



TOWN OF WESTMINSTER

•FIRE •EMS/RESCUE •EMERGENCY SERVICES

2021 Westminster Fire Department Report

Introduction

This year picked up right where 2020 left off with the Fire Department seeing an extremely busy year. The Department set a new record for total incident call volume, responding to 1,783 total incidents including 14 building fires within the



community and 29 fires mutual aid. Fire wise it was the busiest year in recent history with two 3rd Alarm Fires, two 2nd Alarm Fires, four Working Fires and six 1st Alarm Fires. In addition to responding to a record high volume of emergency incidents, the fire department also completed 1,045 fire prevention activities.

The department has reached a critical crossroads in regards to staffing this year. The historical structure of a primarily on-call fire department being supported by some fulltime staff has transitioned to a primarily fulltime department supported by some on-call staff. This change has been occurring over the last twenty years as the department has struggled to recruit and retain adequate numbers of on-call Firefighters. Throughout 2021 the number of on-call Firefighters has reached a critical level as four long standing members retired and three others moved out of town. This trend is not unique to Westminster, and has been well documented locally as well as nationally. Volunteerism is on the decline due to a number of socioeconomic factors that towns and departments of our size and type are facing. The department has seen a 67% loss in on-call staff over the last ten years while incident volume has increased 53% over the same time frame.

The department has been making adjustments to staffing slowly over the last twenty years as the service gaps have appeared. In 2021 the department made some structural changes that included the promotion of two fulltime Firefighters to Lieutenant and increasing part time shifts from eight hours a day to 16 hours a day. This year the department lost 84 years of experience with the retirement of four on-call members and three additional on-call members moved out of town,

changing their role with the Department to part-time. With these reductions in on-call staffing the department is left with 7 on-call Firefighters moving into 2022, down from 21 in 2010 and 34 in 2000. In response to this critical shortage of on-call firefighters the Fiscal Year 2023 budget proposal will include a request to hire additional fulltime staff and increasing hours of part-time staff to fill this critical service gap. The request includes the hiring of a daytime officer who will add to the departments administrative team, assisting with fire prevention, training and emergency response. The request will also include the hiring of four full-time firefighters and increasing the hours of our part-time Firefighters from 16 hours each day to 24 hours each day. These increases will bring the on-duty shift strength to offset the continued loss of on-call firefighters.

Through the beginning of 2021 the fire department remained vigilant while responding to a spike in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic after the holidays. As the year progressed the department began to see cases wain with the State of Massachusetts ending the State of Emergency. As the year progressed the emergence of new variants began to take hold within the community. There was an increase in cases starting in the November timeframe, which included members of the department becoming infected.

On-duty Staffing

The Westminster Fire Department currently has eleven fulltime personnel. The Fire Chief, Deputy Chief and Administrator/EMT-B work a weekday administrative schedule. While the additional eight members consisting of four Lieutenants and four Firefighters, work rotating shifts to cover the town with two Firefighters 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The department supplements our full-time staff with a part-time Firefighter 7:00AM through 11:00PM, 7 days a week.

Throughout the year the departments full-time staff remained stable and included the training and promotion of existing personnel as well as increased hours for part-time staff. For Fiscal Year 2022 the fire department was approved to promote two existing firefighters to the rank of Lieutenant and increase the hours of our part-time Firefighters. In July the department conducted a comprehensive assessment center comprised of both municipal government leaders and fire service leaders. After the assessment center Bennett Chadbourne and Todd Alden were promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. These promotions allowed the department to ensure there is an officer assigned to work 24 hours a day seven days a week. These officers act as the shift commander and are in charge of shift related activities. This change has allowed the command staff to focus



more on administrative tasks while the Lieutenant runs the day to day emergency response, station and apparatus maintenance, training and fire prevention activities. Also in July part-time hours were increased from 8:00AM-4:00 PM daily to 7:00AM-11:00PM.

Throughout the summer of 2021 Firefighter Kyle Halliday, who was hired in November 2020 attended recruit training at the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy in Stow. The Recruit training program is a comprehensive 10-week academy that drills the basic skills Firefighters need to operate as a Fulltime Firefighter. Firefighter Halliday graduated from Recruit in August and returned to his group.

