

BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE

JUNE 15, 2021

A meeting of the Budget Review Committee was held Tuesday, June 15, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Alderman Richard A. Dowd, Chairman, Chairman, presided.

Members of Committee present: Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien
Alderman-at-Large Shoshanna Kelly
Alderman Jan Schmidt
Alderman Ernest Jette

Members not in Attendance: Alderman-at-Large Ben Clemons, Vice Chair

Also in Attendance: Alderman Tom Lopez
Alderman Elizabeth Lu
Fire Chief Brian Rhodes
Assistant Fire Chief Steve Buxton
Fire Commissioner Paul Garant

ROLL CALL

Alderman Jette

I am here in the chamber.

Alderman Schmidt

I am here in the Chamber.

Alderman Kelly

I am here, I am alone and I can hear everyone.

Alderman O'Brien

Alderman-at-Large Michael O'Brien is present and in the Chamber. Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire?

Alderman Wilshire

I am here in the Chamber.

Alderman O'Brien

And Alderman-at-Large Ben Clemons is absent and our Chairman Richard A. Dowd.

Chairman Dowd

I am present and in the Chamber. Also in attendance?

Alderman O'Brien

Also in attendance we have Fire Chief Brian Rhodes of Nashua Fire Rescue and Assistant Fire Chief Steve Buxton also of Nashua Fire Rescue. We have several members of the Nashua Board of Fire Commission.

Chairman Dowd

And I think Alderman Lopez wants to be recognized or he's shooting flies away in the garden he's in.

Alderman O'Brien

Alderman Lopez you are recorded sir.

Chairman Dowd

And so Alderman Lu.

Alderman O'Brien

And Alderman Lu.

Chairman Dowd

First item on the Agenda is Public Comment on anything to be heard this evening. Are there any members of the public who would like to be heard? Seeing no one, hearing no one, we will move on.

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

COMMUNICATIONS - None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None

NEW BUSINESS – RESOLUTIONS - None

NEW BUSINESS – ORDINANCES - None

TABLED IN COMMITTEE

R-20-016

Endorsers: Mayor Jim Donchess
Alderman Linda Harriott-Gathright
Alderman Thomas Lopez
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.

AMENDING THE PURPOSE OF A FISCAL YEAR 2020 UNLIKE ESCROW FOR THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

(tabled at 4-20-20 mtg)

MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO TAKE FROM THE TABLE R-21-142, BY ROLL CALL

A viva voce roll call was taken which resulted as follows:

Yea: Alderman Schmidt, Alderman Jette, Alderman Wilshire
Alderman O'Brien, Alderman Kelly, Alderman Dowd

6

Nay:

0

MOTION CARRIED

R-21-142

Endorsers: Mayor Jim Donchess
Alderman Linda Harriott-Gathright

RELATIVE TO THE ADOPTION OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2022 PROPOSED BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF NASHUA GENERAL, ENTERPRISE, AND SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS

- Public hearing scheduled for 6/21/2021 at 7:00 p.m. in the Nashua High School North Auditorium

DEPARTMENTAL REVIEWS OF THE PROPOSED FY21 BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF NASHUA

<u>Dept. #</u>		<u>REVENUE</u>	<u>Appropriations</u>
	<u>Public Safety</u>		
152	Fire Department	37 & 311	150

Chairman Dowd

This evening we will be reviewing the Public Safety, Department 152 – the Fire Department. The Revenue is on Page 37 and 311; Appropriations are on Page 150. Who from the Fire Department would like to start us off? You can come on up. And when you are recognized please give your name each time so that the person that is doing the stenography will know who is speaking. Chief, do you want to introduce your staff?

Brian Rhodes, Fire Chief

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee and those members who are listening who are not on the Committee. First and foremost I would like to thank you personally and our staff would like to thank you for your leadership over this past year and a half as the Board of Aldermen. You have had to make some pretty tough decisions, but I think you've kept the community and the employees at the forefront. So thank you and well done.

This evening with me I have Assistant Chief Steve Buxton. I have our business manager Karen Conde, Commissioner Paul Garant and in the audience we have Chairman Kevin Burgess and Commissioner Gary Lambert. So again I'd like to thank this Board for the past, present and future support of NFR. It has been my privilege to lead this organization through an unprecedented time. This is something that none of us were really prepared for as much as we think we were. But due to the dedicated professionals of your Nashua Fire Rescue and I'll probably refer to that again because this is your Fire Department not mine. I am just a little caretaker for the time being. They dealt with this pandemic at work as well as in their own homes. And they came to work every day – every day. We had no one working from home. And it is pretty amazing. They dealt with this with the utmost professionalism. As Chief, my main responsibility is to provide support and guidance to our members so they can safely and successfully carry out their sworn duties all the while keeping the community and their needs in mind. At the beginning of this process, the Mayor did, in fact, direct us to develop a Budget with a 0% increase. We ran the numbers and in consultation with the Board of Fire Commission we quickly determined that a 0% increase which equates to a negative, it's not a 0 because nothing stays the same would decimate this great organization and severely impact the services that our citizens have come to expect and more so rightly deserve from your Fire Rescue Department.

It has been said that Nashua Fire Rescue just takes. The handouts that we supplied to the group or to the Committee I'm sorry, I believe clearly show that we give. And we have given. This give resulted in staff reductions in 2006 / 2007 that we have not recovered from yet. Yet our City continues to grow. I continue to clip newspaper clippings about how Nashua is growing; how Nashua needs more housing; how many people are coming to Nashua. Full disclosure, the Board of Aldermen did grant us four new positions in the FY '19 Budget but this was out of a severe need. This was out of need that we demonstrated clearly I believe, the safety of our employees, but in this case more importantly the citizens of Nashua. We were running a staffing model that was 40 plus years old. So for that we thank you.

But to that point, Nashua Fire Rescue was the catalyst of negotiating or re-negotiating the ambulance contract with our ambulance service provider. And for the first time in the history of this City we are receiving money from the ambulance service. That money potentially could equate to, we have a 5-year deal with a 3-year escalator per year with 5 option years after that is the potential of bringing in \$4 million dollars to the City of Nashua for dispatch services.

During the last three Budget cycles, I have requested to fill the vacant public education and investigative position in the Fire Marshall's office. And this year, I will respectfully ask for that again. The proposal that we are going before you this evening will meet the needs of the recently approved Collective Bargaining Agreement that the Full Board of Aldermen voted in the affirmative for the Nashua Fire Fighter's Association. We thank you again for the Board acknowledgement and acceptance to provide us with a Master Plan Study. I believe there's a lot of information in that Master Plan Study and we are not coming before you tonight asking for anything in that Master Plan Study other than the Public Educator/Investigator that we lost in 2006/2007 that we have asked for the last 3 years because the independent study has shown a severe lack of public education that we are providing the community. We are definitely not serving or minority or our elderly populations so those are our at-risk populations.

We are trying and we are in the process of putting together a strategic plan. Because what is the point of spending \$50,000.00 on a Master Plan if we are not going to follow through on it. And we are going to follow through on it. But again, that's going to cost us additional money. But we didn't ask for this money in this budget proposal. The things we are asking for are one additional position that is responsible for our public education which the primary responsibility of that job is to be in our schools, to be dealing with our elderly and dealing with our minority populations. But we are asking for approximately \$60,000.00 in our Operating Budget which is non-payroll. And some other things we are asking for are because of increases in just the cost of doing business that we have no control over.

I am going to say this, it is kind of self-serving I think when I say this but I think we do a pretty darn good job running this Fire Department. If you read that study and if you caught what they were saying, we run this Fire Department with 2% staff administration which means 2% of Nashua Fire Rescue are serving the needs of 98% of our organization. That's not a good number, but we continue to do it. And we are not asking for another Assistant Chief tonight; we are not asking for that. We are asking for another set of boots on the ground who is going to be out in the community, who is going to be interacting with our citizens and who is going to be providing positive interaction to the members of this community. The three members we have in our Fire Prevention or Fire Marshall's office have done yeoman's work through this pandemic. All of these enhancements on Main Street aren't just with a swipe of a pen, they have to go out and inspect and re-inspect and go back and make sure they are good in addition to their regular duties.

