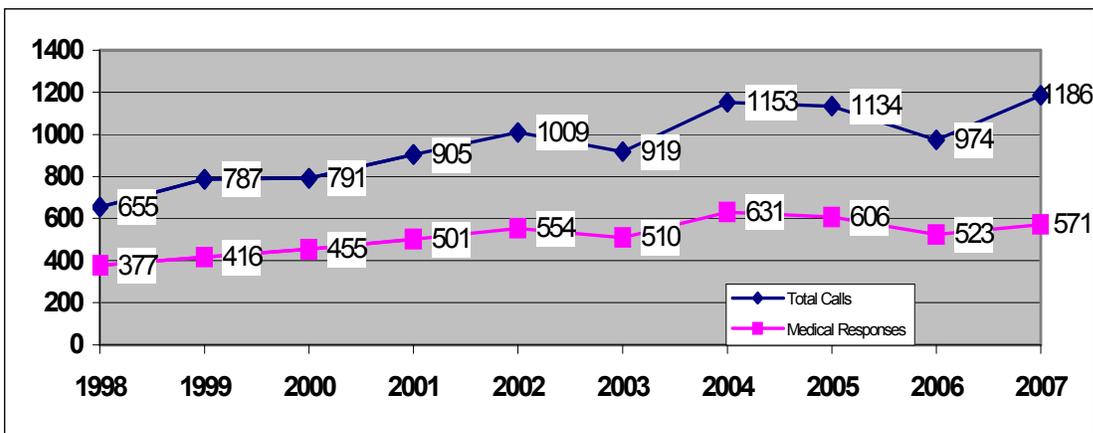


FIRE DEPARTMENT

I am pleased to submit the following Annual Report for the calendar year 2007 for the Westminster Fire and Ambulance Departments. Proudly serving the citizens of the town of Westminster for 182 years. Chief Brenton W. MacAloney



The Fire Department annual report comprises the Fire Department and the Ambulance Department reports all in one. Since EMS has always been part of the WFD we continue to report both within the same annual report although both have different Department Budget lines.



Department Record:

Fire:

Structure	14
Brush/Illegal	54
Chimney	8
Motor Vehicle	6
Mutual Aid	69
Auto Fire Alarm	196
Electrical	5
Other Fires	23

Investigations:

Misc.	72
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Emergency Medical:

Illness/Injury	420
Motor Vehicle Accident	130
Carbon Monoxide	21

Service Calls:

Public Service	111
Hazardous Materials	12
Hovercraft Calls	0
Search and Rescue	3
Other	43

Total Incidents 1186

Permits and Compliance 2007:

Burning Permits	372
Smoke / CO Detector Insp.	152
Oil Burner Permits	34
Blasting Permits	21
Fuel Storage	65
Plan Reviews	71
Safety Inspections	48
Fire Drills	18
Miscellaneous	22
Non-Criminal Complaint	2 (Fines issue for non compliance.)

Personnel:

Full-Time Staffing – During 2007 the department implemented its approved hiring plan for 2 full-time firefighters with one starting in January and the other in September. The second of the two position approved at the 2007 Annual Town Meeting was approved contingent upon the 5 full-time firefighters giving up 6 hours each to obtain a 42 hour average work week to assist in funding the position. The full-time firefighters were able to move away from the 48 hour work week that was established prior to working shifts and allow them a more standardized work week. This allowed the hire of the additional firefighter with little impact on cost to the taxpayers. This change also allowed us the Fire Department to provide a rotation schedule where we utilize the 6 firefighters in rotation along with hiring per-diem firefighters to provide two firefighters on duty from 8:00 am to 11:00 pm 24x7 and over night ½ the time with two full-time firefighters and ½ the time with one full-time firefighter. Current full-time staffing includes 6 firefighters (4 firefighter/Paramedics, 2 Firefighter/EMT) in rotation and full-time Fire Captain, Chief, and Department Administrator who work weekdays.

