

Advisory Committee
Public Safety Subcommittee
FY23 Fire Department Budget
Public Hearing Held via Zoom February 28, 2022

Attendance:

Janice Kahn, Subcommittee Chair; Subcommittee members David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, and Alisa Jonas; Dennis Doughty, Advisory Committee Chair; Carla Benka, Advisory Committee Vice-Chair, Katherine Florio, Advisory Committee member; John Sullivan, Chief of the Brookline Fire Department; Paul Trahon, President of Brookline Firefighters Local 950; Kevin Mascoll, Public Safety Business Manager; John VanScoyoc, Select Board member; Justin Casanova-Davis, Acting Director of Finance/Treasurer; Patricia Cripe, Brookline Firefighters Local 950 Co-chair of the Human Relations Committee; Brian Bergeron, Treasurer of Brookline Firefighters Local 950; Kristine Knauf, Precinct 15 TMM

Hearing Recording:

Click on the link below. Enter the passcode when prompted to view the recording of this hearing.

Meeting Recording: https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/xVHN_-UAz4waaVeSK7tbvIy9JMYOJrDvfBDZcZSZzkTdVWDos8hDHVaJ5da0NQnu.0zYgDBoGG3hrK_Ym

Access Passcode: 9+=mS3=4

Recommendation:

The subcommittee unanimously recommended favorable action on the Fire Department budget request of \$16,934,284.

FIRE DEPARTMENT BUDGET	FY21 Actuals	FY22 Budget	FY23 Budget	Variance
SALARIES	\$ 16,029,429	\$ 15,865,351	\$ 16,104,040	\$ 238,689
SERVICES	126,251	168,426	168,426	0
SUPPLIES	104,513	126,952	126,952	0
OTHER	22,978	27,100	27,100	0
UTILITIES	195,143	225,037	251,970	26,933
BUDGETED CAPITAL	67,899	68,606	255,796	187,190
INTERFUND TRANSFERS OUT	426	0	0	0
Total	\$ 16,546,639	\$ 16,481,472	\$ 16,934,284	\$ 452,812



For further details on the Fire Department budget, see the Brookline FY-2023 Financial Plan, Section 4J, pages 65-72 and online at

https://brooklinema.opengov.com/transparency#/60726/accountType=expenses&embed=n&brea kdown=types¤tYearAmount=false¤tYearPeriod=false&graph=bar&legendSort=co a&proration=true&saved_view=309418&selection=D3C059E77187D7DC57041F9848F54F28 &projections=null&projectionType=null&highlighting=null&highlightingVariance=null&year= 2023&selectedDataSetIndex=null&fiscal_start=earliest&fiscal_end=latest.

The Fire Department budget funds 6 Sub-programs: Administration, Suppression, Prevention, Equipment Maintenance, Training and Emergency Management, with the last responsibility added to the Fire Department in FY21. The Department's proposed FY23 budget of \$16,934,284 is \$452,812 higher than the FY22 budget, translating into a 2.7% increase.

The budget for salaries is \$16,104,040, comprising 95% of the total budget; and its increase of \$238,689 from FY22 represents 53% of the total FY23 increase. The increase primarily reflects annual salary increases for current employees, but also includes funding for an additional Lieutenant in the Fire Prevention Sub-program. Fire Prevention is responsible for the issuance of fire permits, approvals of building plans related to fire protection, investigations of fires, inspections, and education of the public in fire safety. With the volume of building units increasing over time, the current staffing of the Fire Prevention Sub-program was insufficient to inspect new units in a timely manner, and so personnel in the Suppression Sub-program were supporting these tasks. Addition of the new Lieutenant position should enable the Prevention Sub-program to handle the increased volume of permitting and inspections without support by Suppression personnel.

Of the remaining \$214,123 budget increase over FY22, \$187,190 is for Budgeted Capital. \$49,500 of that amount is for a replacement automobile, and \$137,234 is for equipment.

Discussion Topics:

A broad range of topics was discussed at the Public Hearing. Included among these were the following:

Personnel and Overtime

The full complement of 161 FTEs is funded by the budget. As in other years, the full complement of approved positions is funded, regardless of whether some of the positions are vacant. The amount saved as a result of vacancies is used to fund the overtime budget. As vacancies increase OT increases, since current personnel must work overtime to ensure that each station has the required staffing levels.

In FY22, there were 11 vacancies, which accrued over fiscal years 20-21 (3 vacancies occurred in FY20, 5 occurred in FY21, and 3 in FY22). Of these vacancies, 6 were retirements and 5 were resignations, including that of Gerald Alston in FY22 following the settlement agreement of his lawsuit against the Town. According to Chief Sullivan, the Department has not had difficulty hiring qualified candidates; however, because the Town does its own training of recruits, it must wait until there are a sufficient number of vacancies to fill to justify the expense of a training program (see further discussion below). The Department has hired recruits to fill all

vacancies. Of these, 1 is female and 3 are BIPOC. They will begin receiving training in the academy in the spring, but overtime staffing must continue to be used to ensure minimum staffing until the recruits can begin working in the field.

