



Public Safety & Transportation Committee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Wednesday, January 8, 2025

Present: Councilors Grossman (Chair), Greenberg, Lucas, Block, Bixby and Wright

Absent: Councilors Downs and Lipof

City Staff: Chief Greg Gentile and Assistant Chief Mike Bianchi, Newton Fire Department and Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_UBeNRF-ac&feature=youtu.be

#124-24 Requesting a discussion with the Fire Department

COUNCILOR GROSSMAN requesting discussion with the Newton Fire Department on year-over-year data, which may include fires, injuries, inspections, hiring and overtime.

Public Safety & Transportation Held 7-0 on 03/06/24

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation Held 6-0**

Note: Chief Gentile, Assistant Chief Bianchi and Mr. Yeo joined the Committee.

Chief Gentile provided a PowerPoint presentation on the number of incidents and fire locations, attached.

Chief Gentile and Assistant Chief Bianchi provided the following information.

Incidents - Our statistics show that from 2012 to 2024, the total number of runs keeps climbing. We did approximately 500 additional runs in 2024 than we did in 2023. Three hundred of those runs were medical calls. While evaluating these statistics, it appears some increase in those medical calls are due to calls from new businesses, including Dana Farber and a facility on Florence Street. We work with those companies on a daily basis to understand their call volume and needs. Statistics show that approximately 200 of the runs are fire suppression calls (fires, accidents and fire alarms). Traffic accidents did not go up.

Structure fires - We had 27 structure fires; 14 were significant. In the 6 years before 2024, we had 1 working fire, 5 in 2022, 3 in 2023, 3 in 2021, and 4 in 2019. We had 7 multiple-alarm fires and 6 second-alarm fires. This is not the norm in the six past years. We review the cause of fires and several remain under investigation. We didn't see any common themes. The 3 electrical fires are common including several smoking material fires.

Training - We completed approximately 12,000 training hours last year, which is consistent with the past four or five years.

Overtime - We've been trying to address overtime for several years. Fiscal year statistics show we're down 10% overtime hours. Contracts provided a 3% raise on July 1. We attribute the overtime reduction to what we did several years ago with our new hiring practices. We have been aggressive with hiring. We address openings before they occur, given the long length of time it takes to get a firefighter fully trained and working.

Hiring process - We have 4 new members that began in November. The process began in April which is an appropriate time frame to become a firefighter. We currently have 2 vacancies and have begun to prepare in advance for the 8 month time frame it takes. In the past, we've had 5 to 7 vacancies and had to catch up to fill those vacancies. We've done a good job of trying to predict who will be retiring.

Injuries - We currently have 10 members out injured. Two members have filed for retirement, those openings will be coming. Three to four are out long-term. Four members are short-term injuries going through physical therapy.

New apparatus - New Engine 7 was ordered at the end of 2022 and should be arriving in March or April. We just completed the design of new Ladder 3. The company was able to build a slightly smaller truck. The wait time for Ladder 3 is approximately 3-3½ years.

Coastal Ambulance - The department oversees the city's EMS provider, Coastal Ambulance. We have 4 24-hour ambulances. Until recently all 4 were housed at fire stations but Coastal Ambulance procured a facility allowing them to house some ambulances, including one of our dedicated ambulances, with our fifth ambulance dedicated to a 16-hour shift. We negotiated a contract to provide four dedicated 24/7 ambulances, and a 16-hour ambulance as a backup. We can go hours without any EMS calls, and then all of a sudden we have multiple calls at the same time which is very common. Coastal Ambulance has done a great job of being able to provide backup ambulances as well. While we do a very small amount of mutual aid, almost all of our calls are handled by Coastal Ambulance.

Questions, answers and comments:

For clarity, please explain were there 7 or 14 fires? Chief Gentile answered that there were 7 working fires and 7 multiple alarm fires. We consider those a total of 14 significant fires. There was a total of 27 building/structure fires.

Why were there so many multiple alarms? Chief Gentile answered for a variety of reasons. The detection is smoke alarms, but then there's also notification apps. I believe all the homes had working smoke detectors.