One of the things that we don't do good, this is why I am here, I have got to tell you the good, the bad and the ugly. I am not afraid to tell you we don't do a good job and we are not compliant with our occupancy inspections. State RSA states we need to be inspecting occupancies twice a year. We physically cannot do that. We do not have the staff. Think of the amount of schools we have in this community alone. I think there's 17 or 18? Those have to be inspected top to bottom once a year minimum. It is a huge time drain. So Chief Buxton can speak to any questions that you may have on the non-payroll budget, but again, I fully understand, I understand where we are at. I am a taxpayer, Chief Buxton is a tax payer, Ms. Conde is a taxpayer. The three Commissioners in attendance tonight are taxpayers. We get it, we get it; but we cannot keep adding people to the City we cannot keep adding complexity and not service them properly. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

OK. Does anyone else want to speak before we get going?

Paul Garant, Fire Commissioner

My name is Paul Garant, I am member of the Board of Fire Commissioners. Chairman Dowd and Members of the Budget Review, I've been tasked by my colleagues on the Board to deliver comments relative to the

2022 budget for Nashua Fire Rescue. I am quite certain I have been chosen not based on any perceived oratory skills but rather on the fact that this is the 18th Department Budget that I have participated in. In preparing this year's budget, as we have in the past, we have started with a basic presumption, that in order for this City to continue to be a growing, vibrant and safe community for both our residents and those who work in the City, we must provide a level of public safety. It cannot be allowed to erode from year to year.

Therefore we begin with a premise that Nashua Fire Rescue will at a minimum continue to staff its fire suppression, emergency response and support divisions at the same level in the coming year as it has in the current. This Department has and will continue to be heavily dependent on human resources. We continue to rely on troops who don their bunker gear, climb on the apparatus and respond to the fire aggressively working as they say "put wet stuff on the right stuff". Truly a people powered effort. Within barely a two week period we have experienced two 3-Alarm fires in the City. In both cases the ability to deliver an effective and aggressive fire suppression response in the initial minutes of the response, to be followed in rapid succession by responding multiple alarm companies, resulted in saving both structures. And in the case of Cedar Street, with minimal damage to adjacent buildings. To continue to provide this level of protection the Department requires a budget that will support current staffing levels.

In accordance with both the compensation, the staffing clauses of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, an agreement approved by the Board of Aldermen and confirmed with the denial of the Mayor's veto. The Mayor has proposed a 1.7% increase in his proposed budget. That doesn't provide sufficient funding to support current staffing levels to the Department. To support the current levels, we need an approximately \$500,000.00 over the Mayor's number. Failure to provide sufficient funding to cover the cost of staffing provisions, put under significant and possibly drastic and effect fire department service levels. In addition to the Mayor's proposed budget, does not support necessary funding, to provide PPE for Firefighters as well as critical HVAC and IT license.

Chairman Dowd

If I could just interrupt you for one second, I think you have to pull the mics closer to you, they are very directional and you have to be real close.

Mr. Garant

Is that better?

Chairman Dowd

Yes. And to the following speakers, you have to be real close to it or it doesn't pick it up.

Mr. Garant

My apologies. In addition, as I said, the Mayor's budget does not provide us with operating costs necessary to do HVAC, PPE and IT License and Support. The Mayor and Board of Fire Commissioners have not seen eye to eye on the provisions of the CBA. In particular a provision in the agreement that triggers a bonus, these specific targets have been met for participation in the Health Savings Plan and it has been an issue with the Mayor. This provision was a key factor in getting Union approval of the CBA. I am happy to report tonight that less than 6 months after the approval of the CBA, the Union has exceeded the first target goal of 70%.

They have a 115 members of the eligible 158 participating in the plan for a rate of 72.78%. A new recruit class will soon be starting and advised by the Union President that he will meet them tomorrow and will be educating them about the benefits of the new plan and it is expected that the second goal will be achieved when these members join. That will send some money back to the City in terms of the cost of insurance.

In closing, I've always tried to explain somewhat abstract issues or numbers in a more meaningful manner or context. I would like to leave you with the following, I don't know if you know the value of the assessed property and buildings in the City of Nashua, the number that is sent to the State Department Administration & Finance to calculate the tax rate. It is \$10 billion – that's right – billion, \$10,411,906,743.00; \$10 billion, 4. The Fire Department's budget – we are requesting - \$28,852,023.00. If you look at the cost per dollar evaluation, the Fire Department of the City of Nashua with our Budget of \$28,852 equates to a cost of .0027 cents for every dollar of valuation of City property. I don't think it's an expensive insurance program. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

OK if we are ready to continue, the Revenues are on Page 37. On 311 that's the Fire Training Center which is basically a balance cost versus revenue. So I don't know if we will have any questions on that but on Page 37 if you want to just quickly address the revenue, some have gone up, some have gone down. Is there anything that you want to point out? For instance, "Fire Protection & Safety Permits" is down about \$4,000.00.

Chief Rhodes

Certainly. Brian Rhodes, Fire Chief. So I think what we have here is if you look at the original budget of \$25,000.00 and we are actual through, this number is through March 31st I think that's lagging three months, 2 ½ months, which I think there was a severe lag in new permits coming in when we were into COVID. I have been assured on multiple occasions by the Fire Marshall that those days are gone. He is inundated with plans as of late and just so this Board understands, the plans for the Bronstein Project, that's approximately 500 pages of plans that they have to go through for that. So that's a big time draw. The dispatch services are up there because that's a 3% increase every year which started out at \$350,000.00 in year one which was the first 9 months from October of '18 to July of '19 and again each year for the first 5 years it is 3% and potentially the additional 5 years, each 1 year at a time extension after that.

Chairman Dowd

OK are there any questions from anybody on the Committee on the Revenues on Page 37? Alderman O'Brien?

Alderman O'Brien

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Chief, it is pretty straight forward when you read on the lines but reading between the lines – so I heard you say that we have a vacant position in the public education position. But right now I think Nashua is on its second boom, it's not going to be like the early boom of the '80's but looking at the Bronstein Project, looking at the Riverwalk, looking at the School Street Project that is going through. Being Chairman of Infrastructure I notice like in my own neighborhood somebody putting a lot for sale. So single family homes are now going in what traditionally was a single family lot but it can be divided into two. All that comes to inspect and you have to do the inspection. So would this position really help out and isn't a matter – are we losing perhaps maybe projects by contractors that are annoyed because of the delay in getting the proper permits and would this new position kind of expedite that in getting the proper permits filed in a timely manner such as like right we are in building season. So could that definitely help out in that Department?

Chairman Dowd

Chief?

Chief Rhodes

Mr. Chairman, thank you. Brian Rhodes, Fire Chief. Honestly no, I don't think we are aggravating anybody because I have three incredibly dedicated people who are doing whatever they have to do and I am saying

this will all sincerity. They are not taking their lunches, they are dropping whatever they need when someone calls them. They are making it happen. And I'll be perfectly honest with you, I've told them since Day 1 when I became Fire Chief, you have to stop doing such a good job, because I cannot advocate for you if I don't have people complaining. One occasions sticks out in my mind, I had a Fire Inspector come in on a Saturday because a restaurant owner on Main Street didn't do his job and was in a panic. And our Fire Inspectors take it personal because they work with the community. They are going out of their way to make it happen and they are not putting in for overtime for the most part. I am telling you the truth, I've told them that. Because you know what, they are doing over and above what they are being compensated to do.

Chairman Dowd

Alderman O'Brien follow up.

Alderman O'Brien

Chief I agree with you, having to know some of those people personally, I agree we have some of the best. But my point is, we should not have as a City expectation for any employee to skip their lunch or skip their valuable time off on a Saturday just to make the place work. And if we are doing that, they have my deepest respect and admiration for their dedication to the City. But if that's the expectation of us as a City on the, shame on us. Thank you Chief.

Chairman Dowd

I will tell you we have 4 school projects right now and we don't have to pay for the inspections, but they are there every time we need them and they have done an outstanding job and have not slowed down the projects one iota. So yes, they are putting in a lot of time and I think the new position is going to be filling in on things that those 3 haven't been doing. It is things that haven't been done that we should be doing, but you are looking for that fourth position. Any other questions?

Chief Rhodes

As a very wise man has told us, there are a lot of things in life that you can assign a dollar value to, so you have tasks that are a \$5.00 value and you have tasks that are \$1,000.00 value. We have \$1,000.00 value people doing \$5.00 tasks, not efficient. We are not getting the best, we are not getting what we should be getting to service our community. Again I'll bring up the fact that every commercial occupancy in the City, by State Statute should be inspected twice a year and we are not doing it.

