

BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE

MAY 31, 2023

A meeting of the Budget Review Committee was held Wednesday, May 31, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Alderman Richard A. Dowd, Chairman, presided.

Let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance.

Members of Committee present: Alderman Richard A. Dowd, Chairman
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.
Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire
Alderman June M. Caron
Alderman Ernest Jette
Alderman John Sullivan (arrived at 7:10)

Members not in Attendance: Alderwoman-at-Large Shoshanna Kelly

Also in Attendance: Alderman Derek Thibeault
Steve Buxton, Fire Chief
William Atkinson, Assistant Fire Chief
Kevin Burgess, Fire Commission Chairman
Mary Ann Melizzi-Golja, Fire Commission
Karen Conde, Executive Assistant

ROLL CALL

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

COMMUNICATIONS - None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None

NEW BUSINESS – RESOLUTIONS - None

NEW BUSINESS – ORDINANCES – None

TABLED IN COMMITTEE

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO REMOVE FROM THE TABLE R-23-125
MOTION CARRIED**

R-23-125

Endorsers: Mayor Jim Donchess
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.
Alderman Richard A. Dowd
Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire

**RELATIVE TO THE ADOPTION OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2024 PROPOSED BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF
NASHUA GENERAL, ENTERPRISE, SPECIAL REVENUE AND GRANT FUNDS**

DEPARTMENTAL REVIEWS OF THE PROPOSED FY23 BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF NASHUA

<u>Dept. #</u>		<u>Revenue</u>	<u>Appropriations</u>
	<u>Public Safety</u>		
152	Fire Department	107	108

Chairman Dowd

Chief if you want to give an overview of the budget and as we go through the line items, the ones that have any significant changes from last year's budget or anything you want to talk to yourself or any of your team.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Certainly. Steve Buxton, Nashua Fire Chief. Thanks for taking the time to be with us this evening. I'd like to take a moment to thank the Admin. team at NFR for their efforts in building this budget - Assistant Chief Atkinson, Executive Assistant Karen Conde, and Administrative Assistant Ann Marie Boucher are highly skilled and organized and their efforts are very much appreciated.

Nashua Fire Rescue aims to be the premier emergency services provider in our region that is constantly striving for excellence in service delivery through education, innovation, and collaboration. Nashua Fire protects \$14 billion in real and personal property. Our Fire Alarm Division 1 is just under \$2 billion in assets, which continues to grow as our city develops. In FY24, NFR is projected to bring a total revenue of \$467,000 and partial thanks to Alderman Jette. As you are aware, last year we updated our permit fee structure. This coupled with the additional Inspector Investigative position, which we received for funding for last year, assisted in collecting some of these additional revenues.

A key aspect of Nashua Fire Rescue's approach is our focus on adequate staffing. This allows us to respond quickly to incidents and prevent them from escalating into larger, more dangerous situations. The level of preparedness is essential in emergency services and this is something that Nashua Fire Rescue takes very seriously. Many other communities are overwhelmed when their available resources are overwhelmed in they result in longer incidents as well as the loss of property which eventually translates into tax revenue. As you are aware in 2021, we published a Master Plan Study for the organization. From this, there was 40 plus recommendations that were brought forward. Of course most of these if not all have a price tag attached to them. As a result, we developed a strategic plan to prioritize these recommendations so they are accomplished efficiently. The goal is to develop and nurture a modern fire department that meets the needs of our community and is financially viable. As we accomplish these objectives, we will not only be meeting the needs of our community but we will be continually working towards our goal of achieving an ISO 1 rating for our organization in the community. Both the Master Plan and the Strategic Plan can be located on our website. I can report to you that we continue to make progress on these recommendations with the assistance of our members and the investment from the city. These efforts are also supplemented through the use of grant funding opportunities. In FY23, we utilize \$325,000 in grant funding. Unfortunately, we also had to decline \$750,000 in grant funding through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. This was a grant for firefighter health and wellness and the reason we were not able to take advantage of this grant is we did not have the bandwidth at the administrative level within our organization to facilitate it appropriately.

Our goal in FY24 is to continue addressing the Master Plan recommendations to assist in moving the organization forward. Like many others, NFR continues to suffer from recruitment and retention issues. We have engaged in a new process with the assets currently available to us and are realizing some success. Due to our efforts, we have hired members from within the region as well as nationwide. We continue to work to clearly identify a pathway for citizens of Nashua to pursue a career within a Fire. This is an issue that has many contributing factors to it and will involve efforts on both the local and State level to solve. In addition, we work with IFF local 789 to identify areas that membership values and improve our organization and collective bargaining agreement so it's attracted to those pursuing a career in the fire service.