Moving to the future the Fire department looks to our historical trends for guidance. These trends include an average of 8%-10% increase in emergency calls annually, continuous significant reduction in on-call staffing and an ever increasing amount of fire prevention workload due to the volume of new construction and renovations of existing properties in town. These factors are the driving force behind the need to significantly increase our on-duty staff.



On-Call Staffing

For almost 200 years the Westminster Fire Department was adequately staffed by an average of 30-40 citizens. These citizens volunteered to maintain the skillset required to be a Firefighter and to answer the call when their fellow townspeople were in crisis, day or night, on sunny days and during blizzards. Over the last twenty years the numbers of citizens volunteering to perform this job have dropped significantly as showcased in the table below. This is due to a number of socioeconomic factors that are outside of the control of the town and the department. This drop in volunteerism is not solely a Westminster problem, but a well-documented nationwide problem that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years.

Year	Calls for Service	On-Call Firefighters	Part-Time Firefighters	Full-Time Firefighters
2000	791	34	0	3
2010	1,162	21	7	7
2021	1,783	7	16	10

During 2021, the department saw its on-call staff reach critically low levels, ending the year with just seven on-call firefighters. Throughout the year four long serving on-call members retired from the department, taking with them 84 years of experience. Firefighter Al Barrett retired after 38 years of service, Lieutenant David Henry after 24 years, Firefighter Brett Duncan served the community for 13 years and Firefighter Michael MacIntosh 10 years. All four of these members served the Town of Westminster diligently throughout their years here and we thank them all for their service to the community. Aside from retirements the department had three on-call members sell their homes in town and move to different communities, we were able to retain one of these members as a part-time Firefighter.

As members retired and moved, the department continuously sought out citizens to replenish our ranks. Throughout the year 16 interviews were conducted, where the candidate is provided with an overview of what being an on-call Firefighter entails. The initial hiring requirements of a Firefighters physical, drug test, background check and the State physical abilities test (PAT). Followed by the training requirements of Firefighter 1 & 2 and 1st Responder. Lastly the long term requirements are explained, which consists of department training once a month and attendance at a minimum of three calls each month. Out of the 16 interested citizens only two followed through with the process and will be coming onto the department as recruits in 2022.

In previous years these recruits were sent to the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy in Stow for the Call/Volunteer training program. This program is a four-month program provided two nights each week and one day every weekend to facilitate the training of on-call Firefighters who are not employed by the community full-time and need to complete the training around an outside employment schedule. The department identified this as an area that we could improve by offering the training locally to cut down on the commute to and from Stow. Starting in 2020 the department banded with other local communities to offer a training program in Westminster. This program was very successful and trained the departments two newest on-call Firefighters in the fall of 2020. Planning has already started to host a similar program in 2022 with our two newest recruits.



Call Volume

This year was another record breaking year for the department, ending the year with 1,783 total incidents. That is a 5.7% increase over the previous year and a 53.3% increase over a 10-year period. This year's numbers extrapolate out to an average of 4.88

Type	Total	Percentage
Fire/Explosion	51	2.90%
Overpressure Rupture	0	0.00%
Rescue Call	1117	62.60%
Hazardous Condition	39	2.20%
Service Call	214	12.00%
Good Intent Call	108	6.10%
False Call	245	13.70%
Severe Weather/Natural Disaster	2	0.10%
Special Type/Complaint	7	0.40%
Undetermined	0	0.00%
Total	1,783	100.00%

calls per day. As the town continues to grow the department continues to see increases in workload. The 2020 Census data was released in 2021. The Town saw its population rise to 8,213 residents which requires the town to add a third voting precinct. This represents just under a 13% increase in the town's population over a ten year period. Over that same ten years the town added 361 new single family homes.

Aside from total calls for service the department responded to 14 building fires within the community and 29 fires mutual aid. Of these fires two escalated to the level of a 3rd alarm bringing assets from 14 communities to assist the Westminster crews in controlling the fire. Two more of these fires were 2nd alarms, which brought in assets from 11 of our neighbors. Four were

