june_7_2021.pdf. and the 2024 update to the strategic plan.

Proposed Operations/Staffing Model: The significant increase in funding necessary to meet the negotiated change to a 3-hour minimum recall compelled us to investigate whether there were better models that would serve the community better for the same or less money. We have drafted this Proposed Operations Staffing Model to address these issues. Local 4411 have weighed in on this alternative plan and are on board. This is what we are thinking for changes.

- Proposed Shift Staffing (funded by repurposed overtime funds):
    - 'A' Shift
        - Lieutenant/Medic Full-Time
        - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
        - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
        - Per-Diem (Part-Time) Firefighter/EMT (8AM-8PM)
    - 'B' Shift
        - Lieutenant/AEMT Full-Time
        - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
        - Firefighter/EMT Full-Time
        - Per-Diem (Part-Time) Firefighter/EMT (8AM-8PM)

- 'C' Shift
  - Lieutenant/Medic Full-Time
  - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
  - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
  - Per-Diem (Part-Time) Firefighter/EMT (8AM-8PM)
- 'D' Shift
  - Lieutenant/EMT Full-Time
  - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
  - Firefighter/AEMT Full-Time
  - Per-Diem (Part-Time) Firefighter/EMT (8AM-8PM)

- <u>Benefits of proposed shift staffing:</u>
  - Per-Diem Staffing:
    - The per-Diem Staffing from 8AM-8PM will allow us to transport with both ambulances during the time of day we have our most overlapping calls. 83% of our overlapping calls happen during this time period.
    - This staffing model will not require recall for most responses as there will be two staff available to respond to the next call while the ambulance transports a patient to the hospital.
  - Emergency Recall will be dramatically reduced:
    - We would not have to recall members for the vast majority of calls both EMS and non-EMS resulting in a significant reduction in overtime expenditures.
    - We would still recall for additional help at certain types of incidents. A few examples:
      - Cardiac Arrests and other labor intensive critical medical emergencies
      - Building fires and any call that comes in that has a probability to be a building fire.
      - Response to certain weather events such as flooding events etc.
      - Critical water rescues
    - We would still recall members for certain coverage situations. A few examples:

        - Coverage for certain weather events such as major snowstorms, tornado warnings, hurricane warnings etc.
        - When both ambulances are out on transports.
    - More efficient use of budget funds.
        - Currently many recalls are over within 2 hours with the recalled member receiving compensation at a 3-hour minimum. With some exception, under this proposed plan most coverage funds will be used for longer incidents.

Proposed Staffing Plan Funding: In order to fund this plan, the following are the changes, in our view, needed relative to our October 7th budget submission:

- Fire Budget Alternative Additions:
    - 4220-16-401 wages: Add $113,381 for a total of $1,023,360
        - two new full-time positions: base wages
    - 4220-16-410 Replacement Wages: Add $19,890 for a total of $151,745
        - Additional coverage for leave:
            - Vacation 168 hours
            - Personal 96 hours
            - Sick (5 days each 24 hours) 240 hours
    - 4220-16-413 Holiday wages: Add $6103 for a total of $42664
        - Holiday annual pay 84 hours each X2, prorated for 7 holidays instead of 10. Base hourly rate for FF/AEMT for 2026 is $30.27/hour=$3560
        - Additional half time when working the holiday prorated for 7 holidays=$2543
    - 4220-16-422 FICA/MEDI: Add $1417
    - 4220-16-423 Retirement (29.15%): Add $37290
    - 4220-16-424 Health Insurance: Add $71294
        - Two family plans
    - 4220-16-425 Dental: $661
    - 4220-16-426 Life and Disability: Add $2738
    - 4220-16-430 Background checks: Add one $1200

- 4220-16-431 Physicals: Add one $3600
- 4220-16-432 Uniforms: Add one new issue $1100
- 4220-16-? Per Diem Training: Add $1000

- EMS Budget Alternative additions: None
  - Total EMS Budget additions $1000
- Fire Budget Reductions and reallocations:
  - Reduce Fire Budget OT Wages 4220-16-402 by $101,353 to $28,399
  - Move all call 4220-16-416 and call training wages 4220-16-417 except $1000 to 4220-16-402 OT wages from $28,399 to $43,261. (Eliminate Call Force)
  - Move $1000 from Call Training Wages 4220-16-417 to 4220-16-? Per Diem Training for a total of $1000.
- EMS Budget Reductions and reallocations:
  - Reduce EMS Budget OT Wages 4215-19-402 by $152,030 to $15,323
  - Move all call 4215-19-416 and call training wages 4215-19-418 except $1000 to 4215-19-402 OT wages from $15,323 to $28,723. (Eliminate Call Force)
  - Move $1000 from Call Training Wages 4215-19-418 to 4215-19-? Per Diem Training for a total of $1000.

- Projected additional income:
  - New ambulance billing state of NH 325% Medicare rates as of 1/1/2026
    - Comstar projected increase is $106,479 to the general fund.
      - Comstar in-house counsel did the research and projection.
      - Payer mix over 3 years does not fluctuate much adding to confidence.
      - High confidence.
  - Benchmark Expansion:
    - We project additional 63 responses annually
      - 63 ALS1 responses Medicare ALS1 rate $544.61=$34,310
      - Moderate confidence
- Impact of first quarter OT on the plan.

- 2025 First quarter overtime adjusted for the 3-hour minimum was $42,393.
- Freezing the struggling Call Force allowed us to reallocate $25,000 to help subsidize the first quarter old system overtime.

Current Business Plan Liabilities:

- Escalating Recall Cost:
    - The amount (cost) of recalls will increase with our increasing call volume.