Chairman Dowd

OK thank you. Any other questions on revenues on Page 37? Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

Thank you Mr. Chairman. So when I look at the revenues I am wondering if there's any opportunity there to increase fees or whatever to help pay for these things. You talk about people requiring inspections, this enables businesses to conduct their business and earn income for their employees and for themselves and a profit for their investors or whatever. It is a money-making – I mean they are doing it hopefully they are making money doing it. Is there room for us to increase our fees to help finance the people you need to do the inspections?

Chief Rhodes

Thank you Alderman for that question, that's a great question. I think that could be done through Legislation. But what is the cost of future growth in the community if we start raising our fees for one type of building for occupancy and as we are hearing, there's quite a few coming before the Board that we are waiving all the fees. Now I understand it is public good and all that but at what point do we start turning away people who want to come to the City of Nashua and develop. And the reality of it is I don't think we could raise them enough that would really make an impact to do that. I think it is a great idea but I don't think we could raise fees, it would be cost prohibitive for people to come to the City of Nashua to develop.

Chairman Dowd

Follow up Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

So when you say you don't think this would work, maybe haven't even thought of it, I don't know. But have you researched other cities in northern Massachusetts, southern New Hampshire, you know, what they charge for inspection fees and whether we are in line with that?

Chief Rhodes

One of the things that with all due respect, I can't check with Massachusetts because we are in New Hampshire, it's a different playing field. The compensation rates for everybody here are different than the compensation rates in Massachusetts. But I think a lot of these fees are set by the Board of Aldermen. The Fire Chief or the Board of Fire Commissioners can't just arbitrarily raise fees for that.

Chairman Dowd

Follow up again?

Alderman Jette

I understand, I am just asking. I know you would have to come to the Board of Aldermen and we would have to increase these fees. I am just suggesting that we don't think of these things, you are doing this work, you are in this business, you are trying to get people to do inspections, you are trying to get more people. I am just suggesting that a way of doing that is to generate more revenue to help us pay because otherwise it is the taxpayers that are paying these inspectors to inspect these businesses who are making money. It's not the taxpayers that are making money, the taxpayers benefit from it because it is important to have safe buildings etc. But could I ask another question?

Chairman Dowd

Did you want to address what he was ...?

Chief Rhodes

Mr. Chairman if I could. When we talk about fees for businesses, those businesses fill buildings that are taxpayers as well in the City of Nashua. If you can't as a property owner have a company or a restaurant or a store come in and fill your building, you don't have the resources to pay the property taxes. So I think we need to be careful. The fees were raised about 12 years ago; that is a long time but they were raised at this level of the Board. But I think we need to consider the fact that raising fees has an impact on businesses, especially today when the cost of doing business, the cost of labor, is having a bigger impact. We need to be careful not to drive business out of the City of Nashua.

Chairman Dowd

Follow up question, Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

Thank you Mr. Chairman. So you also talked about Dispatch Services. You anticipate \$371,315.00 so I notice on the Appropriations side of things, we are paying for the Fire Dispatch Supervisor and the Fire Dispatcher All Ranks, we are paying \$831,521.00 that's just for wages for those people. So there's another area, are we getting an appropriate amount from, I assume this is coming from the ambulance service. I know you negotiated something that's probably in effect for a few years to come. I am just wondering if there's any room for increasing those to make it more in-line with what we are paying for the Dispatch Services.

Chief Rhodes

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think we have to take into account this is the first time the City has ever charged for that or received revenue for that. When we did our study, when we were negotiating, we looked to and again I brought up to you we can't look to Massachusetts, but in this case we did, we looked to Lowell, Massachusetts and we looked to Manchester, New Hampshire and we saw what they were charging for the privilege I guess of being the transport agency in the community. The \$350 number where we started was appropriate for what they were full well knowing that we were doing this service for free in the past. We weren't getting a dime for it. We did not want to go into this and pigeon hole the City and go with an exact dollar amount that tied into – so one of our dispatch professionals could be tied directly to the ambulance service. So that's why it is intentionally left vague for Dispatch Services because we didn't want to lose a dispatch position who was just 100% for them. But when you look at what we are getting, it is a pretty good number then when we were doing it for nothing for the 30 years I've been before that.

Chairman Dowd

All set Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

Yeah thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Alderman Schmidt.

Alderman Schmidt

I think what we are saying is the people who are doing the dispatching, dispatch for the fire and now they are being paid also for dispatching for the ambulance is that correct.

Chief Rhodes

Technically yes, technically no. AMR Ambulance pays the City of Nashua for dispatching services. It's kind of value but as I said in the past we were doing this for free. The City was getting nothing for it.

Alderman Schmidt

But the employees, are the dispatchers for the Fire Department as well, yes.

Chief Rhodes

Correct. So we are just adding this income from the ambulance dispatching and lowering the cost for the whole dispatch. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

I could be wrong Chief, but every time you have a fire, don't you also dispatch an ambulance. Just because you never know when somebody is going to hurt including a fireman so you need an ambulance there.

Chief Rhodes

I can say that we have an incredible relationship with AMR Ambulance and they do an incredible job for us and for the citizens.

Chairman Dowd

And just as an extra point of information, I think most, if not all of your firemen are Certified EMT's. And a number of instances that I've seen when there's an accident or something at a house, the first people to arrive are a fire truck and the firemen take care of the emergency medical at that time until the ambulance gets there. Correct?

Chief Rhodes

That is correct. A basic, bare minimum to be a firefighter in the City of Nashua, you have to be an EMT. We have many EMT advanced who can do cardiac level skills but we also have some paramedics. We are not licensed at that level but the individuals are licensed at that skill level so they can assist in the ambulance. Of note, this was the third or fourth year that we were awarded the highest award from the American Heart Association. AMR and Nashua Fire Rescue for successful saves and successful outcomes from cardiac patients. But again that speaks to the support of this entire Board and the Fire Department and we are in all the neighborhoods of the City and for ambulance for the most part comes from one location.

Chairman Dowd

Critical point of having fire trucks as close as possible to all the homes in Nashua. Alright anything else on revenue?

Alderman Wilshire

Alderman Lopez is trying to get your attention.

Chairman Dowd

Alderman Lopez. The Clerk has got to hit me when somebody is on Zoom.

Alderman O'Brien

Alderman Lopez and to the other Aldermen too we did bring up, instead of frantically waving, you can also raise your hand which we do have the side thing, that we can't read it. I was tending to a microphone but if need be raise your hand and we can catch it.

Alderman Lopez

Alright, as long as I get a chance to talk eventually I am happy. So I just wanted to reinforce or support what Alderman Jette had been proposing. Because we have been talking about doing something similar in the

Substandard Living Conditions Committee and I think it is increasingly evident that the City spends a lot of time and resources on inspections that doesn't get return. And some developments have an asymmetric ability to actually provide return on that. So yes, a small business raising the fee on them may have a major impact on their ability to operate or make it difficult for them to choose to add on a development or something along those lines. Larger businesses that are going to take away larger amounts of resources if there is a fire and have a much higher overhead in terms of safety, like there's much higher consequences because it is less controllable and also take more Fire Department time to inspect and to evaluate, I think they should be contributing more. So I would ask that the Chief and the Fire Department consider what Alderman Jette has been requesting maybe looking at whether we can revise our fee structure to scale with this amount of square footage that is being covered or something along those lines to better represent the true costs that it represents. Because what I heard as concerns in reply were well we can't look at what Massachusetts does, it is a completely different game and then in the immediate follow up question we were looking at what Massachusetts did.

So we don't necessarily have to take their whole idea but I think we can definitely use it to justify some change. And I think it is important for the Fire Department to know that the Board of Aldermen, if we were approached by the Fire Department to modify these things, we generally go with what you are requesting and what you are recommending with regards to fire safety. That's why we usually fund your budget at the levels that you are requesting and that's why the Fire Department has typically been so successful. I feel like there's maybe some unnecessary hard feelings from when we were doing Union negotiations, I felt like those were not necessarily as cooperative as they had to be with regards to Aldermen. But as was said initially, this is our Fire Department, meaning "our" everybody's, not the Board of the Aldermen, not the Police Commissioners, everybody in the City has ownership in this Fire Department and it is an essential service. No one is going to deny that in as rapidly and expanding a City as Nashua and also with a City with as many older buildings in place, we definitely need a top level Fire Department. I am fully in support of the education piece and the educational position because not only do I not want to see any kind of fire disasters disproportionately impacting people who may have language barriers, cultural barriers or maybe economically forced to be over occupancy. But I also don't want to see somebody launching a firework and burning down the neighborhood. And there's definitely a concern in my particular neighborhood.