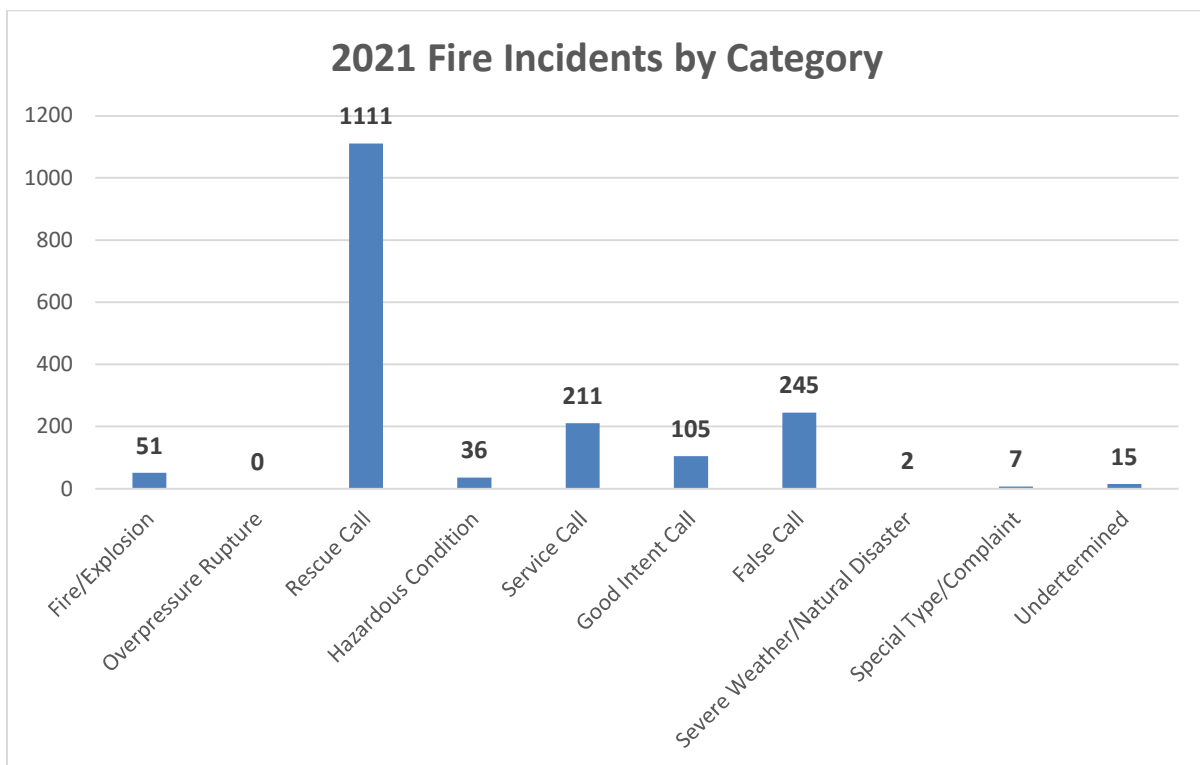


Working Fires bringing assistance from 9 communities and six were 1st alarms which were handled by the departments crews without mutual aid assistance. This call volume combined with the decrease in on-call Firefighters has made the need to increase the staff of the fire department even more apparent.

SAFER Grant

With the increased call volume and decrease in on-call Firefighters the Chief has requested to apply to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) thru the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program for the second year in a row. Last year the department was not successful in this highly competitive grant process that provides 100% of the salary and benefits cost of new Firefighters for a three-year period. The Select Board has approved the Chiefs request and the arduous process of applying for the grant has begun with awards anticipated to be announced sometime mid-2022.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) sets consensus standards nationally for every aspect of the fire service. This organization set standards for staff to fight a residential house fire. Their standard places communities into two categories, NFPA 1710 for all career departments and NFPA 1720 for volunteer and combination departments. Based upon the demographics of our community Westminster falls under the NFPA 1720-Rural staffing model which recommends a minimum of six Firefighters to be one scene of a structure fire within 14 minutes of the call. Currently the department struggles to meet these standards, especially during daytime hours when our on-call staff is at their regular jobs. To meet this standard the Department needs to add staff and with the limited ability to add on-call Firefighters than full-time Firefighters will need to be added. The Chief will apply for four full-time Firefighters thru the SAFER grant process however this grant is far from a guarantee and even if awarded is not enough to overcome the loss of so many of our on-call Firefighters over the last twenty years.



Emergency Medical Services

This year has been a year of continued growth for the EMS Service. Ambulance 2 has arrived, been outfitted and is performing better than expected. The choice to purchase a 4x4 Ambulance has already paid dividends as it allows us to navigate remote areas of town that were previously difficult to access. Ambulance 1 is still performing well and is scheduled for replacement in 2023.

