FIRE STATION ALERTING SYSTEM REPLACEMENT
Subcommittee Recommendation - $450,000 (Revenue Financed)

The Brookline Fire Department's "Zetron" fire station alerting system was purchased over 20 years ago and needs immediate replacement. The system was temporarily upgraded in 2016 to accommodate the Town's changeover to fiber optic transmission, however the local vendor notified the Town in August of 2018 that it would no longer support this upgrade. The system continues to degrade and is no longer reliable, with failures experienced on a regular basis.

Technology changes over the past two decades have vastly improved and modern system components both enhance response capabilities and reduce alerting stressors for firefighters. Improvements in the dispatch-side system components provide a faster and more intuitive user-interface for dispatchers, thus reducing their stress as well. The integrated text-to speech technology standardizing all initial dispatch announcements offers needed consistency and reduces the possibility of responders misunderstanding the alert message.

In-station enhancements will include upgrades to all speakers and alert lighting to comply with NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) 1500 standard for firefighter health and wellness. Wall-mounted message boards, including a timer countdown display, will improve turnout time. In-station video monitors will display current dispatch information incorporating mapping overlays for routing and other vital information. During non-dispatch times these monitors can display all current Fire Department activity as well as Metro Fire activity in real time.

The operating costs for the system include funding for annual service contracts for the software components of the system.
Brookline Fire Department FY 21 Operating Budget
Public Safety Subcommittee

The Public Safety Subcommittee and the Capital Subcommittee held a joint public hearing on the Brookline Fire Department’s (BFD) Operating and Capital budgets on Thursday, March 5th at 5:30 pm in Town Hall, Room 103. Attending were: Fire Chief John Sullivan, Kevin Mascoll (Public Safety Business Manager); Firefighters from Local 950 IAFF - Paul B. Trahon (Pres.), Patricia Cripe (Vice Pres.), Justin Robinson (Pension Officer), James Clinton (Sec/Treas), Brandon Johnson (Dispatch – Fire/Police); Melissa Goff (Deputy Town Administrator); Kristine Knauf (Constable; TMM P15); Lavender Liang (BU Student); Capital Subcommittee Members – Carla Benka (Chair), Fred Levitan, John Doggett, Amy Hummel; Public Safety Subcommittee Members – Janice Kahn (Chair), David-Marc Goldstein, Alisa Jonas and Susan Granoff.

**Budget Summary:** The FY 21 Fire Department Operating Budget shows a 1.4% increase, largely due to an additional Fire Prevention Lieutenant position, and increases in Education Incentive, Longevity and EMT Pay. The BFD also received a Boston Area Securities Initiative (UASI) grant to fund Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator for approximately 18-months. **Salaries** increased $242,350. Included in this budget for the first time is $10,000 for training, which is shown as an increase from $166,426 to $176,426 in **Services**. **Utilities** increase $7,962 (natural gas, gasoline and diesel fuel); **Budgeted Capital** decrease by $29,776.
The Public Safety Subcommittee unanimously by a vote of 4-0-0 recommends favorable action on the Brookline Fire Department FY 21 Operating Budget of $16,261,273.

BACKGROUND:

The BFD through FY 20 has been comprised of 5 subprograms: Administration, Fire Suppression, Fire Prevention, Equipment Maintenance and Training for a total of 170.5 FTE positions (160 of which are in Fire Suppression). The 0.5 position is the Public Safety Business Manager whose salary is shared by the Fire and Police departments.

Starting in FY 21 a sixth subprogram is being organized, Emergency Management, to centralize the administration of Emergency Management functions which are spread through a number of departments including Fire, Police and Health. It is being set up “to coordinate all local emergency planning, preparedness, response, mitigation and recovery from catastrophic events.” Chief Sullivan is the designated Emergency Management Director for the Town of Brookline. The UASI-funded Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator will staff this new subprogram.

DISCUSSION:

Maintenance and Training Facility (“M/T Facility”). In December 2019 the Maintenance and Training Facility located behind Fire Station 6 on Hammond Street officially opened. The most recent drill school class was able to use the new burn building while other work was being completed and there is only a “punch list” of items that still need to be finished. Of the 11 people from the region who took that training 3 were women; the trainees were also able to complete an EMT class within the training program. On April 1st the newest BFD hires will have completed their probationary year.

NOTE: The training building was used for the first time this past Election Day for Precinct 15 voting; prior to that voters were completing ballots next to fire apparatus inside that station. Although there is a need for better permanent signage directing voters to the new location on the site and to the parking area and behind the station, the new facility creates a much safer situation for residents coming out to vote.

When the M/T Facility was still under construction the Advisory Committee granted Chief Sullivan’s request for additional funds to create a second driveway to allow for a more efficient and safer flow of cars in and out of the site, which is working very well.

The M/T building bathroom/shower/changing room for women was designed for only single-use (one shower, one toilet, all open), which is limiting the number of women firefighters who
are able to use the room at one time. While there are no plans to expand it right now, there will be an effort to provide some privacy within the room (for example, by building walls around the toilet) so that more than one female firefighter will be able to use it at the same time.

There are currently only two vacancies in the Fire Department and two new mechanics have been hired, replacing long-serving mechanics who retired. One mechanic came from the Department of Public Works. Fire departments and vendors of fire apparatus are finding it difficult to hire trained fire mechanics. They are having to hire mechanics and then training them to maintain fire apparatus.