NFR will continue to work to acquire new equipment and apparatus as defined in the CERF schedule. As you are aware, we currently have two fire engines and an aerial apparatus on order. The build time for these apparatus are now 28 to 32 months and we greatly appreciate your efforts in assisting us in maintaining this schedule which will eventually result in savings to taxpayers. We will continue to work to secure capital improvements fundings to invest in our infrastructure as well as funding to increase staffing within the organization as mapped out in the Master Plan and according to the needs of our community. The following projects are underway within our organization and some of this funding was achieved through ARPA funding. We're in the process of moving a project forward that will update the fire station alerting system. Completing this project will improve the health and safety of our members and we expect to see improved response times while giving us the ability to extract data at a level that has never before been available to us to evaluate our compliance with NFPA 1710. We're in the process of executing a significant fire alarm cabling project that will reinforce our infrastructure and allow for more growth in the north and southwest quadrants of the city as it continues to develop. We are currently working with our city partners towards upgrading the city's aging traffic preemption system. Completion of this project will result in a complete update to all 98 signaled intersections within our city. In addition, the model selected is scalable and could also provide benefits to DPW as well as the Transit Department.

Our FY24 staffing requests include the following: the addition of an Assistant Fire Chief's position. This position would be

responsible for professional standards with our organization, oversight of recruitment for our new members, oversight of the training credentialing programs of the organization, management of the promotional process, implementation and management of professional development programs within NFR. This position was requested for a half year funding. It has been adjusted to a quarter year funding and I would request that you restore the requested amount to \$69,624.50. That would be an addition of \$34,812.23.

Next is an addition of a part time IT position. Many aspects of our profession have become more reliant on technology for both emergency responses, routine operations, and new construction within our community. Some examples within our organization are computer aided dispatch, fire station alerting, traffic preemption, bi-directional amplifier, radio system component inspection, and installation oversight. This part time position will oversee those technologies as well as create a full IT management program for NFR. Currently, there is no position within NFR to handle this workload. While the city IT Department does well to handle the normal IT needs such as our desktops, our payroll software and scheduling, the specialized needs required to do our work are quickly outgrowing their bandwidth. City IT currently does not keep up with our needs to supply MDTs for our apparatus or other devices required for work in the field. As result, many of these devices along with the fees associated with them have been transferred to our budget. Please note that this position has been requested in collaboration with the Radio Communications Division. The position is currently only funded at a 50% rate of what was requested and I would request that you restore the funding to that Radio Communications budget to allow us to fill the position with the appropriate candidate. This would require the addition of \$32,000 into the radio communications budget.

In capital improvements, we have received funding for \$50,000 worth of deferred maintenance. Request number one - we requested a funding for a building conditions assessment study for all seven of our facilities. It's important to invest in such studies as they help prevent unanticipated maintenance costs and ensure that our facilities are safe, functioning properly, and maximize the longevity of them within our city. This request was for \$210,000 and is currently not funded within the budget. This is to evaluate just under \$15 million in city assets the eight that range in age from 130 years old to 17 years old. This funding would assist us in developing a comprehensive plan for our facilities that we carry us into the future.

Request number two is for floor repair at 15 Amherst Street. Since 2001, we have been maintaining and repairing several small cracks in the concrete floor of the Amherst Street fire station. In the fall of 2022, we locate some more significant cracks that were located remote from the others. These were evaluated by a structural engineering firm and the recommendation that was returned is for a major overhaul of the concrete floor from both the top and bottom sides to make the appropriate repairs that are needed. The engineering report recommends that we have the floor evaluated and inspected every six months until they repairs are made. The cost of the evaluation is \$6,500 and the total estimated cost of repair is \$556,000.

Other FY24 increases that are contained in our budget: our collective bargaining agreement obligations, utility increases that were dictated to us by Administrative Services, Purchasing, and the Energy Manager. A request for additional dollars in the shift coverage in overtime timeline. This was a significant request and this is a very hard number for us to predict. 90% of the NFR workforce is required to be replaced when they take time off to maintain the appropriate staffing levels within the organization. These staffing levels are a requirement of the CBA. They currently meet NFP Standard 1710 and has been proven through research and testing to be the most efficient staffing level for a city fire department protecting a community such as Nashua.

As I have stated earlier, a key aspect to Nashua Fire Rescue's approach is our focus on adequate staffing. This allows us to respond quickly to incidents, prevent them from escalating to larger, and more dangerous situations. This level of preparedness is essential in emergency services and is something that we take very seriously.