The department changed its Medical Control over to Dr. O'Connor with Leominster Hospital in 2021 after many appreciated years with Dr. Ray from Heywood Hospital. Heywood's Emergency Room Physicians have continued to support our growth and have offered to review cases and calls as needed. Heywood Medical Control served the department well for many years but the changeover to Leominster Hospital has opened the service to advances and options that were previously unavailable.



In July, our EMS Coordinator Todd Alden was promoted to Lieutenant and in order to focus on his new duties stepped down from his role as EMS Coordinator. Lieutenant Alden served as the EMS Coordinator for three years and served the position well. Private Jason Cox was appointed to replace him and has approached the task head on, bringing fresh experience to the role. In August the department was granted the use of Ketamine in the pre-hospital setting for both Pain Management as well as acute Behavioral Emergencies. On the Basic Life Support (BLS) level the department has implemented the use of CPAP for non-invasive airways. A main focus for the new EMS Coordinator was a holistic evaluation and revamp of our supply system which has been completed. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic supply shortages have become more prevalent, because of safeguards put in place within our supply system we have been able to stay ahead of the national supply deficits that many other agencies are experiencing. Through selective organization and creative use of space the department has been able to reduce the need of overflow storage in the town hall attic. In an effort to support the community on a larger scale, the departments staff have been authorized to administer Flu and COVID vaccines through our medical control. This is a great advance in the level of care that our department can foster for our community.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the department has been successful in adapting trainings to fit socially distant and virtual guidelines. This past year the department was able to offer more EMS in-house trainings to include Advanced Cardiac Life Support and Pediatric Advanced Life Support. Additionally, department staff have been working with the other town departments to increase CPR and AED effectiveness. Looking into 2022, the department will continue the trend of remote learning by adding more virtual classes, and special training opportunities through local facilities. The department strives to provide the highest level of care to the community by staying abreast of new techniques and equipment while providing our staff with the best training available to meet the needs of the community.

Ambulance Calls By Level of Care

Hospital	Occurrence	Percentage
At Scene Other	9	0.86%
No Treatment Required	5	0.48%
Patient Refused Care	243	23.25%
Treated and Released or Refused Transport	0	0.00%
Treated, Transferred Care	7	0.67%
Treated, Transported by EMS (ALS)	462	41.34%
Treated, Transported by EMS (BLS)	378	33.21%
Treated, Transported by Private Vehicle	1	0.10%
Unknown	1	0.10%
Total	1,045	100%

Ambulance Call by Destination

Destination	Occurrence	Percentage
Health Alliance - Leominster	371	35.50%
Heywood Hospital	335	32.06%
Other, In-State	7	0.68%
St. Vincent's	8	0.77%
UMASS Memorial	4	0.38%
UMASS University	20	1.91%
No Destination	300	28.71%
Total	1,045	100%

Simultaneous Incidents

Simultaneous incidents are when more than one incident occurs during the same time period. As calls for service have increased over time, so have the frequency of simultaneous incidents. The current staffing level of the department provides enough staff on duty to respond to one basic incident (Medical, lockout, CO alarm) and/or the initial response to a more complex incident. When additional staff is needed for a complex incident or for multiple incidents the on-call Firefighters and off-duty fulltime Firefighters are relied upon to respond to the station, staff additional pieces of apparatus and respond to the incident. Considering the 67% decrease in the amount of on-call Firefighters on the department over the last ten years, this portion of our staffing model has begun to fail. The ability of the department to respond to more than one call at a time was first identified as a service gap in 2018. This statistic was not captured in traditional incident reporting prior to being identified in 2018, when the department began to track the volume of simultaneous incidents annually.