In the future we want to provide the same coverage overnight no matter what day the public calls for our services. When only one firefighter is on duty they have to wait for another firefighter prior to responding to calls other than medical to ensure their safety.

On-Call Firefighters – We have been able to maintain 15 Call Firefighters over the last year. We have two Call Firefighters in a training program that will graduate from the course in February 2008. We are encouraged with having two more Call Firefighters but this will help our shortage situation only slightly as we continue to see problems with the availability of the Call Firefighters. The department could utilize up to 30 call firefighters to meet the needs of the department and reduce the strain on the existing Call Firefighters who are expected to respond to more calls each year. One of the problems we face is that there are 5 – 6 Call Firefighters that are unable perform all functions including driving apparatus or operating specialized equipment due to lack of total training. A larger number of Call Firefighters are needed so that when they are called to service there is a greater chance to have more respond although we never know how many will show up.

The continued shortage of Call Firefighters has resulted in the need to hire more full-time firefighters over the past years. This is not a long term solution as even if we had two Full-time Firefighters on duty 24x7 we still need Call Firefighters to assist in all fires and calls that require more than 2 firefighters.

The shortage of firefighters puts a burden on the full-time firefighters which results in increased overtime costs. Less Call Firefighters also puts more requirements on the remaining Call Firefighters who try to respond to more calls and impacts their family commitments.

Per-Diem Firefighters: We currently have 6 Per-Diem firefighters who are firefighters who do not live in Westminster and come to work shifts for our department. The reason for these firefighters is that we do not have sufficient number of call firefighters from town to cover shifts. Per-Diem Firefighters are either full-time firefighters or call firefighters for other communities. Although Per-Diem Firefighters have a place in our department they do not respond to general calls as they live too far away to make any difference in the majority of the calls we have.

Solution to the staffing problem: Each year we take steps to help educate the public about the continued need for Call Firefighters, but this has not resulted in any change in the number of people wanting to choose this as a second career/job. There are many social factors that relate to the shortage that I have addressed in prior years. Regardless of these factors the problem remains the same and my comments at town meeting, when we request additional full-time firefighters, is always prefaced by explaining to the voters that the need for more additional full-time firefighters is directly related to the number of Call Firefighters that we have. The public in general seem unwilling to make the personal commitment to the profession by applying for a position.

Residents 18 years of age and High School Students at least 16 years of age are encouraged to stop by the station and contact the Chief to learn more about becoming a Call Firefighter and review eligibility. For more detail contact the Fire Chief.

We recommend that the town take steps to continue on the plan to eventually have 2 full-time firefighters on duty 24x7. This would require eventually hiring 2 more full-time firefighters. In the short term we plan to provide as much coverage with Per-Diem Firefighters with available funds to allow for a consistent response to calls no matter what time of day it is.

Service Delivery:

Our goal is to provide the best possible customer service with regard to the delivery of Emergency Medical, Fire Suppression, Hazardous Materials, Technical Rescue, Fire Investigation, Public Fire Safety Education, Fire Prevention, and Specialized Community Services. The Department is service driven and we appreciate the feedback during the year to assist us in knowing how well we are delivering these services.

The Firefighters of the Westminster Fire Department are always looking for opportunities to exceed customer expectations. Residents and visitors are welcome to visit the station or contact the Chief of the Department at any time, so we can continue to align our services to meet the ever changing needs of the public we serve.

Westminster ranks 329 out of 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts for the amount of square miles we cover from one station and as the town builds out in our more northern areas our average response times will continue to increase.