In closing, I want to take a moment to thank the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen for their continued support. As you are aware, Nashua Fire Rescue has struggled to recover from cuts that were made to our organization several years. Through the efforts of the Mayor and others, we are slowly making progress to regain some of this ground while at the same time being certain the funding is placed appropriately for the needs of our community. I would further like to thank the Board of Fire Commission and most importantly the members of Nashua Fire Rescue for their efforts each and every day to make our community safer and assist those within our community who are having their worst day imaginable. I think it takes a special individual to enter into a career of public service and I would say that firefighters are some of the most unique of these public servants. This is not just because of their skill set but because their compassion and desire to fix any issue that is presented to them. I'd like to thank you for your time and I'd be more than willing to answer any questions you may have for me.

Alderman O'Brien

Yeah, I do have one Chief. I'm very concerned. As you know, I'm Chairman of Infrastructure. I've seen over the years the lack of maintenance on some of the buildings that the city does own. I wasn't aware. I have, as you know, a history with NFR. I remember when the floor collapsed the first time and I was working at the Arlington Street station when that floor collapsed. Could you just enlighten the Board a little bit more that we got a transient load of 16 to 22 tons moving out of that? That's putting a lot of stress on that concrete. Basically if I were to build a new station such as the new Crown Hill station, they're no longer building it over a pit such as a basement.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

As we know, the Amherst Street Station is our oldest firehouse. It's one of the oldest fire houses that is still in service in the New England region. The load that is currently on that, an engine goes about 20 ton and an aerial device goes between 36 and 40 ton. So the load that is being placed on that floor is much more significant even since the days when he left. They're certainly not making the trucks any smaller. We do monitor it frequently. We have done much repair through capital improvements in the past mostly to the top side of the slab. This one most recent crack that developed while they've told us at this point in time it's safe and we just have to monitor it. We do need to pay it the attention its due before it continues to deteriorate.

Alderman Thibeault

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So just a question and this may be more for Chairman Dowd. So the building study and the floor pair was taken out of the budget. Is that something because there are more one-time fees that we could pay through escrow if we have escrow? Now I don't know what the escrow is going to be yet but isn't that something we could put in there as opposed to staffing which you really shouldn't be putting in escrow?

Chairman Dowd

Well why it was taken out, you would have to ask the Mayor. As far as where it could be funded, yes those are other options that could be funded through escrow or other.

Alderman Thibeault

I'm not saying I wouldn't support it in the budget. I'm just thinking that if we don't end up passing it through in the budget that we find this other way because obviously both of these things, I think, are extremely important. Obviously the building study and obviously the floor pair is something that we would have to do sooner than later I think.

Chairman Dowd

Yeah there are several ways to approach it but we'd have to look into which way to go. There are other stations that require work as well for getting there. The fire station at the airport it's in pretty tough shape. Fortunately, we have some of the newer fire stations but the Amherst Street fire station, I think, goes all the way back to the horses.

Alderman O'Brien

No I remember them. Ash and Cinder.

Chairman Dowd

Any other questions?

Alderman Sullivan

Please my apologies Chief Buxton and to your entire team for being a few minutes late tonight. You mentioned staffing. In our budget books, I'm looking at a number of Nashua Fire and Rescue has 181 and a quarter people. What I didn't see and that you outlined in your comments - and again, I was late so I might have missed some of the narrative around it, I don't see in that 181 the IT position that you mentioned. Is that a wish that you want there or?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

So that position is actually in collaboration with the Radio Communications Division.

Alderman Sullivan

Okay.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

So it will be funded through their budget and they'll actually work with those individuals supporting fire IT needs.

Chairman Dowd

That was asked for by Mr. Mansfield and we had discussed it when he was in.

Alderman Sullivan

Okay, thank you. 181 and a quarter people fully staffed currently?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

I guess I would ask what you mean by fully staffed.

Alderman Sullivan

Are you at 181 and a quarter people?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Not currently, no.

Alderman Sullivan

Okay. Where are you in?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

I think we're 176. Currently, we just had 12 recruits hit the floor the beginning of May and we already have five openings within our organization. We're probably due to have seven openings by the beginning of fall.

Alderman Sullivan

Okay. Very good. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

I think it would also explain difficult hiring people right now because there aren't people out there looking to become policemen or firemen. Just the way it is. Any other questions?

Alderman Caron

Thank you. Thank you Chief for explaining what was left out of your budget. I like Alderman O'Brien know that we just do not take care of our buildings. My thoughts are what a terrible thing to happen if that caved in over there on Amherst Street. So I think that having discussions within the Budget Committee later on how do we help you get that so that your people are safe, and the people around you, and if anything happened to that building would be catastrophic. I do appreciate that you gave us an overview of what was taken out of the budget. I appreciated that very much. Thank you.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

You're welcome.