2018	2019	2020	2021
132	170	182	233

As these annual totals are further broken down, 67% (157) of these simultaneous incidents occurred during the daytime hours of 8:00AM – 6:00PM. This time period is the most critical to the departments staffing model due to the fact that the on-call staff is not available to respond

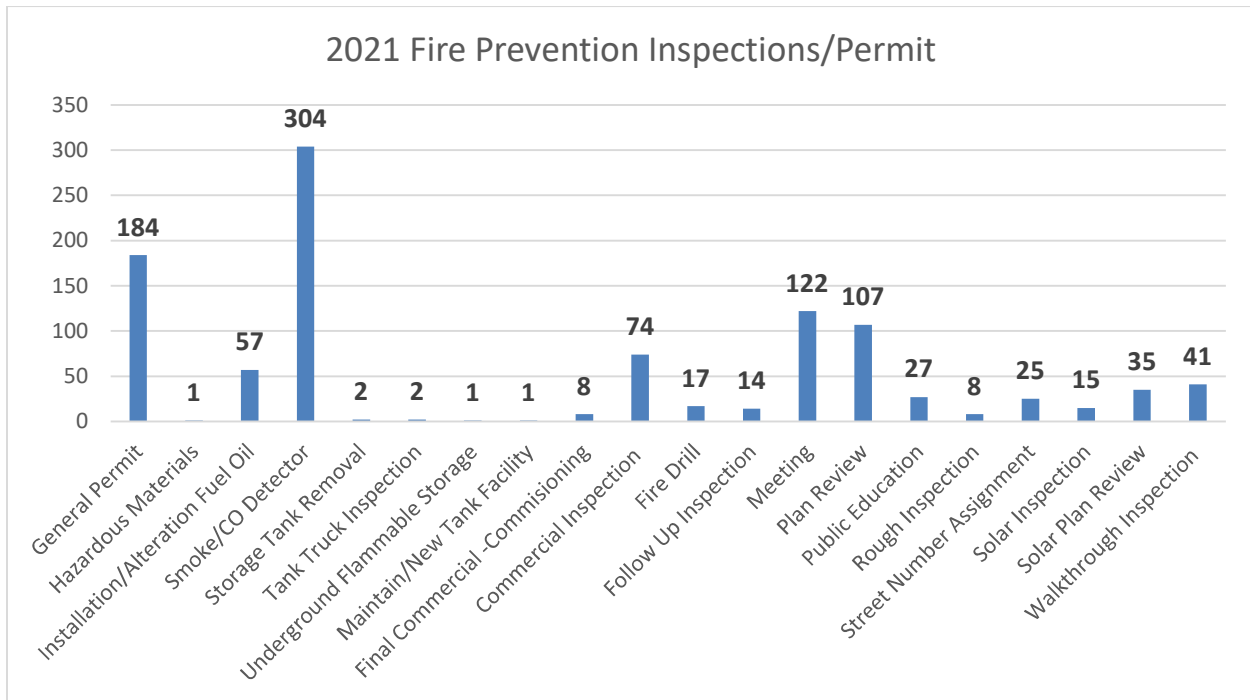
due to being at work at their fulltime jobs. In response to this shortfall, the department has asked the fulltime staff to comeback much more frequently to fill this gap incurring additional overtime related costs. When assessing simultaneous calls in 2021 by call type, 66% (154) of these incidents were EMS related.

The department does have two ambulances; however, the current staffing model does not



consistently provide enough personnel to staff both trucks. When this occurs, mutual aid is relied upon to provide an ambulance for the additional calls. In 2021, the department was able to staff and transport with the second ambulance 53 time out of the 154 incidents. With the current level of staffing the department will continue to struggle to respond to simultaneous incidents.

Fire Prevention



Throughout 2021 the department completed 1,045 fire prevention activities and registered 719 open air permit fires. The towns residential housing market remained steady and the department continued to see smoke detector resale inspections as its highest volume activity. During the year the department saw an emerging trend of the installation of battery storage systems in the residential setting. As battery technology has advanced they have become a real option to store and use energy created by a solar system. Very commonly the advances in technology outpace the codes that regulate their installation. With that the Fire Marshall and Building Inspectors created a joint memorandum for the installation of these systems in the residential setting. As the year progressed many of these systems were installed within the community. With that, training on the inspection of these system was completed as well as mitigating emergences in these systems when they fail. With the proposed code change coming in the next few years these systems will most likely be installed in most new construcion.

With the promotion of two Lieutenants, these new officers were required to complete the Fire Prevention Officer Level 1 credentialing. This program requires that students attend 40 hours of training plus a considerable self study online workload. With this higher level of training it provides the officer the tools needed to recongnize and handle a much wider variety of fire code issues. All of the fulltime staff are trained to the Fire Prevention Officer basic level with all fire officers credentialed to the Fire Prevention Officer – Level 1. This training provides a consistant level of code enforcement throughout the department. Chief Butterfield was re-elected to serve on the Board of Directors for the Massachusetts Fire Prevention Association until 2023.