EMS:

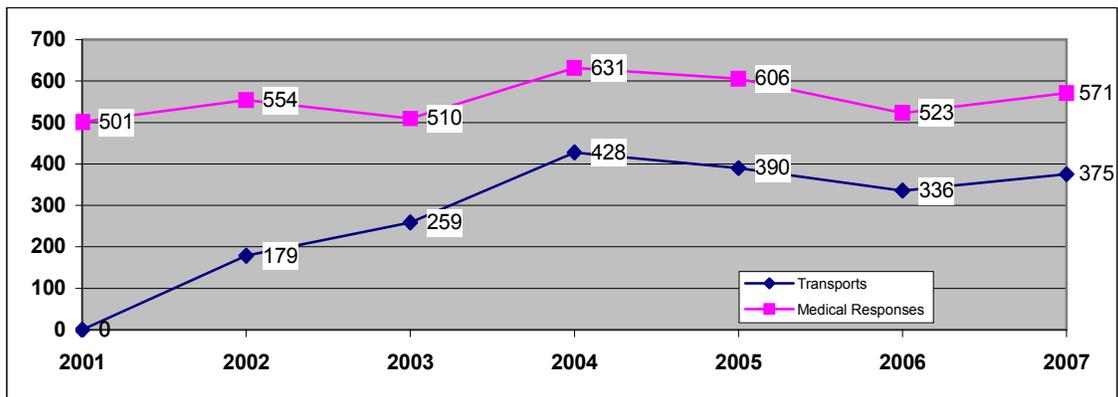
Emergency Medical Services - Between 50% and 60% of the Department's responses are Emergency Medical in nature. This includes responding to all 911 calls for in-house medicals as well as personal injury accidents including motor vehicle accidents, which often require the assistance of firefighters to assist and address other hazards.

We offer outgoing EMS services that include visiting critical care and special needs patients and family to preplan a medical response in the event we are called.

We continue to exceed industry benchmark response times for Emergency Medical Services. Our response time from the initial call to arrival on scene is at an average of 4 minutes with 2 Firefighter/EMTs.

During the year we also utilize donations to purchase specialized equipment to assist the Paramedics with delivering lifesaving interventions.

The following chart shows the total number of medical response to ambulance transports since we started the ambulance service.



Ambulance Account - Ambulance receipts for services are put into a Town receipts for appropriation account where monies are expended only at a town meeting. Ambulance Receipts fully fund the additional costs of operating the ambulance service. The Ambulance Budget covers the cost for the ambulance, medical supplies for the Ambulance, Fire Department, Police Department, and First Aid Kits the Town Hall, Parks and Recreation, and Crocker Pond. A detailed ambulance report containing statistics and finances is provided to the Selectmen on a monthly basis.

On days when we do not have a second full-time firefighter on duty a per-diem Firefighter/EMT is hired to work from 6:00 pm to 11:00 pm and is paid from the Ambulance Budget. This Firefighter/EMT provides both ambulance services and fire services during these hours.

We replaced our used 1994 ambulance with a new ambulance in July of 2007. We obtained approval at the May 2007 Annual Town Meeting. Ambulance receipts funded the purchase.

ALS/Paramedics - We took the next step in the fall of 2007 to provide the highest level of patient care by going to the Paramedic Level. This change allows us to deliver drugs and utilize a heart monitor. We operated at the Intermediate Level for one year as required by the State. This migration was made possible through ambulance receipts that paid for full-time firefighters to attend paramedic school and for equipment and supplies to operate at this level.

The change from Basic to Intermediate to Paramedic level service delivery has resulted in delivering life saving interventions in many situations cases over the last year. The public now receives Advanced Life Support (ALS/Paramedics) the quickest possible utilizing existing resources and funded by ambulance receipts. This also means that patients are getting to the hospital quicker as we don't have to wait to meet up with other Paramedic services.

Fire Suppression and Other Calls:

Unlike medical calls where when there is only one Firefighter/EMT is on duty we respond immediately, response to fires and other highly dangerous calls only occur when there are at least 2 firefighters to respond for their safety. This means that with current staffing half the nights from 11:00 pm to 8:00 am we wait for second firefighter to arrive. As we make progress of filling the overnights when only one Firefighter is on duty we will be able to improve on reducing our average response time to fires or other emergencies.