Firefighters typically work three 24-hour tours. In the past, if a firefighter needed to take part of a day to care for a sick child, for instance, that employee would have had to take off a full 24-hour tour, which would then have to be covered by another firefighter. As of February 1st, 12-hour shifts are now contractually allowed, which is a great benefit to the firefighter and to the Department in terms of meeting staffing needs and in somewhat containing overtime costs. Overtime expenses are currently on target with the FY 20 budget, although a spike in costs generally occurs in the summer months.

**Emergency Management.** Chief Sullivan is the Emergency Management Director for the Town of Brookline. Different departments are involved in emergency response: Fire Department, Police Department, Health Department, Public Works. Creating an emergency management subgroup coordinates response efforts and opens up funding opportunities for emergency planning. Prior to this subgroup, the Emergency Management Team had been a task force. Depending on the nature of the emergency, a particular department will take the lead. For example, for the coronavirus, it’s Health Director, Dr. Jett.

**Covid-19 Response Plans:** An emergency management trailer has been equipped to respond to this latest health crisis and the Town will use the same protocols as were used for earlier health crises like SARS and MERS. The Dispatch Center has been prepared to ask questions to deal with this crisis to determine the proper response. If a person calls with potential symptoms, the response generally will be to tell that person to isolate at home and not go to the hospital.

If firefighters are exposed and need to self-monitor at home, there are enough people to backfill, since right now we have a high level of staffing. Other options could be forced overtime as a last resort and turning to other communities for mutual aid. Other strategies are to limit a COVID-19 emergency medical response to a single person rather than two or three individuals, staying at least 6 feet away from the person needing assistance, washing gear and decontaminating on the scene. At this point, it was noted that dollars directed to public education are the most useful dollars spent.

**Ambulance Service.** The Town has a contract with Fallon to provide ambulance service calls in Brookline. Two Fallon ambulances are housed at Station 7 on Washington Street in Washington Square, and at Station 4 on Route 9/Reservoir Road. The contract is set to expire July 1st 2020. There is nothing to limit the Town from having its own, in-house ambulance service.
would be large start-up costs for which there might be some funding available and would require complex oversight (billing and hiring and training of EMTS). Based on our proximity to the medical area, it could be very lucrative. Medicare sets ambulance rates. Chief Sullivan is not adverse to researching this option.

It would probably take about 3 years to shift the ambulance service to in-house and so another contract will have to be signed in the immediate future. Last time the Town simply rolled over the contract with Fallon, but there is an opportunity to negotiate better terms and enhancements with Fallon. The Subcommittees talked about going out to bid being good policy to put into practice and we were told that another ambulance service may be interested in coming to Brookline. Fallon has been asked to provide data on the number of calls to which they respond.

Fire Station Master Plan. The Fire Department has needs to renovate all 5 stations or, maybe, renovate 4 stations and rebuild the 5th. Station 7 was built in 1898, Station 1 in 1907, Stations 4 and 6 in the 1930s, and Station 5 (on Babcock St.) in 1965. The average station age is 92.5 years. The chief characterized current living conditions in the five stations as “deplorable,” and showed photos of unsanitary showers, soot-embedded furnishings and sleeping facilities without partitions or privacy. Right now the renovations being planned include accommodations for Fallon, but the space needs would fit an in-house ambulance service as well. It would require space for two people in an office, plus space for the ambulances. In the past Brookline had close to 220 firefighters, 7 engines and 3 ladder trucks to respond to 5200 calls per year. There are now 160 firefighters in suppression, 5 engines and 2 ladder trucks to respond to over 8500 calls per year. Critically, the two ladder trucks are in North Brookline and there are none close to South Brookline (Station 4 on Route 9 and Station 6 on Hammond Street) despite a major expansion of Hancock Village. Chief Sullivan has acknowledged the potential need for another ladder truck to be housed at Station 4.

Among the goals of the planned renovations are (1) creating more capacity for female firefighters, including unisex bathroom pods that contain a toilet/shower/sink, and sleeping arrangements that provide more privacy (currently, there are no partitions between beds in bunkrooms and only 4-5 feet of space between each bed); (2) constructing interiors to provide environmental safety for decontamination purposes; and (3) compliance with OSHA regulations.

The current estimated costs of renovating all 5 stations is $21 million, and for renovating 4 houses ($16 million) and rebuilding Station 5 ($17-21 million), all of which would need to be funded by a debt exclusion.

Firefighter Health and Safety. Firefighters are exposed to toxins in the course of their work and have high cancer rates. One way to reduce their risk is to decontaminate as best as possible on the scene, undergo further decontamination at the station and then have a clean station. There are now decontamination bags for gear that can be stowed before returning to the station. And there are washers and dryers in all the stations.
Another way to reduce risk is early detection through yearly cancer screening. The firefighters and the Chief would like yearly physicals and the Human Resources Director supports this initiative. The New England Baptist Hospital recently closed its Occupational Health Center practice and the Town has contracted with Physician One located at Hammond Street and Route 9 to provide those services.

The Public Safety Subcommittee unanimously recommends favorable action on the Brookline Fire Department FY 21 Operating Budget of $16,261,273.