Fire Investigation

The Fire Department continues to investigate all fires in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws in conjunction with our partners from the Westminster Police Department and the Massachusetts State Fire Marshals office. All fires are investigated and when appropriate, all legal options are followed.



Lieutenant Bennett

Chadbourne continues to be the departments lead investigator and throughout 2021 investigated 14 building fires and numerous vehicle and brush fires. Of the fires investigated by the department one brush fire was determined to be intentionally set. All other fires were determined to be due to unintentional causes.

Public Education

Like all aspects of the departments work, the COVID-19 pandemic made 2021 a difficult year for Public Education. Lieutenant Zachary Algarin continued as the departments coordinator for Public Education this year. The department was able to perform Senior SAFE Activities on a one on one basis in homes as well as provide the local Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops with classes on first aid and a socially distanced station tour. The department's Public Education focuses the majority of its' efforts in the school system during the spring time. With school being performed on a hybrid model our normal activities were not able to be completed. Lieutenant Algarin was able to attend The Public and Life Safety Educators conference held in Hyannis. This is a two day conference that provides educators with the most up to date fire safety curriculum.

Specialty Community Services

National Night Out

August 14, 2021 was the first annual National Night Out hosted at Oakmont. Throughout the evening over 1,000 people attended the event which included community partners and town entities. The event provides for a safe community building event with public safety, private/public partners and other special agencies such as Life Flight.



Halloween Bonfire

October 31, 2021 marked the return of the Halloween Bonfire. This event is the departments largest public safety event of the year. The only major change that was made to the normal routine was the elimination of the apple cider due to the ongoing pandemic.

Event Planning

The department continues to be part of community event planning. Due to the ongoing pandemic a majority of the annual events were cancelled. The department looks forward to working with our community partners ensuring a safe environment for all those in attendance.

Mid-State Mutual Aid

Westminster is a member of the Mid-State Fire Mutual Aid Association. Locally each Fire Department relies on mutual aid for not only man power but equipment resources as well when incidents exhaust or overwhelm the community in which the incident is occurring.



Department Training

In a traditional year the department holds 12 paid monthly trainings. Due to the ongoing pandemic, 2021 saw a modified training schedule in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19 thru department members. The department held an apparatus operator course for five members thru the summer and early fall. This course followed the IFSTA curriculum for apparatus operators and was taught in house by department personnel. This course, coupled with an Emergency Vehicle Operator (EVOC) class and a pre-determined amount of practice driving and operating each piece of apparatus gives the members the training and practice needed to drive and operate the department apparatus. A training component was also added to our on-duty staffs daily routine, with lesson plans for short (1 hour) drills to be performed during their workday. An array of topics are provided to the groups each month, tailored to the time of year or small improvements that need to be made. Even as the department entered the last month of the year there were some modifications made due to increased Covid-19 cases throughout the department and community.

As the the ongoing pandemic affected the department, modifications had to be made to the training schedule. The use of Microsoft Teams was launched to provide an online training platform when in person meetings were not available. With a portion of the meetings having to be postponed, the department added a basic skills and live fire training day into the schedule in an effort to maintain the department members skill sets.

EMS Training was heavily modified to accommodate the change to a new medical director. Rather than members having to go to other Hospital's to achieve their training hours. The training was done in house with all of the required M&M Rounds being done by our medical director. M&M rounds are an opportunity for our Medical Director to review actual call from the service area to improve service. The change to doing this as a department instead of regionally was a major improvement as we were able to focus on calls strictly from Westminster and not seven other services.

Apparatus

Engine 1 - (2019 Class A Pumper) KME. The vehicle has a 1,500gpm pump with 1,250 gallons of water and is equipped with Class A foam for ordinary fires, this Engine is the primary attack truck for structure fires. This vehicle is two years old and is in excellent shape.

Engine 2 – (2001 Class A Pumper) KME. This vehicle has a 1,500gpm pump with 2,500 gallons of water. This vehicle is also equipped with a Class A foam for ordinary fires. This vehicle is a dual role vehicle able to perform as an attack pumper or a tanker for incidents in the areas of town with no hydrants. This vehicle was refurbished in 2016 and is in moderate shape. The vehicle is starting to show its age. For this vehicles replacement it is proposed that the truck be replaced with two vehicles. A dedicated tanker truck and a dedicated engine.