So I think the education piece is important. I think the revenue piece is important too because we shouldn't be feeling confrontational or competition between the Board of Aldermen and the Fire Department over funds if the cause of the increased expenses is the expansion of the City. So there are economic development concerns. The Economic Development Office can manage those and they can come forward and tell us, hey you are going to slow down business. But from what I am hearing from the Fire Department, in order to sustain safe growth in our City, we may need to put limits on how big and quickly places expand. And I think one of the more obvious ones is a financial limiter. We need to be able to fund the work that's being asked of the Fire Department to do so we need the Fire Department's guidance to better do that. And I think rather than continually looking at tax revenue as the only source, we may need to look at how do we couple these inspections with development and start changing some expectations for how to manage in Nashua.

Chairman Dowd

Thank you Alderman Lopez. Just a couple of quick things. One any of the revenues that you see in the yellow pages, when they get paid to the City, go directly into the General Fund. They don't go to the different Departments to be able to be spent. The only relationship might be in the following year if there is more monies available because of revenues. The other thing is just a consideration and this may not be the time to raise the fees because as has readily been advertised in all the newspapers and publications relative to building, and I see a lot of them, the average cost to build a home right now is \$36,000.00 more than it was a few months ago. And people that are doing construction, their margins are getting very narrow and if they are too narrow they won't invest the money. So we just have to be careful overall, I am not saying that we shouldn't look at it at some point but probably near term is not the point in question. Alderman Schmidt did you have a question?

Alderman Lopez

Mr. Chair if I could respond to your comments because it sounded like they were in reference to mine?

Chairman Dowd

Not exactly no, everybody's. But is it a follow up because Alderman Schmidt has a question.

Alderman Lopez

I'll be brief. I would just say that I am not expecting it to happen right now or fix this immediate problem but I think it is work we should start doing because this immediate problem informs the reason for it needing to be done.

Chairman Dowd

OK. Alderman Schmidt?

Alderman Schmidt

Thank you, I just would like to ask if you could check the other cities in the State of New Hampshire and see what they charge as a fee schedule and get that back to us so that we can see and we can compare whether an extra \$5.00 here or maybe something is too high and it should come back down. But it would be really valuable for us to know in the future. And I agree, we shouldn't do it now, now is not the time to raise any kind of fees, I think. Next year maybe and it would be good to have the data so we would know. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Another task for your Assistant Chief that adds to his ledger of many things he does.

Chief Rhodes

Consider that done.

Alderman Schmidt

Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Any other questions on revenues? Alderman Lu?

Alderwoman Lu

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to offer my perspective on what was being discussed. I find it really concerning to hear that some of our responsibilities of inspecting or of inspection are not being done and not able to be done because of budget constraints. And to me that is an important thing so we should be looking for ways to solve this shortfall. I also want to respond to the inflation and the current increase in costs of building. I just want to point out the perspective that this may be due to increased funds in the economy, greater demand and greater interest in building. When we have a shortfall I think we should be careful not to worry about the builders or the costs that are being incurred because they are certainly choosing to incur the costs. So that's my thought. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Yeah I wasn't making the point that we want to worry about their profit, just whether they will invest in the City of Nashua. Chief?

Chief Rhodes

Thank you, Chief Rhodes. Just as a point of clarification, I am not against raising fees. That's not what I am saying. I am just saying we have to be careful how we do that. And to be realistic, we are not going to fund this position based upon a small increase that we put in fees. But I'll say it again, Nashua Fire Rescue is not averse to raising fees. And we will get that information to the Board and in particular Alderwoman Schmidt.

Chairman Dowd

Yes, thank you. Any information, please send it to Donna so she can give it to all of the Aldermen. Thank you. Any other revenue questions? Seeing none, we will go the Appropriations on Page 150. Are there any particular line items on there that you would like to discuss before we open it up to general questions? Are there any that have significantly increased or significantly decreased?

Chief Rhodes

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Brian Rhodes, Fire Chief. So the biggest addition is the addition of the Public Education / Investigator Position that we have budgeted at \$82,109.00. Everything else in the 51 series is contractual.

Chairman Dowd

Everything in 52 is pretty well set too.

Chief Rhodes

Yeah I am sorry, yes.

Chairman Dowd

OK and Professional & Technical Services has stayed pretty level. You may want to explain 54243, "HVAC Maintenance".

Chief Rhodes

If I may Mr. Chairman, Assistant Chief Buxton.

Chairman Dowd

Sure.

Steve Buxton, Assistant Fire Chief

Hi, Steve Buxton, Assistant Chief Nashua Fire. So traditionally we are looking for an increase in the HVAC line this year because over the past three years we have averaged anywhere between \$25,000.00 and \$30,000.00 underwater. So we spent that above and beyond what you've given us. That line is currently funded at \$23,000.00 a year, that's \$23,000.00 to maintain HVAC systems in 7 facilities within the City. So it is very easy to see how we have to rob Peter to pay Paul to make ends meet on that line. We have a preventative maintenance program in place already. These costs are incurred just by average breakdowns in the systems and replacing broken parts. If you remember the Master Plan that the Chief has spoken to a few

times already, stated that we are going to have to have a significant investment in the Fire Department facilities in the near future. This is just one spot. We are having a strategic planning committee put together to try to prioritize the things that we need to move forward; the bigger projects, replacements of systems and stuff like that.

But the reality of it is I don't see this line ever being able to be decreased, it actually needs to be increased, again we are managing 7 facilities HVAC systems on this one line. So we take a lot of money from different areas to make things work.

Chairman Dowd

Some of your facilities are rather old which means you've got old systems which are expensive to maintain and probably looking at some point to be replaced.

Assistant Chief Buxton

Correct.

Chairman Dowd

Alderman O'Brien.

Alderman O'Brien

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Chief on that account on HVAC Maintenance and everything, would this be, have you looked into getting a contract with a particular provider to do maintenance contract for some of these stations. And is there a cost benefit analysis by going that route instead of calling somebody at 2:00 in the morning and saying, hey we have got the AC broken or the heating system is down or something like that. Are you looking into that?

Chairman Dowd

Chief Buxton.

Assistant Fire Chief Buxton

Yeah Alderman O'Brien we do have a preventative maintenance program. Currently we have been doing business with A&E Mechanical for several years now. They do provide all of the preventative maintenance to our HVAC systems in all of our facilities. They do a very good job for us, but again at the end of the day, most of this line is paid directly to them just through breakdowns and stuff like that that take place.

Alderman O'Brien

Very good. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Yeah the only other one that I think deserves an explanation is 54428 Technology Operations which wasn't in last year's budget, looking for \$20K there, just to cover that.

Assistant Fire Chief Buxton

Steve Buxton, Nashua Fire. So this is basically new to our budget it is an IT Technology Software Program called Target Solutions. Through some of the CARES money that became available due to COVID we approached the City for what we call our reconstitution efforts. One of the programs we pushed forward was

this training platform. It would allow us to do remote training in the Fire Stations rather than having to pull all of the companies together to do training in a big classroom type setting over at Lake Street. The City was able to give us the hardware end of things, the City IT Department with our Fire Alarm Division worked to get the Wi-Fi and Fiber stretched throughout all the Fire Stations. They were able to purchase the iPads. Unfortunately they weren't able to purchase the licenses that we need to run the software program. This was spelled in the Master Plan as something that would assist in documenting our training hours an area that they specified we are weak in. We know training takes place every day, multiple times a day; the problem is it doesn't always get documented appropriately. This would put the burden on the individual to document his training and that's necessary for several reasons. It assists us with our ISO Rating and in addition to that the members on a bi-annual basis have to recertify their EMS licenses. This would minimize the amount of time that we have to get them together to do that. Right now we probably lose about 5 months out of the calendar year for the training division to accomplish the recertification process. So that is what that line is for. We did have the support of the City moving forward, they are in favor of it. Of course, we have to get the funds to the budget.

Chairman Dowd

OK thank you. Questions on Appropriations? Chief?