ISO (Insurance Rating) - The Fire Department maintains an ISO Fire Insurance Rating of 4/9. The ISO rating is utilized by many insurance companies to set fire insurance rates for residents and businesses. The rating of 4 places Westminster on a par with 6.9 percent of communities across the country. Just 10.3 percent of cities and towns nationwide are rated between one and four on a nine-point scale. Only 3.9 percent of communities in the country have a better rating than Westminster. The 4 rating is for parts of the community protected by town water and the 9 are for those sections of town that are not on the water system. There are many factors that are included in the rating including staffing levels, water flow, training, and alarm systems.

Homeowners should check their insurance policy and look for the fire insurance rating and if they have questions contact the Fire Department to determine what ISO Classification area they are in. The 4 rating on our policy provides the lowest cost for fire protection of your property in Westminster. The Fire Department has a regulation for new sub-divisions that require hydrants for fire protection. If hydrants are not provided on the public water system we require underground cisterns to supply the water for firefighting the immediate area. We now have one such cistern on Sawin Drive off Harrington Road. This cistern meets the criteria as a fire hydrant for insurance purposes. One of our firefighters is attempting to assess our hydrants, dry hydrants and this cistern in order to determine what residents in the area of these water sources may qualify for the reduced rating from a 9 to a 4. We hope that this review will assist the residents in the area with reduced fire insurance cost in the future.

Fire Alarm/Monitoring - The Department initiated a project in 2006 to upgrade our fire alarm monitoring equipment to a wireless radio box system that will provide for better management, control and data for firefighters who respond to alarms. The base system went online during 2006 and was initially set up to monitor 7 town buildings eliminating the cost of the phone lines that were previously used to receive alarms. These locations provided the network backbone for the fire alarms that we monitor through the system. During 2007 we worked with all commercial, industrial, and the schools to migrate them to this new system. The transition went very well and we now monitor 49 locations with the system. This system has some distinct advantages over the older system other than eliminating the monthly telephone costs for the subscribers. One example is that new alarm systems are required to report detail alarm information so firefighters know exactly where the alarm is being generated in the building.

Hazardous Materials – The Fire Department is the Town's Hazardous Materials emergency response service and the location for Right To Know information for companies that report to the EPA. The Fire Department takes advantage of Massachusetts Law to bill for our Hazardous Materials responses and utilize the funds we receive go into a revolving account to pay for the storage, disposal, and replacement of equipment used. The efforts undertaken to control and clean up even minor spills protects the ground water, shallow wells from pollution, and protects the environment we all enjoy in Westminster.

Technical Rescue – Every year the Fire Department faces challenges with regard to rescuing the public. Although we do not supply all types of technical rescue we have focused on core rescue

techniques that are most likely to affect the public. These include cold water/Ice rescue, vertical lift rescue, confined space rescue, and low angle rescue. Rescues that are outside the realm of what we offer can be obtained through mutual aid from other communities. These include dive rescue and trench rescue as examples.

Fire Investigation - The Westminster Fire Department continues to have 2 highly experienced fire investigators that ensure that all fires are investigated completely and when needed files charges against suspected arsonists. This has resulted in arrests, convictions, probation, and the reimbursement in court awarded funds to the town for costs related to the investigation of fires and explosive devices. The efforts of the fire investigators have resulted in reduced arson resulting in stolen vehicles dumped and ignited from other communities. In addition, the town has benefited from court ordered community service. Funds are returned to the Town's General Funds for inclusion in future years expenditures.

Again this past year we have worked with Town Counsel to address large fires this past spring caused by the Guilford Railroad. The town is presently waiting for our case to work its way through Superior Court. The Town/Fire Department seeks reimbursement for over \$20K for fires that have been set since the last out of court settlement. One of the fires in the spring of 2007 was in Fitchburg and Westminster and resulted in firefighters and equipment from over 30 communities and some as far away as southern Worcester County.

Fire Prevention - Prevention activities is a major focus for the department that not only helps reduce property loss and reduces injuries, but also includes the development of the personal interaction between the community and the fire service. The Fire Department participates in a number of town events each year to assist in meeting the goals of the department.