Chairman Dowd

So if we lost the floor of that station, we not only risk people being injured but those three trucks combined cost millions. They obviously wouldn't do well going through the floor. Something that we probably should come up with an approach. Maybe not part of the budget but other ways to funding it.

Alderman O'Brien

I couldn't agree with you more but more importantly, human life. There's people that occupy that building. You wouldn't tolerate it in your house to have something that could catastrophically collapse or potentially. So let's remember that there's a 24/7 is a crew living in that structure. So that's a need within itself.

Chairman Dowd

That's why we got the trucks out of Lake Street – the old Lake Street fire station.

Alderman Jette

Yes thank you. So on that subject since the Amherst Street station is so old in your planning, I know you have a plan. I looked at it a long time ago. I don't remember all the details. Is that Amherst Street station gonna stay? I mean if we replaced the floors – I'd hate to replace the floor and then build a new building somewhere else to service that area. Can you talk about that?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

So yes we do have plans to maintain that location from now and for many, many years. We may take some strides to lessen the load on that floor because there is a full basement under there. Either way, we need the floor repaired. As Alderman Dowd stated, the airport fire station is in desperate need of repair. One of our requests in the six year plan under capital improvements was for some money to started studying where that should be located, and start some architectural drawings, and so forth to design a station out in that area. So our thoughts are we would maybe be able to move the aerial device out towards that district, have a two piece company type fire station out in the area of the airport, and lessen the load on the floor at 15 Amherst Street.

Alderman Jette

So Chief you itemize several requests and I was trying to follow in the book. I don't know if those – you seem to be paralleling what you've listed as goals here. I don't see any numbers. You mentioned several numbers. Am I missing it? Is it here or If not, can you provide us with a list of your requests and the numbers that you would like us to add to the budget?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

From within the capital improvements program?

Alderman Jette

You mentioned adding an Assistant Fire Chief, part-time IT position. You talked about the floor at Amherst Street. I think you also talked about a building condition assessment study. I thought that you were asking us to add that to the budget. If so, could you provide us with those specific requests and the numbers that go with them so that we could consider that?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Certainly. So the Assistant Chief's position...

Chairman Dowd

Alderman Jette do you mean in writing so the whole Board has it?

Alderman Jette

Yeah that would be - rather than my trying to take dictation from you.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

We don't want to transcribe it wrong.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Yep we can do that.

Alderman Jette

Okay.

Chairman Dowd

So if you would send the answer to Donna Graham. She will get it to all the Aldermen and Budget Committee.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Okay.

Alderman Jette

Thank you. So I noticed in salaries and wages the difference between what you listed as what the department proposed and what the Mayor is proposing. I calculate the difference of \$535,957. I think I found that under the overtime shift coverage. Is that correct? Is that where that number is?

Karen Conde

The majority of it is. In the overtime shift line 446957 was from the overtime line. 89,000 is from the wages full time which is the six months for the Captain of EMS and three months of the Assistant Chief.

Alderman Jette

Okay.

Karen Conde

For the overtime line, it's always been underfunded. It's hard to predict what the overtime is going to be. As of this year, right now projecting out will be at about \$3.8 million on that line. So if we're at 2.9 next year, we're already looking at a problem.

Alderman Jette

Okay. So maybe you could include that in your list of asks.

I noticed the total revenue for year to date total revenue is over 748,000 but your proposed budget is 467,000 plus. What is the difference there? What why is that?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

I believe the city received some funding from the New Hampshire Retirement System or from the State of New Hampshire in regards to pension last year. That is the difference between the two numbers.

Alderman Jette

And you're not expecting that again? Is that a one-time thing?

Chairman Dowd

We'll see how Mr. O'Brien can do.

Alderman O'Brien

I tried.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Not at this point in time though.

Alderman Jette

So that contribution refund, what is that? What's the explanation for that? Why did we get a refund? Do you know?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

I believe that came to the city and that number is the Fire Department's portion. So we receive some. The Police Department received some. Anybody contributing to the State retirement system received that refund.

Chairman Dowd

Do you remember how much?

Alderman Jette

Is that part of the 2 million that Alderman O'Brien?

Alderman O'Brien

Right but understand it's a butter that is very thin on the bread because it's not just police and fire and traditionally people say that when NHRS. They say police and fire but there's people that are employees of City Hall that belong to the NHRS - the teachers and there's a whole bunch and stuff like that. So there's only another one pension system in the city and that's Public Works. That has a very limited number. The rest are all in the New Hampshire Retirement System. So it did do well by the city. Was it everything we wanted? Of course not but and it was a one-time deal. Until people up there - I'll make no joke about it - until people up there really smarten up, it's nice when you look out at the lake and everything else like that but what about the reality of the second largest city in New Hampshire? Those people need to buckle up and realize the problems that municipalities like Manchester and Nashua has.