Chief Rhodes

May I add a little to that? Brian Rhodes Fire Chief. So Chief Buxton spoke of the ISO rating which is the Insurance Service Office which sets the insurance rates for commercial businesses in your community. Currently we are an ISO Class II Community. There are no ISO Class I Communities in the State of New Hampshire. I am somewhat disappointed to report that we are less than 2 points shy of being an ISO Class I Fire Department. But one of the deficiencies we had as Chief Buxton said, was our members are training every day, it's a documentation problem. So one of the key features to this Target Solution Software Platform is it tells us exactly what we need to be ISO compliant for each fire fighter's level of training per year. The additional thing this does, this basically puts it in the fire fighter's lap, now they become accountable. We will be able to see when they logged on, what they are missing, what they have completed. One of the issues I hate to bring up Alderman O'Brien here from his past Fire Department experience, but I will.

Alderman O'Brien

Go ahead, you want to.

Chief Rhodes

But our system of communicating is still rather archaic. Yes, we have email but we work on a two day mail delivery system where we deliver mail on Thursdays and Sundays. And that's when all important correspondence go out. It is a piece of paper that goes on a bulletin board. We have no accountability to say that everyone in that station saw that. This new software will give us that accountability because we will be able to see who has ready it and there will be a time date stamp on that. So this is technology that we never ever thought – Chief Buxton and I saw this technology three or four years ago. We were at a conference in Orlando, Florida and we said Wow, wouldn't this be great if we could do this. Then COVID hit. So in my mind, COVID was a good thing for us if we could get Target Solutions. Because again the other thing it is going to do is it is going to take us out of our traditional training models of putting 12 to 16 people in a room for extended periods. They will be able to a lot of stuff at their own pace, on their own back in their own Fire Stations, which keeps them in their district, keeps them closer to their response district. They will still need to get together, but nowhere near the frequency or the duration we are currently at. So thank you.

Chairman Dowd

OK. Alderman Lu?

Alderwoman Lu

Thanks Mr. Chairman. On Overtime Coverage that went up 3 ½ times, I understand it is contractual. I don't really understand that line. If anyone could just help me understand why it went up 3 ½ times.

Karen Conde, Executive Assistant Business Coordinator, Nashua Fire

The line actually moved from Additional Hours to Overtime Coverage. If you see Additional Hours it has nothing now. That line was combined at the request of the Finance Department.

Alderwoman Lu

Thank you, I didn't notice that.

Chairman Dowd

All set?

Alderwoman Lu

Yes.

Chairman Dowd

Any other questions on Appropriations? Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

Yeah thank you Mr. Chairman. So under 52 "Fringe Benefits Pension Expense". Is that the number the Mayor keeps talking about how the State has passed down an increase in pension expenses? Is that why that number is so high?

Chairman Dowd

Chief, do you want to handle it?

Chief Rhodes

I believe that's the number he's speaking of but we have no control over that number and the Fire Fighters of this City pay more from their check than any other City employee pays towards that. And that's just a fact; we pay more than the Police, we pay more than the Teachers, we pay more than Public Works. That's just how the State has that percentage laid out.

Chairman Dowd

And the Firefighters pay one amount, the City pays another amount; I believe this is the City's amount. And that was the increase based on what we got from the State where they decreased the amount of interest they are earning on their money, which is a big concern for me and I hope they come down and we can talk to them but that's where that came from. Follow up Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

I was trying to identify it. So in the next item "Benefits"; is that Health Insurance what is ...

Chief Rhodes

Thank you Mr. Chairman. That's a supplied number from the Financial Division so I can't tell you exactly what that encompasses. My assumption is yes, that has to do with healthcare and some of the other fringe benefits.

Alderman Jette

So if I could continue. I noticed ...

Chairman Dowd

Alderman O'Brien just wanted to add something for your first question so maybe we will let him and come back to you.

Alderman O'Brien

What I just wanted to add according to the New Hampshire Retirement System and loose numbers, the Police pay 12.3% of their salaries into the pension system. The Fire Department pays 12.5%. I have asked the New Hampshire Retirement System what is the disparity. They cannot tell me why that is but just so you know, our Fire Department employees pay more into the retirement system than the Police do. And, mathematically, they stay longer. So you figured you would get the group that stays longer would get the discount rate compared to the group that stays the shortest. But correct me Chief what is it? Average Fire Fighter's lifespan is 30 years versus the Police 20 something like that. Pretty close to 30 years for a Fire Fighter.

Chief Rhodes

Yes thank you. I can't give you a definitive answer on that. I would say it is 25 anyways for a Fire Fighter.

Chairman Dowd

Another question, Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

Yes, please. Thank you. So whatever percentage the fire fighters pay this \$5.5 million dollars is the City's share, that's beyond the increased amount that the fire fighters paid.

Chairman Dowd

I believe that is what John Griffin told us, yeah.

Alderman Jette

Is what the City pays in addition to that. So I looked in your PowerPoint presentation that you sent us ahead of time. I appreciate that you showed us some comparisons to New Hampshire cities and you included Salisbury, Massachusetts in there. So I looked at Manchester which is according to your chart and I am not trying to be confrontational here, I am just trying to understand and help the taxpayers understand. So in your chart, you listed Manchester as having a population of 113,035 and Nashua 90,323. So based on that I looked at Manchester's Budget. They do their budget a little bit differently. Your proposed budget is \$28 million and theirs is about \$22 million but they don't include in that, I think I am correct in this, they don't include the retirement or the benefits number. So I added in their retirement number which is \$6,585,716.00 compared to our \$5,597,000.00. And then their benefits are not included in their Fire Department Budget, that's part of their City Budget.

So I wasn't sure how to calculate that so I just threw in what we pay for benefits and I rounded it up to \$4 million. So that got me an approximately \$32 million plus for Manchester. So Manchester comparing the populations and I understand Manchester has more fire stations, which I assume they have more firefighters and more fire equipment, fire engines etc. So when I took their \$32 million plus, and comparing the populations, I came up with Nashua is about 80% of Manchester. So when I multiply that I came up with about \$26 million for what I propose would be appropriate for Nashua. But your proposal is for \$28 plus and I am wondering from my benefit and for the taxpayer's benefit, why does Manchester, why is Manchester able to fund their Fire Department for less money, if you accept my extrapolation for less money than it costs us. Do you have answer for that, have you looked into that, do you have any idea.

Chairman Dowd

Chief?

Chief Rhodes

Thank you. Thank you for that question Alderman. I don't know if we have enough time tonight to get that deep into the weeds but this isn't really a calculation that you can take guestimates at. I think the biggest thing we have is we have a Collective Bargaining Agreement that has been in place for over 75 years in Nashua and that's where we work towards. I think there are probably things, as you said, our budget request is laid out in black and white before you; theirs is not. So what else that isn't showing, that doesn't show up on their ledger sort to speak. I think it comes down to at the end of the day, what type of fire protection and emergency services is the community willing to support. They run a different model in Manchester than we do. I think they went through some pretty heavy years of staff reductions but they are building back up now. They are gaining, they are getting back some of those fire companies they used to have.

Full disclosure, these numbers are for your benefit because you asked these questions earlier on. And that is where we found them but these don't even tell the whole story because you get so deep into the weeds with Union contracts and you get into some of the Fire Chief deals out there. There are Fire Chiefs that are making close to what I make for a community a third of the size and for an organization that is a third of the size of what we have here but they have buy back deals. They are buying back vacation time and sick time every year. They have the ability to not take the health care, if their spouse has healthcare, they are being compensated for that. We don't have that ability here. So I think that's why I am saying it is very hard to try to go apples to apples with ... particularly Fire Departments. I can't speak to any other Department but I do know there's a lot of variables. There's education involved, there's different certifications involved, longevity is involved, which the City of Nashua used to have but has eliminated which the Fire Fighter's Union no longer has that. So that is sunsetting in our budget. It is just kind of a difficult question to really get that deep into the weeds to give you a really solid number to say this is why we are 80% of Manchester.

Chairman Dowd

Commissioner Garant, did you want to add something?

Commissioner Garant

Yes, there are items in the budget that we do not control. The amount for pension and health and benefits. But also the City tells us what we are going to spend for fuel, for heat, for water, for diesel. Whether those are in the Manchester budget or they are rolled up into another account within the City of Manchester, we can't tell you, I can't tell you. So those are rolled into our budget. So fuel, heat, water, electricity are in the budget and you see what it costs for the Fire Department.

Chairman Dowd

Anything else Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

No, thank you very much.