Research Questions:

Our questions researched focus on our current staffing model, specifically, in (1) maintaining or improving our service, especially our EMS service to our residents; and (2) Are there improvements that can be made through our existing proposed 2026 budget. These are the questions:

3. What are the benefits and liabilities contained within our current fire and EMS staffing model?
4. Can our current fire and EMS staffing model be significantly improved with little or no additional funds above and beyond our current 2026 proposed ambulance (4215) and fire (4220) budgets.

To answer these questions, we performed a SWOT analysis of our current staffing model.

SWOT Analysis

Defined: A **S.W.O.T. analysis** is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats involved in a project or in a business venture. It involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve that objective.

- **S**trengths: characteristics of the department that give it an advantage over others in the industry. These are assets that can be capitalized or built upon.
- **W**eaknesses: are characteristics that place the department at a disadvantage relative to others. These are components that must be re-evaluated for effectiveness, need, and unanticipated consequences.
- **O**pportunities: *internal & external* chances to increase the capacity of the department. This involves the evaluation of utilizing what currently exists, or what is anticipated to surface that can bring the department closer to accomplishing its strategic challenges.

- Threats: *internal & external* challenges that form barriers the department seeks to overcome. Threats can be attitudinal, budgetary, environmental, or contextual; they can be perceived, or they can be real.

SWOT-CURRENT STAFFING MODEL

The Current Staffing Model SWOT results are illustrated in the executive summary.

Summary of findings:

STRENGTHS:

- Two of 4 shifts are staffed at 3 FT members.
- Two of 4 shifts are staffed at 2 FT members and 1 per-diem member.
- Rye Fire Rescue receives an average of 1.6 members per incident on emergency recall. We recall approximately 95% of our incidents.

WEAKNESSES:

- Per-Diem Coverage is challenging to find. Per-Diem staffing must have both fire and EMS certification.
- Emergency recall is inconsistent and unpredictable. Some incidents get 0 in on recall while others get 3,4 or 5. The average is 1.6 members per incident, but it is not spread out evenly.
- The 3-hour minimum for emergency recall means that in many cases 1 to 1.5 hours of the typical recall for ambulance transports are not spent in the station. For example, a medical call may take 2 hours to clear. In this case the recall members receive their minimum 3 hours but are only in the station for 2 hours. Not all expended recall hours are spent at station coverage.
- There is a limited pool of FT personnel available for larger extended incidents such as severe storm coverage, fire watches etc.
- Recall is needed to staff the second ambulance for overlapping calls. There is a time delay for this to occur.

THREATS:

- Recall overtime cost will continue to rise as our trending volume continues to increase.
- The recruiting market for per-diem firefighter/EMT's is tough with little relief in sight.
- Increased recall needs may cause diminishing recall numbers for major incidents (storms, fire watches etc.) as well as periodic long-term sickness/injury coverage.

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Rye Fire proposed staffing model change will move the majority weaknesses to strengths.
    - Why now?
        - Increased emergency recall overtime has increased to a 'tipping point'. These productive changes can be made within the existing proposed 2026 budget numbers with little to no additional funds.
        - Recall overtime will continue to increase with trending volume unless we make a change.
        - Local 4411 is on board and concurs with this change.
        - Ambulance billing change: Although not part of our budget, the recent ambulance rate increase to our billing schedule is projected to net a positive $100,700 ($106,000 less the 5% billing company charge). While not figured into the staffing model change, this is good insurance for any unforeseen additional expenses. We are confident of our numbers however this could provide us with a safety net.

As you can see, above are the findings to our first research question: *What are the benefits and liabilities contained within our current fire and EMS staffing model?* The current staffing model liabilities are significant and as troubling, the threats are also significant.

SWOT-PROPOSED STAFFING MODEL

The Proposed Staffing Model SWOT results are illustrated below.

Summary of findings:

STRENGTHS:

- 4 shifts all with 3 FT members (added 2 FT members)
- 4 shifts have per-diem coverage from 8AM – 8PM. This is where 83% of our overlapping calls occur.
- Second ambulance can be staffed from 8AM-8PM. This is where 83% of our overlapping calls occur.

- Per-Diem staff can be EMS certified only (we will prefer fire/EMS certification) because there will be 3 FT dual certified members on duty. This will help greatly with recruiting per-diem staff.
- Consistent/predictable shift coverage replaces most emergency recall.
- Most former recall overtime will now be spent on shift coverage.
- Reduced recall overtime costs. Because the daytime duty shift can handle two overlapping ambulance calls, emergency recall would be limited.
- Most of our future increasing call volume will not lead to additional OT expense.
- More staff for major incidents (which are increasing regionally). Adding two FT members increases our recall pool by 20% for important, long-term incidents such as storm coverages, fire watches etc. This also will help on shift coverage needs when a member is out long term.

WEAKNESSES:

- We will still need to recruit sufficient per-diem members, however the ability to accept a candidate with only an EMS certification, if needed, will ease the challenge.

THREATS:

- We will still need to recruit sufficient per-diem members, however the ability to accept a candidate with only an EMS certification, if needed, will ease the challenge.

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Second ambulance will be available for more responses which should create some additional ambulance billing. More of an added value.

As you can see, above are the findings to our second research question: *Can our current fire and EMS staffing model be significantly improved with little or no additional funds above and beyond our current proposed 2026 ambulance (4215) and fire (4220) budgets?* The answer is yes, significantly

The proposed staffing model change will move most weaknesses to strengths. Threats to the system are diminished.

End of Selectboard Memo

Thank you for your support. I look forward to discussing our 2026 budgets! I am available for questions/comments.