Kevin Mascoll, the Public Safety Business Manager, has provided the subcommittee with estimates of FY22 total and net overtime costs, with the latter obtained by deducting savings related to personnel vacancies. Starting in February the full cohort of new recruits were receiving salaries, so there no longer were savings arising from vacancies. The recruits will not be able to staff positions until they have completed the training academy, however, so that the need for overtime has continued.

Overtime costs also result from long term injury, long term sick leave, and various benefit leaves, such as vacation, personal days, and leaves under the Family Medical Leave Act. In FY22 the Department was hit with many sick leaves due to Omicron in January, resulting in particularly high overtime costs during that month, approximating 40% of the total overtime for FY22. COVID, in general, resulted in increased overtime throughout the year. ARPA funding may thus be used to cover some of these overtime costs.

Total overtime costs are estimated to be \$1,632,588 and the estimated net cost, after deducting the cost savings of vacancies, is \$907,111. After deducting reimbursements and grants, the estimated FY22 overtime shortfall is \$725,477.

Training

As noted above, vacancies were high in FY22 because they accrued over the course of 3 years, and since the Department runs its own training academy, the cost can only be justified if enough recruits need to be trained. Chief Sullivan believes that we could reduce costs by having recruits trained at the State academy, for which participation is free. By having recruits enter the State academy, the Department could fill vacancies as they arise, thereby reducing the need for overtime staffing for longtime vacancies. It will also eliminate the need to fund the training academy for recruits. He noted that very few municipalities still do their own training. Paul Trahon supports the Town continuing the training academy. He told the Subcommittee that there were waiting lists for the State training academy that trains firefighters for all municipalities. The town academy also provides training with the specific firefighting procedures used by the Town's Fire Department.

Chief Sullivan expects that there will be few vacancies arising within the next few years, since there was a hiring freeze for 6 or 7 years during the 1990's, and it is personnel that would have been hired during those years that would be retiring in the upcoming years. With few new hires expected for FY23 and the following few years, Chief Sullivan plans to use the state training program for those hires and assess how this form of recruit training compares to use of in-house training.

On another training topic, Chief Sullivan is urging the establishment of a funded training division that can provide advanced professional training for firefighters. The Town has a brand new training facility but we need outside consultants to provide the specialized training that the

Department would benefit from. We try to obtain grants to fund this type of training, but the funding does not always become available.

Health of Firefighters

There is increasing awareness of the increased risk of cancers resulting from firefighting. As building materials, both for the buildings themselves and for the furnishings, contain more carcinogens, and these are breathed in by firefighters, this has resulted in increasing rates of cancer for firefighters. Firefighting equipment also makes use of carcinogenic materials. Discussed at the hearing was the use of PFAS (Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances), a widely used chemical that has been used for waterproofing of uniforms and in the foams used to extinguish fires. To date, there has not been a good replacement available to replace its use in firefighting gear, but the foams used now have lower concentrations of PFAS.

The Department has not formally tracked the rate of job-related cancers, but there is knowledge of about 6 job-related deaths due to cancer over the past 20-25 years. Currently at least 3 firefighters have had job-related cancers but are in remission. The Union, working with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, has recently been attempting to compile statistics. The Department administration is currently negotiating with the union regarding the use of annual physicals for improved early detection.

The cancer risk to firefighters can also be reduced by providing firefighters with 2 sets of clothes, so that they can replace contaminated ones, by the provision of shower pads, making use of extractors, and improving air quality conditions in the fire stations, which will be included in the renovations planned for all the stations.

Renovations of Fire Stations

The current estimate for the renovation of fire stations is \$50 million if the buildings are not renovated to have net-zero emissions, and \$60 million if they are to be net-zero. The project will be multi-year, with stations renovated one at a time and individual renovations taking approximately 1 to 1 1/2 years to complete – longer if net-zero. The project would thus be completed in 5-7 years. Chief Sullivan is urging that the override vote for the renovations be presented to the voters this November. The need for the renovations is pressing, given the current environmental hazards affecting the health of firefighters, the lack of separate changing areas for the increasing number of female firefighters, and the need to add facilities for firefighters to remove chemicals from their clothes and skin following a return to the station after fighting a fire.

Increased Town Population

Brookline's population has been increasing over the years, with a particularly large increase projected for south Brookline. There has been much new construction in the Route 9 area by Hammond and Hammond Pond Parkway, and in a few years, there will be approximately 500 new units added to Hancock Village, which in itself adds 1% to the total housing stock. Chief Sullivan stated that addressing the increased need in south Brookline could be addressed by adding an additional ladder company for that part of Town. As planned, it will be added to the renovated Station 4, located at Route 9 and Reservoir Road. The renovation schedule has Station 4 as the first one to be renovated. Until that time, the ladder company would temporarily be

located at Station 6 on Hammond Street. Chief Sullivan is hoping that the Town can receive a “SAFER” federal grant that would fund 70% of the cost of the new ladder company in year 1 and 30% in year 2, with the Town required to fund 100% starting in year 3.

By a vote of 4 in favor, 0 opposed and 0 abstentions, the Public Safety Subcommittee recommends favorable action on the Brookline Fire Department’s FY23 Operating Budget of \$16,934,284.

Voting:

Alisa Jonas,
David-Marc Goldstein
Neil Gordon
Janice Kahn, Chair