Chairman Dowd

Any other questions. I just have a couple of quick things just for clarifications. One thing is that is kind of concerning to me and it is not just the Fire Department but you have one station that you have solar panels all over your roof. And we put solar panels on Conway Arena and we are putting them on all of our schools. What I haven't seen is any savings that we are realizing from that electricity. Where is it going? You can't answer that question and I wasn't expecting you to answer it. But I asked that question of our new Energy Management person and I am still waiting for an answer. But I don't know as we have a handle on that yet. But long-term electricity should be going down. We just are putting a new generator in the dam that we own and that should be far more efficient, generating more electricity, of course that's all dependent on the amount of water we get. We keep having rain storms like an hour ago we will be all set. But that's one thing. I noticed your electricity was the same amount as last year and I am hoping the City is going to be recognizing some savings and if the people in Concord would give us a higher net metering number we'd be even better off.

Alderman O'Brien

Working on it.

Chairman Dowd

The other thing is Clothing & Uniforms. It went up \$20 K. I am going to believe that is because the cost of the uniforms is going up?

Chief Rhodes

Unfortunately, yes.

Chairman Dowd

OK that's what I figured. I just wanted to ask that question in case anybody saw that and said, well why did that go up.

Chief Rhodes

That again though, that went up because of a contractual increase. So the firefighters were getting \$600.00 a year for the last 20 plus year. In this contract it was raised to bring that up \$50.00 in one year and to get to \$700.00, again all of these – the black boots that we require our members to wear, the work duty boots they are well over \$150.00 a pair / \$200.00 a pair now. And uniform pants are \$60.00/\$70.00 a pair and you start ruining those, it adds up quick.

Chairman Dowd

OK is there anything else that you would like to add under Appropriations? Chief?

Chief Rhodes

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I hope the Committee understands that we understand what is happening here. But you pay me, you pay Assistant Chief Buxton a lot of money to administer the Fire Department and we do that to the very best of our ability. There's four of us in the Fire Department; there's Chief Buxton, there's

Karen and there's Ann Marie Boucher. And I can tell you we are crunching numbers daily. I go into Karen's office every day when I get a requisition, what's this one for, can you tell me what that one is, because my memory is not so good anymore. And she goes, oh that's for this.

So we are watching every penny we have. We are not coming back to this Board, historically we do not come back to this Board at the end of the year and say, we need money, we have a problem. We try to keep things within our own four walls and only come to you when we really need something. And we take great pride in that. Our firefighters take great pride in the job they do for the citizens of Nashua.

I think if we want to start comparing us to other Fire Department, I don't want to jinx us, but there's a reason why we don't have a lot cellar holes in the City of Nashua. That's because you fund us appropriately, we have proper staffing and we have extremely dedicated professional people who are working for us who come to work and they give it their all every day. And to go back to my prior statements when I opened up, Nashua Fire Rescue is not a taker, we are not a taker; we give back to this community a lot. And I don't know if you saw it but the Nashua Fire Fighter's Union just donated 190 pair of sneakers to the Arlington Street Community Center. Takers don't do that.

Chairman Dowd

OK two additional points maybe. One is you just recently had an extremely large fire within the last couple weeks I think. You had to deploy every single truck and fire fighter on duty for the City of Nashua and probably called in others. And all of our stations had to be covered by other community's trucks. So any lack of additional firefighter would have been a problem. The Mayor's reduction in your budget, I'd to let the Committee know what you think that impact would be if that stuck.

Chief Rhodes

So are we talking the 0 or the 1.7%?

Chairman Dowd

Line item of 495955, bottom line reduction adjustment. So it's a bottom line reduction that doesn't cover any particular line but in order for you to meet that with your budget you would have to reduce something in your appropriations.

Chief Rhodes

So I feel like we are in Collective Bargaining and we are going to start talking about what we need and what we don't need, but you know what, that's why we are here. We are going to tell you the truth, this is what we need. 2.525% - that is the minimum we need to keep Nashua Fire Rescue as it is today for the next year. That's 0 increases in our Operating Budget, that's no new additional person for the Fire Marshall's Office. To satisfy the Mayor's request for a 0% increase, we would be closing one fire company. So in the context of Nashua we have 9 so we would be down to 8. But let's put that in human factors. That's 16 people we would be laying off at a minimum. We would be increasing response times to other parts of the City. To your point, Mr. Chairman, when we do have these incidents that escalate quickly we will be calling in neighboring communities much faster.

It adds to additional increases in wear and tear on our apparatus if they are on the road more it's going to be more fuel, it's going to be more tires. Do you know how much a tire costs for a fire truck? About \$900.00 for one tire. Fire engines have six and the ladder trucks have ten. And then there's also the potential if we lose a fire company because in that Master Plan Study there was a reference to NP1710 which is your deployment model which tells you how effective response force, how quickly you can get in so many minutes within your community. So we are going to be dangerously close to dropping from ISO 2 to an ISO 3 which means an increase to the insurance rates for our business community if that happens. I wish there was a better answer for me to tell you that we could do this but again, the cuts that we sustained in 2006 / 2007 we

haven't recovered from. And the City continues to grow and we keep asking our people to do more and more and more. Trust me, I would love to come to you and say, I need a second Assistant Chief because I think it would be really beneficial for us. But I think our employees need the assistance more than Chief Buxton and I do at this point. Not to say it's not going to come to you in the future, but at this point we have been asking for assistance in our Fire Marshall's Office, this will be the fourth year in a row. And it will be money well spent. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Thank you Chief. Any additional questions for the Fire? Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

Chief I didn't quite understand. You said that in order to meet the Mayor's proposed budget you would have to eliminate a fire company which would equate to laying off 16 people. And then you talked about increased wear and tear on equipment. How does eliminating a fire company increase wear and tear on equipment?

Chairman Dowd

Chief?

Chief Buxton

Sure thank you. So let's just say for the sake of argument we have three ladder trucks in the City of Nashua currently. And we are forced to reduce something and I say we decide through the Board of Fire Commission and Administration, we say – OK we are going to use two ladder trucks in the City of Nashua. Well now we have to redeploy those trucks because we have one at the north end of town at Amherst Street; one at the south end of town at Spit Brook Road and one at the center of town at Lake Street. So logic would say, get rid of the one in the middle right? So now we have this whole area in the center of the City that we have to cover. So the ladder truck from Amherst Street covers the downtown and all the way to Merrimack line and all the way to the Hollis line.

The ladder truck in the south end covers to the Mass line covers to Tyngsboro, Dunstable, Hollis, that way. So those trucks are traveling a much greater distance on a much higher frequency when we call them if we don't have the vehicle we have. I don't like going back to this Master Plan but I just think there are so many relative things in there that they spelled right out. And I am in full agreement with them. At this point, we have sufficient firefighters in the City of Nashua. We are not asking for more firefighters, we are not asking for more fire trucks. But it did point out, if the City is going to continue to grow with these large scale developments that are going up, these 4, 5, 6 story buildings that are light weight wood frame, that have 100 to 200 units in them, then we are going to have to think about. But at this point we are not there yet so the independent study says we are okay, we are doing okay, it says we are going to think about it in the near future but now would not be the time to be reducing because we'd be playing catch up.

Chairman Dowd

Thank you Chief. Any additional questions? Follow up to that same question?

Alderman Jette

So you said that you would have to reduce, you would have to eliminate a fire company which you said was 16 people. Now you are saying you are also going to eliminate a ladder.

Chief Rhodes

Mr. Chairman?

Chairman Dowd

Yes, Chief.

Chief Rhodes

I am sorry I am speaking in fire department vernacular here, let me bring this back so you understand it. A fire company, a ladder truck, a fire engine it is all the same. So we have three aerial companies in the City, ladder trucks, we have six engine companies. We would need to eliminate one of them and I said for this instance I just threw out a ladder truck. But each of those vehicles is staffed with 4 firefighters and there are four groups so if we got rid of one of these vehicles, whatever it is, that's 16 people. So it doesn't matter ladder truck, engine or whatever.

Alderman Jette

So just forgive me for being so dense about this. So the 16 people, if you eliminated 16 people you couldn't man or supply the crews necessary for the equipment that you have now? You'd have to also eliminate a piece of equipment?

Chief Rhodes

Correct. So instead of having 9 pieces of fire apparatus on the road 24/7, we would have 8 if we had to reduce.

Alderman Jette

OK, thank you.

Chairman Dowd

All set? I have Alderman Schmidt.

Alderman Schmidt

I just wanted to say I remember when Manchester decided that they had to lose some fire support. They were going to close at least one of their buildings. I know it was a huge budget cut and the contract with the firemen was up and there was such contention in the City and I know they cut it deeply. At that point, I tried to look at their budget and I couldn't find one for one anywhere in the budget at all. So I really had no way of comparing. But if you look at the service that Nashua gives it is tremendous, I mean you call for help and they are there every single time. And it shows. If it's got to be 2.25 that's fine, I think that's what you need, that's what you should receive.