Engine 3 – (2013 Class A Pumper/Rescue) KME. This vehicle has a 1,500gpm pump with 1,000 gallons of water. The vehicle is equipped with Class A and B foams allowing the vehicle to increase its fire suppression capability as well as fight flammable liquid fires. This vehicle serves as the department's heavy rescue carrying the specialty rescue items such as the Jaws of Life, structural cribbing, water/ice rescue and many other items. This vehicle is in good shape but has started to show areas of corrosion on the frame and other structural members.



Tower 1 – (2005 Ladder Truck) KME. The vehicle is a 95-foot aerial ladder with a bucket. This vehicle is equipped with a 2,000gpm pump and a 300-gallon water tank. This vehicle is in fair condition and is scheduled to receive a refurbishment next year. This vehicle is beginning to show body and frame corrosion that will be addressed with a refurbishment. The refurbishment however will not address all of the needs of the truck. This vehicle will start to encounter major mechanical failures in the coming years due to aging components.

Engine 5- (2008 Mini-Pumper) CET. Engine 5 is the departments brush truck. It has 4-wheel drive, 500gpm pump and 300 gallons of water. The vehicle is also equipped with Class A foam to increase its effectiveness on ordinary fires. This vehicle is in fair shape, substantial corrosion was found on its sub-frame and was replaced. The Compressed Air Foam System (CAFS) was disconnected from the vehicle due to high repair costs. To replace this system would require a major service and removal of parts of the body. The cost benefit was evaluated and the benefits of the CAFS did not necessitate its repair.

Car 1 - is a 2020 Chevrolet Tahoe that is designed for emergency response and as a command vehicle. This vehicle was placed in service in March of 2020 and is in excellent shape.

Car 2 - is a 2016 Ford Explorer designed for emergency response and as a command vehicle. The vehicle is in moderate shape and is scheduled to be replaced in the coming years.

Car 3 - is a 2013 Chevrolet 3500 equipped with a plow and is used for daily inspections and as the departments primary tow vehicle. This vehicle mechanically is in fair shape however the bed of the vehicle is showing extensive corrosion.

UTV – The UTV is a 2016 Gravelly UTV. The vehicle is designed for multiple roles including brush fire response in remote locations, rescue/transport of injured parties in remote locations and use during large events as a quick response vehicle. The department has seen and continues

to have incidents in remote locations where we once relied upon mutual aid from other communities for a UTV vehicle where now the department can handle many of these calls ourselves.

Ambulance 1 – This is a 2016 Chevrolet Chassis with a Braun ambulance body. This ambulance responds to medical emergencies and transports patients to the hospital. This ambulance is in fair condition. It is showing signs of corrosion but should meet its scheduled life expectancy.

Ambulance 2 – This is a 2020 Ford F-550 with a Braun ambulance body. This ambulance responds to medical emergencies and transports patients to the hospital. This vehicle is in excellent condition.

Station

In 2019, the Select Board re-formed the Public Safety Building Committee to perform a site selection process for a new public safety building. This committee completed a site selection analysis which was posted on the Towns webpage. The selected site was the Hager Park Road site. Once this site was selected the process began to transfer the land to the Town from Hager Park. This required a unanimous vote of the Hager Park Commission to proceed. There was not unanimity in the Hager Park Commission rendering this site unusable. This put the committee back to the beginning steps of its charge from the Select Board and is currently evaluating sites.



While this process proceeds the department continues to see increased needs for its services which has created a need to add additional staff. The department had sufficiently outgrown its current facility in the early 2000's. If sufficient progress is not made through this committee the department will have to request additional funding to modify the existing building. These additional funds will not adequately address the issues faced. It will be a very short term, temporary modification and other areas within the department will sacrifice.

All of the committee's documents can be found on the Town Website under the Public Safety Building Committee.

Future

The Westminster Fire Department is an all hazards response, prevention and education agency. Without a doubt the men and women who serve on the fire department provide the citizens with the highest level of service. The department's performance at all of the fires in 2021 have shown their dedication to the fire service and community. The Department strives to provide the highest level of service to the community as possible and our members embody this. As the department continues experiencing rising call volumes as the community grows, the department will need to grow to meet the needs of the community. I look forward to working with the town to facilitate these needs.

Please contact the office if you have any questions.



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