Chairman Dowd

Any other questions? You all said Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

I have another question. Under your goals, the second to the last item is adjust the AMR contract to include BLS units. What are BLS? What does that mean?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

So currently our contract with AMR requires them to provide us with four ALS units. Advanced life support unit is a unit that is staffed with a paramedic as well as an advanced EMT. We have found that probably better than 60% of our incidents that we respond to in the city do not require advanced life support skill set. They require basic life support skill set and therefore, we would like to adjust the contract at some point in time potentially to maybe include even more ambulances but at a basic life support level.

Alderman Jette

Okay so the BLS is basic life support.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Correctly.

Alderman Jette

Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Any other questions?

Alderman O'Brien

Just one if I may. On the potential of the new Assistant Chief, what is the start date that they gave you and what would you like to see? I've been waiting for Alderman Caron to ask the question. Are you fully funded and are you ready to go? Do you mind if?

Alderman Caron

Be my guest Alderman.

Alderman O'Brien

Thank you Alderman. But what would be the best for your department to be the target date to start this particular position?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Our target date would be January 1. That would give us a half year funding. It's not as significant of an impact on the budget all at once. It kind of steps it up and then the following year you try to get the full year funding for it. It gives us a chance between July and January to actually put a process together to decide who we want for the position, get the roles and responsibilities formalized, and laid out. So it gives a little planning time.

Alderman O'Brien

Okay. Right now what is the start date? Is there a potential start date?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

No not yet because it was cut to a quarter year. So a quarter year would be closer to, you know, April time frame.

Alderman O'Brien

So January 1st. Okay. All set.

Alderman Jette

I didn't mean to interrupt. So perhaps you could help me understand this. So like the Amherst Street station, that's a capital improvement is it not? I didn't think the capital improvements were put into your regular budget. Isn't that a separate item? Don't we fund those things differently?

Chairman Dowd

There's a section in the budget book for capital improvement projects. They get a list from the Capital Improvements Committee and the Mayor picks the ones that he wants to fund in the budget. I don't believe the fire station is in there.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

So the Capital Improvements Program starts on page 224, I believe, in the budget book. I'm a big fan of the new layout of the budget book. I really like it. One thing that I didn't really care for is we don't have a full report on everybody's capital improvements requests. So therefore, you can't see my request that...

Chairman Dowd

It's a separate document originally.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

You can't see everything that we requested for future years because there is a six year plan that has been put together. Does that answer your question?

Alderman Jette

Probably whether I understand it or not is the issue.

Chairman Dowd

So Director Sullivan and I are sitting down. They didn't want to do it before the budget this year because he wants to change that whole process so that when you – I don't want to get into it because it's complicated. We're probably going to change that process so it's easier for the Mayor to select what goes into the budget.

As far as the fire stations are when we finish up with Main Dunstable and Birch Hill, we're done with schools for a while. I think I've talked to the Chief about it, that's why they want to do the assessment study for the fire station so we can figure out okay where are we today? What has to be fixed before we start building a new station? Correct me if I'm wrong and there's the study they did said we need another one perhaps in the Amherst Street/Thornton Road area. An estimate trying to work that out with what do we do with airport fire station? It's a problem with the airport being there covering Ward 1 and Amherst Street with one station. If you get hung up on Charon Avenue, it's a problem.

Alderman O'Brien

Quarter of the city.

Chairman Dowd

Yeah so the assessment study will give you an idea of where all fire stations currently exist and what that needs to be done to them. Amherst Street being the most obvious and then a plan for - it's probably going to be a bond and what can be included in it I'm not sure. I have to talk with the Treasurer. I think that we could look at maybe looking at that. If we could get the assessment study done, we could probably start looking at repairs to the fire station in '25. We'd look at the whole situation and what needs to be done. There was some discussion about putting one up off Amherst Street, perhaps a station like they have in Hudson across from the bridge. I think that's pretty much wood. It's not brick. And moving the heavy truck out of Amherst Street up to that station. I mean this is just preliminary. There's a lot of study that needs to be done beforehand. I think that we'd be in a position bonding wise when we're done with schools for the foreseeable future that now we focus on the Fire Department.

Alderman Jette

So am I correct in understanding that the cost of the study would be in this budget?

Chairman Dowd

It could be. It could also be in escrow funds. I didn't have that discussion with - I don't know if you've talked to him the Treasurer. There's some things the Mayor wants to put in the escrow funds so some of that's deferred maintenance and another thing. I don't know what's in there yet because I don't think they'd got that far along.