I did want to say the Master Plan Study was awesome. It showed all of the halos you guys wear, it also showed your warts. And I thought that was tremendous, it is going to give us a place to go with that. Is the public educator position in the budget at this point?

Chief Rhodes

So in our budget proposal yes, it is in there, that's the all in number. The number I just gave you was the number, the bare bones that we would need to keep 180 employees with Nashua Fire Rescue for the next year.

Alderman Schmidt

Thank you Chief.

Chairman Dowd

Alderman Wilshire?

Alderman Wilshire

Thank you. I don't expect this will happen but how do you choose which fire house to close?

Chief Rhodes

I don't know, I'd be asking you.

Alderman Wilshire

Well for the inner city, I would tell you to close one further out but I don't want to see that happen.

Chief Rhodes

You know what, we talk about this all the time. And it would – who becomes the haves and who becomes the have nots in the community and how do we make that decision and I guess data would drive our decision. But the data can't tell us that at 11:55 at night we are going to have a 3-Alarm fire in the most densely populated portion of our community and then again at 2:55 in the afternoon we are going to have a 3-Alarm fire in a not so densely populated portion of our City where we need all those resources. We have become a society that calls the Fire Department for everything. Now I know that other City Departments get phone calls for different things.

Alderman Lambert is in the audience and he is new to the Board of Fire Commission and he just got a tour because of COVID, all our facilities, Chief Buxton took him out. But one of the things he has been amazed with since he became a Commissioner was, he sees every call we go on. He is absolutely amazed at what people call us for. The problem is, we don't have the ability to say no we are not coming because we don't know what the problem is. So we are going to everything and anything and that's from the 3-Alarm house fire to the person stung by a bee to the person that smells something in their apartment to the child with his leg stuck in the rungs of a chair. You can't make this stuff up but again, we have become a society that when you have a problem you dial 911.

We provide a tremendous service to this community and at times it because an excess where we do lift assists. Like clockwork every morning, my phone vibrates and I look at what the call is and we are going somewhere in the community for a lift assist. We are an aging population, we are trying to encourage younger people to move into our City but we are an older population and these people have no other resources and they call the Fire Department.

Chairman Dowd

Thank you Chief. Alderman O'Brien.

Alderman O'Brien

Thank you. Chief I just want to reiterate exactly what you are saying. To the public that may or may not know, I spent 35 years on the force. When I retired in 2015 – I started in 1981. The exact number of fire apparatus, the exact number of fire stations was the same in 1981 as compared to the day I retired in 2015 and now 2021. The City has grown folks, it has grown tenfold, 1981. I'll show you where the empty field is

where right now stands the Pheasant Lane Mall. The DW Highway didn't look like it does now and Amherst Street didn't look like that either in 1981.

They rolled out the streets folks, except for Thursday nights on Main Street. Because Thursday nights I would meet you at Millers. But the thing is, compared to today, look what we have done with the downtown. We have people there on several nights a week enjoying, we have done everything to increase. We have made Nashua the mecca, the place to really come in and bring your family in to grow. But what have we done with the Fire Department? If it hasn't grown since 1981 I don't think we've done anything, you know? So I think the Chief is right. I am scared. I don't want no part – if the Chief mentioned earlier in this conversation they got an award with Rockingham Ambulance for the percentage rate of lives saved of people who have cardiac issues. Well folks, do you want to be a member of the team that picked award that your loved one is going to die of a heart attack because we can't get the fire company there? Because it is usually the engine company that is there first.

Or do you want to be that person sitting in the DW Highway involved in an auto accident waiting to be extricated because we can't get the jaws of life there or the current tool that is used now, they can't get that tool there to extricate the victim. That's concerning to me, that's not what I think the taxpayers want. And I think any suggestions to cut anything to me the proof is in the pudding folks. If it hasn't grown since 1981, then I challenge the Mayor to show me where the fat is baby. Because if it was there the same in 1981 and it is the same thing in 2021, I don't see what we are really talking about and why there should be any type of reduction.

So Chief, I hope that this Board, the Budget Committee can work with you in the future to try to reclaim some of this and try to get back. Being on Infrastructure we like to see the projects that are coming forward in the City and see them go and maybe having that new position in the Fire Marshall's office is very good. Part of the things, like you say, I agree. I worked many years with the Fire Marshall. Keep in mind folks, the State of New Hampshire has NH State Fire Marshalls but we have our own. And the reason we have our own is because they are one of the best and their conviction rate is one of the best. To rely on like other communities rely on the State, I don't know, it's very shameful. So I hope we can work with you Chief in the future and try to work with the Mayor's Office and try to do something with this.

I think one thing about education is one thing about having enough sand when it snows. But I think what we are talking about is life of the community here in an emergency situation. It seems like when we had an opioid crisis, who did we go to? The Fire Department with Safe Stations. It seems every crisis, who do we go to? The Fire Department. I hate to have your numbers depleted and I say it in the highest degree of prejudice, but I hate to see your numbers depleted because of a budget, when you guys are the go to people. So thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Any other questions for the Fire Department. Yes, Alderman Jette?

Alderman Jette

Chief I just want to be clear, I don't know if you meant this when you said it but I heard you say that you needed a minimum of 2.5% over last year's budget.

Chairman Dowd

Chief?

Chief Rhodes

No I meant it. I am being totally transparent with you. That's what we need at a bare minimum to maintain the Fire Department as it is today.

Alderman Jette

So in full disclosure, I don't want you to say something you don't really mean. But when I multiply last year's budget by 2.5% I come up with \$27,328,106.00 which is less than what the Mayor is proposing. Maybe my calculator is wrong, but I just want to be clear. I just don't want you to be stuck with something that you didn't really mean.

Chief Rhodes

So the 2.525 number is reflective of taking the public education officer out, taking the clothing allowance, no that's a neutral, taking the HVAC, taking the technology operations, taking the PPE out, that leaves in the utilities which shows us \$460,000.00 short of what we need or that's the increase it would be to get to the 2.52 number.

Alderman Jette

The increase over last year's budget?

Chief Rhodes

I would say yes that is what this was figured on.

Alderman Jette

OK.

Chairman Dowd

OK. Any other questions? Alderman Lopez.

Alderman Lopez

Yeah just an observation regarding the napkin math that's being done, he should probably adjust for inflation before multiplying it as well because the dollar this year isn't the same as the dollar last year. And there are a lot of supplies that have changed in price as well. So I would never as Aldermen hold you to that just because of a comment in Committee. And I would also want to reinforce that the Fire Department is incredibly valuable to the City in terms of the service they offer. It is very valuable to taxpayers in terms of the insurance benefits provides, but it is essential to the person who is experiencing a life threatening emergency that they get that first response. Not to detract from Alderman O'Brien's point that we turned to the firefighters for the Safe Station. We didn't actually have to turn to the firefighters they were bearing the brunt of the emergency calls and stepped forward for the Safe Stations. They were the ones that drove that effort and what it ultimately represented.

We are seeing a less locally originated effort now through the Gateway Program. It is a result of State level (inaudible) planning. And from what I've seen on the ground it's not as effective, it is nowhere near as responsive in the emergency moment. It is not the standard that we want to be looking at. So when we do look at other cities and other communities, we don't want to take their standards as though they are superior to ours, I think our Fire Department does, by and large, a very, very effective job with what they have. But I think it is also important for us to recognize that we have not adjusted their funding system, we haven't grown the tax base in a way that allows us to have extra revenue or even if we do, we are subject to things like State politics gobbling up \$11 million dollars of whatever tax base we have.

So while I don't think it is the solution to every problem, I do think we need to start looking at different ways of generating local revenue. That can be traced directly back to how the organizations and the City Departments (audio cuts out). I think maybe the licenses isn't going to be a major contribution but I think we

do need to start looking in that direction of different ways to look at funding services that keeps money in the City and addresses the needs of Departments without being as subject to larger input. Because shutting down a fire station is a major problem for our City. Changing our trash pick up to every other week is a major problem for our City. Having a school close down and not being able to provide special need services, these are all major problems and I think because we have only the real significant focus on general revenue that they get put against each other in Board of Aldermen and the Mayor's Budgets time and time again and I think we need to start looking at making sure that those Departments that need specialized funding and have a higher priority are able to protect the revenue that they need to do that so that we are able to make financial decisions based on what the situation calls for not based on what we happen to have due to a bunch of other factors.