Fire Prevention activities in the department include residential commercial, and industrial building plan review, residential smoke and carbon monoxide detector inspections, oil burner inspections, LP storage inspections, blasting permitting, flammable storage permitting, commercial, industrial, and industrial inspections, Senior Citizen safety awareness, preschool and daycare fire education programs, and school age fire education programs.

We continue to base our Elementary School age fire safety education on SAFE (Student Awareness for Fire Education). This is delivered to students at the Westminster Elementary and Meetinghouse School and involves using the SAFE Trailer available from the Fire District and other classroom activities. The preschool and kindergarten children are taught fire safety at the Fire Station with video and live fire education programs with Smokey Bear as a guest visitor. We have a "friendly firefighter" program that we take on the road to preschools and kindergartens to introduce young children to firefighters so they know not to be scared of us during an emergency and we have all our equipment on. The SAFE Grant was funded by the Massachusetts Legislature for FY2007 and is expected to be funded for FY2008 and these funds will make it possible to deliver quality fire and general safety programs to the public and key "at risk" groups in the future without local funds.

The Fire Department is a member of the Massachusetts State-Wide Coalition for Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program, and provides intervention programs for children at risk. The department has trained firefighters in evaluating children for risk potential and assisting with referral to various agencies for intervention if necessary. Residents are encouraged to contact the department if they feel they know of a child at risk.

Cooperative efforts with various businesses and have included providing safety programs, such as fire extinguisher training, participating in safety drills, and assisting with emergency preparedness. Businesses interested in available programs are asked to contact the fire prevention office for available programs.

Our senior citizens are a group that is at risk for a variety of potential injuries. We continue to offer assistance through a grant we received to partner with the Council on Aging to install free smoke detectors to seniors. Anyone interested in a free smoke detector needs to contact the Senior Center to fill out an application. We also offer assistance to seniors with the installation of self purchased smoke and carbon monoxide detectors for their increased safety. Anyone wishing assistance can call the department to arrange an appointment.

Specialized Community Services:

CPR/First Aid - We provide the public with Community CPR & First Aid. The ongoing need from town business, community groups, organizations, and the general public for CPR and First Aid classes has been a large part of our life saving education. During the year we held 9 classes and trained about 48 people in these important life safety courses. These classes are delivered at little to no cost to businesses, organizations, community groups, and general public from Westminster.

Lock Boxes - The Department works with residents interested in the use of residential lock boxes. The department keeps a few lock boxes purchased with donated funds to assist residents who often contact us about handicapped, or otherwise physically impaired family members that may need emergency services during hours when other caregivers are not home. Since the Fire Department does not hold residential keys it is possible that the only way we can get in the residence when needed is to force entry. We loan lock boxes to residents with temporary problems or until they can purchase their own. Anyone interested in the Lock Box program or is looking to purchase their own lock box is encouraged to contact the department.

Halloween Bon Fire - Each year the Department partners with the Friends of the Library to provide the Halloween Bon Fire held at the Public Safety Facility. This event attracts hundreds of adults and children and provides an opportunity to meet residents and to answer questions about the department.

The Department consults on large event management venues in town. The Fire Department has developed unique skills to coordinate large multi-jurisdictional resources through managing large incidents and attending training. Any business or civic group interested in assistance in large event planning should contact the department.

Mid-State Fire Mutual Aid – Westminster is a member of the Mid-State Fire Mutual Aid Association and like other Fire Departments in the area we continue to be dependent on mutual aid due to shortages in manpower, and ensuring firefighter safety. (It takes a minimum of 16 firefighters to fight a house fire.)

Department Equipment:

Fire Equipment: All hose has been tested and defective hose taken out of service or repaired. Fire pumps as well as Fire Ladders have been tested and certified to meet original specifications and repaired as needed. SCBA (Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus), along with the compressed air we put in the bottles, is also tested each year.

