

Annual Town Meeting - May 8, 2023
Fire Rescue Department Articles (all Finance Committee votes were 9-0-0)

Article 21 - Fund Fire Department Aerial Ladder Truck Replacement

Article 41 - Fund Fire/Rescue Department Ambulance

Article 43 - Fund Fire/Rescue Department Bunk/Locker Space

Article 49 - Fund Fire Department Overtime

On Behalf of the Finance Committee: Lynn Bruneau

I'm back - four more Articles at once - this time on behalf of the Fire/Rescue Department - Articles 21, 41, 43 and 49. Again I'll do them in reverse order - though they're all important.

Background first. On January 6 of this year, the Finance Committee sent a letter of support to Fire Chief Geof Deering and Deputy Chief Tim Gula in support of the Orleans Fire/Rescue Department's plan to apply for a FEMA-sponsored "SAFER" grant ("Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response") which at the time was due in early January.

The goal of the SAFER program is "to enhance local (fire) departments' abilities to comply with staffing, response and operational standards established by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)."

In the Chief's November 2, 2022 and January 4, 2023 presentations to the Orleans Select Board, he outlined the need for additional resources for the Department and referred to a number of on-going staffing challenges, including increasing call volumes, increasing multiple, simultaneous calls, increasing complexity/duration of calls, decreasing availability of callback personnel, housing and response times and inadequate number of resources needed to respond to calls. The data indicate that on average, with multiple/simultaneous calls and limited callback resources, 30% of the time the station is left with just one or 2 or even no firefighters/paramedics to respond to the next call.

The Department works well with neighboring towns to provide Mutual Aid resources when needed. In early December, in Eastham, a pick-up truck fire in a residential driveway spread quickly to the house. With all other resources out on ambulance calls, the Eastham Fire Chief drove the fire engine to the scene himself. Mutual aid from Orleans, Wellfleet, Brewster, Harwich, Yarmouth and Chatham came to the scene while crews from Hyannis, Harwich and Dennis covered the Eastham station.

The very next day, an early morning fire at the Christmas Tree Shop here in Orleans was extinguished by Mutual Aid support from Chatham and others because 2 Orleans crews were out on ambulance runs when the call came in. Mutual Aid is working, and working well.

The Finance Committee wrote to support the Department's plan to apply for a SAFER grant - with a goal of hiring an additional 8 firefighters/paramedics, adding 2 per shift. We understood

that the SAFER grant could cover staff salaries and benefits for the first 3 years for each new hire, with the Town then picking up the cost after the initial period. We understood that there would be additional on-boarding costs for each new hire that the Town would have to cover (including turnout gear and Fire Academy costs) as well as temporary bunk space/lockers that would need to be added to the building - likely in the conference/storage room - another \$30k.

So let me switch gears here. The application date for the SAFER grant was deferred a couple of months. The Select Board got on board and provided their support for the application on March 15, a few days before the application was due. We won't hear the results until late this summer. Meanwhile - we need action on a number of funding Articles at tonight's Town Meeting.

Article 49 asks for interim funding for \$100k to cover anticipated overtime for the summer months to cover the anticipated need - what experience tells us will be needed to provide shift coverage, particularly when the Town's population grows from 6,000 year-round residents to 20k summer residents. Article 43 asks for \$30k to fund the build-out of bunks and lockers in what is now a conference room to accommodate the extra shift staffing. In the fall we'll know whether we got the SAFER grant for more resources - or not. And that will determine our next steps - hopefully in time for Fall Town Meeting.

Meanwhile - Article 41 - \$410k to fund a new ambulance. The Town has 3 ambulances. They are usually replaced on a scheduled cycle basis - funded by what's called "ambulance reserves" - the funds from ambulance fees - the fees for the ride to the Hospital in Hyannis. Let me be really, really clear: there is NEVER a charge when an Orleans ambulance comes to help you at home or anywhere when they do NOT transport you to the hospital. So please - do NOT NOT call for help if you need help!

Finally - Article 21 - \$1.6M for a new 100' ladder truck to replace the current 70' ladder truck. Several key points - but most importantly - the 70' truck is inadequate to best serve the Town now. It is NOT about building height - this is not NYC or Boston - it's about reach. Think about the condos on Old Colony Way. There is no access road behind those condos and I don't think a fire truck would fit down the bike path. Also - with the Cape Cod 5/Pennrose project in the offing - with the conversion to affordable housing - that would be both height and reach. And in some of the further corners of Town - bigger houses with larger footprints in out-of-the-way places - it's about reach there too. And a ladder truck of this size - once ordered - the average wait time for delivery is 900 days. Hopefully just in time for Pennrose occupancy.

Please join the Select Board and the Finance Committee in voting to support all of these Articles - in support of the Orleans Fire/Rescue Department.

And one more thing: have a lock box installed! The Fire/Rescue Department would have a master key to access your house key inside the lock box installed on your house - so that in an emergency, they wouldn't have to break down your front door with their fire axes. Get it done!