Alderman Jette

But the cost of repairing the floor at Amherst Street would not be in this budget, it would be on some future?

Chairman Dowd

No I think that ought to be combined with other work that needs to be done, you know, and bonded, and get the work done that needs to be done. I think the first step, again, is doing the assessment of the building so we know - we'd hate to start on two stations and all of a sudden find there's a problem with a third. We should be in pretty good shape with most of the others but the assessment tells you what's lacking, and what the condition is, and all of that. We did a similar one to the

schools by the way and we're almost ready to do another one because it's hard to keep track of the School Department's 18 buildings. Fortunately, they don't have as many buildings so. You have to do that assessment because it's not something that's known day to day. It's something you have to hire somebody to go around look and see what they're looking for structurally.

Alderman Jette

Thank you.

Bill Atkinson, Assistant Fire Chief

To just add a little context to the Amherst Street fire station. Most of you probably have a garage in your home. The concrete thickness under your car, that garage slab floor is four inches thick. The slab floor at the Amherst Street is only eight inches thick. As the Chief alluded to, we're putting well over 80,000 pounds for a ladder truck in there. That's a problem.

With respect to the facility study, currently I have in excess of \$60,000 in HVAC repairs that we're looking at presently and that's only for mechanical systems that have been identified by our subcontractors. In addition to that, we have five of our seven buildings are over 40 years old. So doing a facility study, the city's done it to both of the parking garages as well as the city library. It just helps us with a roadmap to be most fiscally frugal with the monies that are available to us. We can easily identify what our HVAC repair costs are because we are sub-contractors but with respect to structural movement, for example, with Amherst Street being right on the edge of the road and the vibration of trucks going by and the fact that it has granite foundation, there is movement to that building. That's the reason that we need to have an engineering firm come in here and look at it and see how much more life. When you build a fire station, you anticipate or you build it for at least a 50 year life expectancy. Obviously with Amherst Street being built in 1894, we're well beyond that.

By having a facility study, it helps us to look at the whole building envelope including the condition of the roof with an anticipated projection of how long that roof is going to last. A residential house we all know we get about 25 years out of a roof. So having that information on our assets is only significant value to the city but it helps us as we develop a roadmap going forward to be more fiscally frugal.

Chairman Dowd

It's similar. We did that analysis pre-COVID with the Police Department and they had issues. Their HVAC system was antique. It's now been replaced. They had problem with their windows. They had duct tape on the side of the windows to keep the snow from coming in. I mean that was kind of ridiculous. So we fixed the police station now so they're up to speed and they really appreciate it. So now we've got to look at Fire Department's buildings.

Alderman O'Brien

Me again. Not to continue to beat the dead horse but if we talk about the potential of a new Assistant Chief which would probably be C3, correct? In the position of C3, this is – can you discuss Chief with the Board this isn't really a new concept to actually - it did exist before but what budget cuts that were relayed back to the Department in the strangulation at that particular time fiscally, fiscal strangulation to the fire department. It's high time to get that position back. Can you just opine to that if you don't mind?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

So in 2001, we created that position. It was in service for approximately three to maybe four and a half years. In about 2000 to 2008, some budget cuts were requested from all city departments. The Fire Department, I believe, lost about a dozen positions and those cuts and we have been struggling to get those back up on the board ever since. To this point in time I believe out of a dozen, we probably have about five of them back in service. Some of them we won't utilize. We've gone in a different direction but the Assistant Chief is one that we significantly struggle with and the organization is kind of hamstrung. As you heard me say, we had to decline a \$750,000 grant for the organization that we wrote for - a lot of members put a lot of hard work and effort into it - but at the end of the day, we couldn't do our due diligence to administratively execute the grant program appropriately because we don't have the bandwidth for it.

Our promotional processes, our hiring practices - I don't want to bore you with the details but a lot of work gets pushed down to other areas of the organization. Myself, the Assistant Chief, the Deputy Chiefs work a lot of hours and are unable to utilize some of our leave time because we don't have that additional set of hands to handle some of the workload.

Alderman O'Brien

Just a follow up to it. So this would help you out. I mean the thing is just so the Board's appreciation and the public. Gone are the days of just putting out fires and feeding the horses. I mean my time I was in charge of the dive team. So can you just tell us about the different Divisions and how this new position will help you out? We have grown in divisions here that really need some oversight, training oversight. My greatest fear when I ran the dive team was to make sure everybody was satisfied because when you're about 25 feet under water, I can't save you quick enough. So the thing is, their training was phenomenal which was good. Can you say what everybody's going to be doing and how many things your circus so to speak. How many balls you got in the air?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Certainly. So a new concept we would have within our organization with this position would be professional standards. In the law enforcement community, that's something that's existed for 20 plus years and we started down that road in the early 2000s and then we had to put it on hold. Professional Standards allows us to develop our firefighters, allows us to develop our company officers, allows us to develop our inspectors, investigators at every level of our organization.