Since it is a huge jump from previous years, is there any indication as to why so many more fires may be occurring? Chief Gentile answered no, we spend time looking at each individual fire. It is tough to predict. This is why we train many hours and worry about response times.

When incidents happen on the Mass Pike does NFD respond? Chief Gentile answered yes.

Since it takes 3½ years to build a new truck, is that the reason you're getting ahead? Assistant Chief Bianchi answered yes, the next truck to be replaced has 3½ years left in its life which will become a spare.

Regarding the family who passed away in New Hampshire, reporting indicates it was a carbon monoxide leak. Is the department educating the public at community events? Chief Gentile answered yes, we educate the public on smoke detectors, fire alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and that they are necessary to have in your homes. We are preparing some carbon monoxide information for the public. At the end of 2023, we began a Senior Safe Program after receiving a small grant for approximately 75 homes to seniors that wanted a safety check done. Fire Prevention Bureau and volunteers assisted in this project and were able to do work in homes including preventative nature making sure that residents have the proper smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and numbers displayed on their home.

Please inform the public when educating about smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors that they should check the expiration date.

What's the easiest piece of advice we can provide making sure people have operating smoke detectors and carbon monoxide sensors? Chief Gentile answered that the simple message we can get across is to change the batteries twice per year. Test the devices once a month, every six months, make sure they're going off. If they're not working, replace them.

Are there any female members working in the department and what are you doing to recruit females? Assistant Chief Bianchi answered that we have not started the hiring process for the two vacancies. We are working with our 3 female firefighters to get that message out. We're looking to expand our number of female firefighters.

In your presentation one fire was from solar panels. How did the fire begin? Chief Gentile answered that the solar panel fire was located at Newton Wellesley Hospital. They have an elaborate array of solar panels, not something you see on a residential structure.

Regarding forest fires, do firefighters have special training? Chief Gentile answered that we spend a lot of time getting necessary information out. We do training and we've been trained

in wildfire and urban wildfire scenarios. Mr. Yeo added that the state has a very effective division of forest fire control with teams deployed around the state who jump in at a moment's notice to assist a fire department with forest fire control. Teams are deployed frequently to fires outside of the state. Our Fire Department has the equipment, training, policies and outreach especially during these drought conditions.

During the drought, were you coordinating with the Parks and Recreation Department regarding their policies for renting space at the Cove or parks? Chief Gentile answered yes, we coordinated quite a bit, but most of it was for the messaging, because by the time the Fire Department got involved specifically with the Cove they stopped issuing permits. People were going to the Cove without permits. It may be best to ask Parks and Recreation Department about their policies and how they issue permits.

How does the department respond to medical calls? Every time Dana Farber calls does an apparatus respond? Chief Gentile explained that the department uses EMD, emergency medical dispatch. Information is received into the dispatch center, and then it goes through a computer program process. It is complicated as to which level of service is required. An unconscious person to a person with a sprained ankle are coded not only A through E letters, also each letter is categorized 1 through 4, and sometimes more. These are the different levels of what the system thinks the severity of the call is, based on that, we determine what is the proper response for that letter and number. Each ambulance has 1 paramedic and 1 EMT on it, which is technically an ALS ambulance. In some of the more severe calls we might require a second paramedic. We also have a field supervisor (FS 1) in an SUV that that has 1 paramedic. Some of the more severe calls will get 1 ambulance, the supervisor, plus an engine company. The least severe calls (alpha level calls), get 1 ambulance, no fire engine, and no supervisor. When Dana Farber calls, we take the criteria to find out if it's a potential life-saving call. On those calls a fire engine responds. We typically get to medical calls first and begin life-saving procedures.

Do wrong connections for electronic devices continue to be an issue? Chief Gentile answered yes, lithium-ion batteries and battery chargers continue to be a problem, and they're becoming more of a problem. We have had several lithium related fires from non-UL listed lithium-ion batteries purchased, or second hand chargers being bought. It is necessary to purchase UL-listed products only, not non-UL listed products. The website on lithium-ion battery safety can be found at:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/lithium-ion-battery-safety>

Regarding retirements are you able to begin recruiting and hiring or is it necessary to wait for a formal process before you are able to hire? Chief Gentile answered that we can begin hiring for the 2 positions. We don't have vacancies for long periods of time allowing us to speed up the process.