Rescue Truck (R1) (2000) American LaFrance. This vehicle provides EMS (Emergency Medical Services) and Rescue services to the town and is in good condition and will need some body work in the next couple of years. It is licensed as a Class V Ambulance (back-up ambulance)

Ambulance 1 (A1) (2007 Ford Ambulance) Horton. It is used to respond to Emergency Medical calls and transport patients to the hospital. The vehicle is in excellent condition.

Engine 1 (E1) (1999 Class A pumper) KME. It carries 1000 gallons of water and Class B foam to fight flammable liquid fires, and is in very good condition.

Engine 2 (E2) (2001 Class A pumper) KME. It carries 2500 gallons of water and has a Class "A" foam system that doubles the rate of fire suppression. This vehicle is also capable of operating as a tanker by performing water shuttles, and is in very good condition.

Engine 4 (E4) (1990 Class A Pumper) KME. It carries 1000 gallons of water, and is in good condition for a mid-life vehicle. This vehicle needs to be planned for replacement in the future as it lacks many safety standards required for new vehicles.

Tower 1 (T1) (2005 Ladder Truck) KME 95 ft aerial ladder with tower bucket and 300 gallons of water and 2000 GPM pump. The vehicle is in very good.

Forestry 1 (F1) (1986, pick-up truck) this is a military pick-up truck obtained from Government Surplus. It has been outfitted with a 275-gallon tank and 600-gallon pump. The vehicle will be replaced during 2008 with a Mini-Pumper capable of being used year round and will provide access to areas that require bridge or narrow access.

Forestry 2 (F2) (1976 Tanker Pumper) Ford 1000 gpm pump and 2300 gallons of water. Is in poor shape and was disposed of in December 2007 as part of the plan to replace both F1 & F2 with the Mini-Pumper that will arrive in 2008.

Utility Vehicles: The department has 3 utility vehicles as follows: Car 1 (2001, Chief's car – Fair condition) and is designed to be an emergency response vehicle and the primary command vehicle at major incidents. The vehicle has gone through 2 sets of ball joints, 4 complete sets of brakes and suffers from other mechanical problems and is recommended for replacement. Car 2 (2003, Duty Officer's car good condition) and is designed to be an emergency response vehicle and the secondary command vehicle when the Car 1 is not available. Car 3 (2007 utility pick up truck – excellent condition) was replaced during 2006 with a 4 door crew cab pick up truck.

Radio Equipment: The UHF radio system is in good condition. All firefighters have UHF portable radios and pagers for their safety. The department still maintains our Low-band radio system as a back up and communications system for alerting and all communications on UHF are repeated on Low-Band. The public wishing to listen to us can tune their scanner to either 460.1625 or 33.96

Breathing Apparatus: The breathing apparatus are fully compliant and inspected and tested yearly.

Station:

Our station is well maintained and in good structural condition, but lacks functional living, storage, and operational space. When the public safety complex was expanded in 1995 and the Fire Department moved in we quickly ran out of storage space for the small equipment and supplies we need to carry. Two storage sheds were added in the rear of the station over the years to assist with cold storage. Although this has been done we significantly lack space for records management and equipment and supplies. Although the Town has moved forward with a Public Safety Space Needs Committee to address the space needs of both the Fire and Police, this is seen as a long term solution.

In FY2005 the Fire Department submitted a proposal to address the space problem by adding a second story to the south side of the building, thus increasing the storage and living space needed now that we have a 24 x 7 staffing arrangement, but there has been a lack of support for this proposal due to the lack of an end plan for what happens to the Police Department as they also need space. There is some level of concern about spending any money on the building if at some point it is decided to build a police station leaving space in the current building for the fire department.