Recruitment and retention within our organization - currently one of the Deputy Chiefs or a couple of Deputy Chiefs out there have a hand in that. The Deputy Chiefs their job is actually to manage the city when they're on duty and run emergency incidents, scheduling, injury reports, anything that can happen within the city in their 24 hour block of time, they're responsible for. Unfortunately because of that cut, we have them doing that plus recruitment retention, apparatus specifications, protective clothing development, training bulletins, training programs. They work hand in hand either with the Fire Marshal's office, helping with tech review, with the Training Division during recruit school, and all the training credentialing that needs to take place, or assisting in managing the promotional process. All at the same time, they're trying to run the city. So as Alderman O'Brien points to, the circus act, you know how many balls we have in the air at the same time, we've reached a point that it's very challenging for us to keep the organization up to speed with the growth that is taking place in the city.

Alderman Thibeault

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So I have a couple of uncles that were firefighters. One in Berlin in the cold north of New Hampshire and one out fighting tumbleweed fires out in Wyoming. My question when I'm thinking about all this stuff is why - so I understand the whole fire thing and how important it is to have outstanding, top notch Fire Department. Why do you feel that I guess the Fire Department gets – I don't know what the word is - short shrift I guess on things? Is it cuz people don't feel like they need the Fire Department till they've got a fire in their house where police, it's just they're there all the time? Like I don't believe that. I believe, you know, but I'm kind of curious why the Fire Department is short and not just from the pandemic part of it but why do we feel that we're not able to give you more funds for the stuff that you truly need? Everything you've talked about tonight to me in my eyes is something we need. I know the Mayor had said that I think he said that you guys came at a 9% budget and that was cut a little bit. I guess why does – it doesn't seem like it's that important to people when we all here know that it is?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

So I have two theories and that's all they are, are theories. I can't be inside everybody's mind within the city. But my first theory is that it's a roll of the dice, right? The Fire Department's like an insurance policy and if you've ever needed us and you've experienced that worst day, you recognize our value. If you've never had to pick up the phone and call for our help, it's pretty easy to roll the dice and say I'll get away with it. Each time you get a win and a year goes by that you didn't need the Fire Department, your confidence grows that you may never need the Fire Department. However eventually as we all know, tragedy strikes and most people do have some experience with us at some way, shape, or form throughout the years.

The funny thing about firefighters is they fix problems with no matter what you give them. So the people that came before me were doing their due diligence with the budget that was put before them. They were doing the work that they felt appropriate to be good stewards of the budget and good stewards of the organization. I lived through those days and I don't question any of the decisions they made at that point in time. But a lesson I learned was that doing with what was given to us wasn't helping move the organization forward and we lost a lot of ground as the city was growing in front of us. The Mayor and I consistently engaging in conversation about why the Fire Department's requests are always so much higher than everybody else's. It's because everybody else was consistently coming in and trying to get right back up on the horse and establish that again where we were just doing our due diligence and trying to get by thinking that sooner or later somebody was going to come along and say hey, we're ready to stand you back up. Well nobody came along really

to help stand us back up and we slowly started to get back up there. So at the end of the day, my job is to tell you as the Fire Chief what I need to run the Fire Department and the requests are in front of you.

Alderman Thibeault

Thank you. Yeah I mean I appreciate the answer and thank you for that. You know the less fires we hear about means to me that you guys are doing your job, right? The less people that perish in a fire, again, you guys are doing your job. So you're right. It's kind of in some ways out of sight out of mind sometimes for people but it's appreciative not to hear of some horrible incident. So I agree with everything you said. I look at it like, you know, the paving went by the wayside, and then we put a plan together, and now you know every year we're doing that. I think it's time that we look at the Fire Department as well and get them back up to speed or at least on the on the road to getting back up to speed. We know we need another fire station. We've known that for a long time. It's something I will support when the time comes for that to come out. Thank you for that answer. I appreciate that. Thank you.

Alderman Wilshire

Thank you. Chief Professional Standards how are we handling that now?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

It's a cooperative effort throughout the organization and quite honestly, we're failing. If you're a firefighter and you test to get promoted, you take some classes on your own. There are certain monetary incentives that would encourage you to go to school but if you do well on the test, one day you could be riding on the backside of the truck and then on the next day, you're in the right front seat and you're in charge of the crew making decisions. We don't have the bandwidth at this point in time to really give them any formal training. There is an informal program in place but is significantly deficient to what we should be doing.