Do you have enough leeway based on the authorization this Committee approved two years ago to hire for expected upcoming vacancies, or do you need more? Chief Gentile answered no, we don't see a need to increase that.

Have you seen an interest in people to become firefighters? Chief Gentile answered that we are comfortable with the list and where it's been for the past 5 years. There's plenty of people on the list and looking for the job. Assistant Chief Bianchi added that we worked with the Human Resources Department to create a flyer on the steps to become a firefighter and the process.

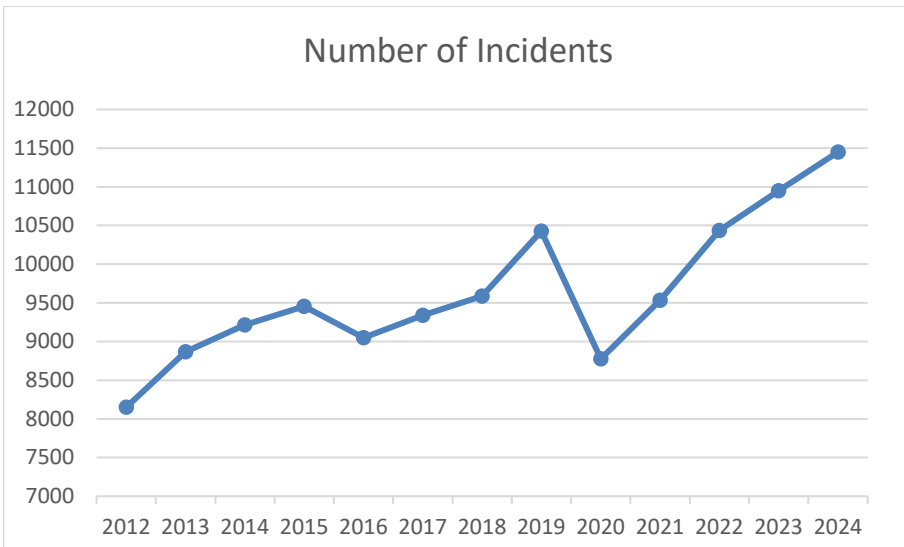
Committee members thanked the Fire Department for their diligence.

Without further discussion, Councilor Greenberg made a motion to hold. Committee members agreed 6-0.

The Committee adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Becky Grossman, Chair



<u>Date/Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Incident Type</u>	<u>Alarm Level</u>	
12/10/2024	407 WARD ST	STRUCT FIRE	Working Fire	Under Investigation
12/8/2024	25 PAUL ST	STRUCT FIRE	Working Fire	Electrical
6/28/2024	144 HARWICH RD	STRUCT FIRE	Working Fire	Electrical
6/11/2024	7 CHENEY CT	STRUCT FIRE	Working Fire	Hot Work
5/25/2024	114 ADAMS AVE	STRUCT FIRE	Working Fire	Vehicle/Equipment
3/19/2024	2014 WASHINGTON ST	STRUCT FIRE	Working Fire	Solar Panels
3/16/2024	33 PARSONS ST	STRUCT FIRE	Working Fire	Smoking Materials
			7 Total	

<u>Date/Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Incident Type</u>	<u>Alarm Level</u>	
12/15/2024	26 OBER RD	STRUCT FIRE	2nd Alarm	Under Investigation
6/20/2024	110 WARWICK RD	STRUCT FIRE	2nd Alarm	Lightning Strike
4/24/2024	8 CENTRAL AVE	STRUCT FIRE	3rd Alarm	Oily Rags
4/4/2024	18 CHARLEMONT ST	STRUCT FIRE	2nd Alarm	Under Investigation
3/24/2024	1241 WALNUT ST	STRUCT FIRE	2nd Alarm	Smoking Materials
2/23/2024	425 WATERTOWN ST	STRUCT FIRE	2nd Alarm	Oily Rags
1/24/2024	16 LINCOLN RD	STRUCT FIRE	2nd Alarm	Electrical
			7 Total	