Considering this feedback the fire department gained approval from the town for a 5-7 year solution by building a mezzanine on the apparatus floor. Although this would eliminate a location for a vehicle it would provide needed space. We had hoped to have this mezzanine in by the end of 2007 but ran into problems with bidding due to the cost being driven up as a result to having to pay prevailing wage and companies posting a bond. The fire department is now looking into buying the material and using our own labor to install the mezzanine this allowing us to stay within the approved budget request. The mezzanine would provide space where the current building could be outfitted to accommodate the increased demand for living space.

Another possible solution that we have proposed is to build a Sub Fire Station on the land donated for such purpose on a parcel of land at the intersection of South Ashburnham Road and Whitmanville Road. This provides a strategic location for a future Fire Sub-Station in the northern third of town, where growth is being experienced. The capital plan for the Fire Department includes the eventual need for a sub-station to adequately service the residents in this area and the Space Needs Committee is also considering this alternative. The fire department sees this being considered a long term solution that will be addressed by the Public Safety Building Committee.

Department Training:

The Department holds 24 paid drills each year. This does not include all the training that individual Firefighters and EMS personnel take on their own. Training consists of Live Fire training, automobile extrication, confined space rescue, medical skills, CPR, Hazardous Materials.

All firefighters are trained to the national standard of Firefighter I and are also trained to the First Responder level of medical training. A number of firefighters are also trained to the higher standard of Firefighter II. All firefighters are fit tested for use with breathing masks used on fires and hazardous situations.

NIMS Compliance: The Fire Department complies with the NIMS Training requirements for 2007.

Contact Information:

Location: Fire Station is located at 7 South Street, Westminster, MA 01473

Phone: 978-874-2313, Dispatcher Ext 0, Chief Ext 230, Fire Prevention Ext 232, Administrator Ext 231

Office hours: Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM.

Appointments: During normal office hours or by special appointment

E-mail: firechief@westminster-ma.gov

Web page: www.westminster-ma.org/fire/index.html

General:

Firefighting work is labor extensive and the Captain along with the 6 full-time firefighters we currently have working shifts alone can not meet the demands of the job by themselves. It actually takes a minimum of 16 firefighters to initially fight a house fire. The few full-time firefighters can not safely do their jobs without call firefighters. As the call firefighters ranks have declined the town has been put in the position to increase the number of full-time firefighters to offset the trend and ensure that the work can get done.

The Fire Department is put in a difficult situation because of the lack of call firefighters. Residents do not want their taxes to go up but on the other hand they do not come to the station and want to become call firefighters to help solve the problem. We have citizens that have complained about the rate of increase of the fire department budget over the last few years, but these expenses are a direct result of the public seeing the problem that we have with too few resources and voting to spend the funds to help solve the problem.

The problem we have is that the trend has not changed. With all the press and discussion about increased taxes we have not seen any new call firefighters complete the training and help turn the tide of the problem.

Therefore I must write what I have written in the past.

“With out community support for the fire department in terms of people wishing to be call firefighters and coming day or night when you are called we will need more full time firefighters. It is not something the Chief and all firefighters control as we cannot do the job in the future with out help either call or full time.”

It takes a special group of men and woman that demonstrate an unselfish willingness to serve the Town to deliver the Fire Department's services. The few highly dedicated skilled call and full time firefighters that comprise the Department are responsible for the day-to-day operations. They have done a wonderful job of working with the community to delivery excellent services that have improved each year. They have my respect for the commitment and dedication they demonstrate. We welcome you to visit your Fire Station and meet the men and woman who stand ready when emergencies occur.

From time to time the Department receives cash donations from the public. These funds are utilized to purchase, or combine with town funds to purchase equipment that assist us deliver the services to the people we serve. The Department wishes to thank all that donate to the department either in cash and or services to help offset the cost to the town and improve the safety of the firefighters. The support from the community makes the job just that much easier for all of us, and the presents, cakes, cookies, and candies say thank you in a big way.

I would like to thank other town departments for their high level of cooperation and professionalism in assisting us in delivering emergency services. Special thanks to the Police Department and the Public Works Department for their assistance at the many emergency responses we make each year.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chief Brenton W. MacAloney