Alderman Wilshire

So would this Assistant Chief position be in charge of Professional Standards?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

He would oversee the development and relieve some of the workload from other people to allow them to develop programs. A Deputy Chief in the street is in charge of company officer - the company officer in charge of the crews. The Deputy Chief's bandwidth at this point in time because they have so many balls in the air that they're juggling in areas of responsibility limits their ability to mentor a younger new fire officer as they're getting started.

Alderman Wilshire

I know how important professional standards are. I've seen it at the Police Department. My daughter actually does it for the Department of Corrections up in Concord. It's important. You want to give people the best fire service you can give and I appreciate that about you Chief and the Chiefs before you. They come in here and they plead their case and they still get cut. So I think professional standards are very important and I'd like to seek this position funded.

Alderman Sullivan

Thank you. Chief Buxton you were gracious last summer. We met about Nashua Fire and Rescue becoming – I'm going to forget it – Class 1 fire department and you went through some of the steps. Where are we in that process? How are we doing?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

We're getting there. Quite honestly, bandwidth wise it's not at the top of my radar. If we achieve it, we achieve it. I will tell you like we're closer than we have ever been but it's one of those things we don't have somebody to pay the attention it's due to achieve that goal. There is no other ISO one rated fire department in the State of New Hampshire. We missed it by a couple of points last time. It's a pretty complex formula and there's probably not enough hours tonight for me to explain it all to you. At the end of the day, you need somebody to work on that project for a significant amount of time. We have made some changes in our organization that I'm almost certain that we probably as we sit today are a Class 1 fire department. We just don't have the bandwidth or the hours in a day to put somebody on a project to get them back in here

to reevaluate us.

Chairman Dowd

So, you know, firemen when there's a fire, they're the ones that run into the burning building and put themselves in harm's way. Every time I see something about 911, it just amazes me that those people went in, climbed stairs, and then the tower came down. Those are firemen but that's not all they do. They're usually the first people at a medical emergency and able to save lives before AMR can get there or the Police Department. That always impressed me because if there's an emergency, bang they're there.

The other thing is that they have a group fire marshals that have been working diligently with us on the school building projects to do all the inspections that are required and make sure that we have a safe building. That's critically important when you're building a building for young students to be in. That's a good portion of what they do. They were short Fire Marshals and we added one last budget season. So now they're pretty efficient at what they're doing and actually we've kept them pretty busy. There's a lot of school projects going on. So I just wanted to thank them for all the work they're doing with us on the school projects and making sure that our buildings are safe for the kids. But like I said, they do a lot.

Any other questions?

Alderman Jette

Thank you. So Chief I don't know was it a couple of months ago you were you were here asking us to move up the purchase of two more vehicles and you were hoping to get what you call the "Cummins legacy engine". Did you make it? Were you able to get it?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Yes we snuck in the door. When we were awarded our contract, there were under 15 motors left nationwide.

Alderman Jette

And you got two of them?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Correct.

Alderman Jette

Okay, good.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Thank you.

Alderman Jette

You're welcome.

Chairman Dowd

And because of that IT person when they get these new trucks in, they have to go down to Conant Road. It takes them a while to get the truck ready for service and one of is putting in all the radios. We do all that. It doesn't come that way. So there's a lot of work when we get the new truck in, right?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Correct.

I did have one more thing. Alderwoman Caron had asked me to air out everything I had requested in the budget that

wasn't funded. One other position we had requested for a half year funding was a Captain of EMS within our organization and that was at a total of \$54,251. EMS is a significant amount of business that we do within our organization. Currently, the Training Division attempts to oversee this. However, they don't do its due diligence and by that I mean, we're meeting the minimum and we are much better than that. We rely heavily on AMR which is very uncomfortable for me. While they provide us a good service, they're also soon to be a publicly traded company that is for profit, obviously, in EMS. Emergency medical services to me is a critical infrastructure that we provide to our citizens. We first respond to all the calls and all of our members are basic EMTs. However, we don't currently have the ability to process refusals to do our due diligence reporting wise or even necessarily equipment and skillset wise in the field because we don't have somebody overseeing that program completely.

Chairman Dowd

Okay if there are no other questions? Thank you very much for coming in and if you could provide that information to Donna you'll be all set.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

We'll do.

Chairman Dowd

All right.

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO TABLE R-23-125
MOTION CARRIED**

GENERAL DISCUSSION - None

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

REMARKS BY THE ALDERMEN - None

ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO ADJOURN
MOTION CARRIED**

The meeting was declared closed at 8:02 p.m.

Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.
Committee Clerk