Chairman Dowd

Thank you Alderman Lopez. Any other questions or concerns regarding the Nashua Fire Rescue Budget? Seeing and hearing none, thank you very much for coming in. We will be going through the rest of the Budget Process and hopefully having a budget by the 1st of July.

Chief Rhodes

I want to thank you Mr. Chairman and thank the Budget Committee for hearing us tonight. And by all means, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. And again thank you for the incredible job you guys are doing. These are challenging times and these are tough decisions. But at the end of the day we have full faith in the Board that we will make it work. We will make it work. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

OK. Alderman O'Brien?

MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO TABLE R-21-142 BY ROLL CALL

A viva voce roll call was taken which resulted as follows:

Yea: Alderman Schmidt, Alderman Jette, Alderman Wilshire Alderman O'Brien, Alderwoman Kelly, Alderman Dowd	6
---	---

Nay:	0
------	---

MOTION CARRIED

GENERAL DISCUSSION - None

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

REMARKS BY THE ALDERMEN

Alderman Wilshire

I'd just like to thank the Fire Department and Commissioners, financial people, everybody for the great job they do for our City. They are always first, you always show up first and I think your dedication is outstanding and the Board does appreciate it. I can probably speak for all of us that we all do appreciate all the work you do. So thank you for that. And any over and above work you do as well.

Chairman Dowd

Anyone else? I too would like to thank the Nashua Fire Rescue, no one knows how much they need you until they need you. And once we have served them then hopefully they can tell other people just how much we need a good Nashua Fire Rescue. You save lives all the time, you save property all the time and people appreciate that. And I am sure that people don't want to see their fire insurance costs go up, especially businesses. So thank you very much for coming in.

POSSIBLE NON-PUBLIC SESSION - None

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO ADJOURN BY ROLL CALL

A viva voce roll call was taken which resulted as follows:

Yea:	Alderman Schmidt, Alderman Jette, Alderman Wilshire Alderman O'Brien, Alderwoman Kelly, Alderman Dowd	6
Nay:		0

MOTION CARRIED

The meeting was declared closed at 8:51 p.m.

Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.
Committee Clerk

2021

Nashua Fire Rescue Budget Talking Points



Introduction

As we emerge from the Covid Pandemic, as an organization we are proud of the partnerships we have developed and strengthened as local and state stakeholders worked together to protect ourselves, and our community. We provided over 8,000 hours of personnel staffing at both local and the state vaccination sites along with the local testing site. At the beginning of the pandemic, our executive staff formed a team of officers and privates to manage the volumes of information received on a daily basis. In turn we were able to push out CDC best practices to our personnel. As a result, we did not experience any reduction in our ability to respond to emergency calls.

As we enter this challenging budget process, this document serves to answer questions and provide a bit of historical data to help all understand how we came to be where we are today. The year 2007 was a turning point for our organization with the then Mayor's directed 5% budget reduction.

Loss of Positions - 2007

- **At the Executive Officer Level - we lost one Assistant Fire Chief.**
 - As you learned the results of the recent ESCI Nashua Fire Rescue Master Plan, this would have been the chief officer who would fill the recommended Professional Standards/Services position.
 - *Currently, those responsibilities have been and continue to be shared by the Chief / Assistant Chief.*
- **Safety Training Division - lost four Safety Training Lieutenants.**
 - These officers were responsible for incident safety at emergency scenes 24/7/365.
 - They worked within the division to deliver training programs to our 175 members.
 - They conducted all accident and injury investigations.
 - *Currently these duties are shared among the on duty Deputy Chiefs.*
- **Suppression Division - lost 4 firefighter positions.**
 - These have been restored as the Shift Management Technicians.
 - They work daily with the on duty Deputy Chiefs in both an administrative and emergency capacity.
 - This is a very dynamic position that carries a heavy workload.
- **Fire Alarm Division - lost a Fire Alarm Technician/Electrician.**
 - This position maintains all the components that are part of the fire alarm alerting system including;
 - The Gamewell System (red alarm boxes mounted on buildings and telephone poles).
 - The station alerting system in the fire stations.
 - Assist the City IT Division with maintaining the fiber optic network. We handle all the fiber work in the city that is not done by outside vendors.
- **Fire Marshals Division - lost one Fire Inspector/Public Education Officer.**
 - This position managed all aspects of our Community Risk Reduction Program.

-
- Primary areas of focus were youth and the elderly through a multilingual educator.
 - *This division does not have the personnel to manage the previously managed programs.*
 - **Administrative Division - lost one part time Administrative Assistant.**
 - Our organization currently only has 4 Administrative positions.
 - This creates challenges with lapses in coverage during peak vacation periods.
 - We find an additional challenge in lack of redundancy.
 - All are engaged in attempting to stay ahead of the current workload.
 - There is no ability to cross train.
 - **Facilities - lost one Part Time Facilities Manager.**
 - Nashua Fire Rescue maintains 8 facilities.
 - Currently, we have no facility manager to render needed repairs.
 - Our firefighters handle keeping the stations clean and light maintenance.
 - *Facility management currently is the responsibility of the Assistant Fire Chief.*

-
- **Total staffing reductions:**
 - **11 Full Time Positions.**
 - **2 Part Time Positions.**

Current Salary Comparisons

Looking at some of our regional partners, we offer the base starting pay here for your reference

Firefighter Starting Salary

Community	Salary	Population
Salisbury, MA	62,000	9,360
Merrimack	54,000	25,987
Pelham	53,000	14,220
Nashua	52,000	90,323
Derry	49,000	33,341
Manchester	48,000	113,035
Concord	48,000	44,019
Laconia	48,000	16,579
Claremont	45,000	36,058
Dover	41,000	38,482

Current Salary Comparison

Fire Chief Salary

Community	Salary	Population
Manchester	160,000	113,035
Salem	160,000	29,000
Nashua	146,000	90,323
Concord	136,000	44,019
Durham	134,000	14,600 w/o UNH population
Hudson	133,000	25,300
Keene	128,000	22,900
Lebanon	93,500	13,600
Laconia	117,800	15,476
Gilford	108,000	71,000

Budget Summary

Year	Salaries and Wages	Employee Benefits	Pension Costs	Total Personnel Costs	Benefits Costs % of Salary	Total Budget	Personnel Costs % of Budget
2010	13,190,874	1,934,881	2,340,493	17,466,248	38.32%	18,598,441	93.90%
2011	13,459,698	1,987,988	2,907,272	18,354,958	36.37%	19,248,651	95.36%
2012	13,110,402	2,116,463	3,348,523	18,575,388	41.68%	19,461,082	95.45%
2013	13,241,402	2,030,104	3,473,447	18,774,953	41.60%	19,638,647	95.45%
2014	13,383,874	2,502,830	3,730,371	19,617,075	46.57%	20,598,539	95.24%
2015	13,877,101	2,609,710	3,747,889	20,234,700	45.81%	21,182,299	95.53%
2016	14,146,879	2,720,456	4,043,125	20,910,460	47.81%	21,850,669	95.70%
2017	14,648,317	2,571,551	4,222,309	21,442,177	46.38%	22,392,116	95.76%
2018	15,108,172	2,754,371	4,668,753	22,531,296	49.13%	23,776,107	94.76%
2019	15,661,451	3,149,176	4,794,837	23,605,464	50.72%	24,423,758	96.65%
2020	16,033,467	3,444,002	4,562,014	24,039,483	49.93%	24,540,642	97.96%
2021	16,056,159	3,748,412	4,800,000	24,604,571	53.24%	25,513,109	96.44%

As a result of our total budget being insufficient to cover the CBA costs since 2010, we have had to contribute an additional 3.5% out of our operating budget to meet obligations. The 2021 budget also includes 4 additional dispatchers approved by the BOA.

Supplemental Grant Funding

2010	\$ 1,315,474
2011	\$ 95,000
2012	\$ 74,300
2013	\$ 495,000
2014	\$ 765,915
2015	\$ 971,332
2016	\$ 867,721
2017	\$ 240,000
2018	\$ 96,000
2019	\$ 717,077
2020	\$ 343,407
Total Grants	\$ 5,981,226

All grant applications have been generated by one of our 4 deputy chiefs in addition to his regular Citywide Command and day to day responsibilities.

2007 - 2021 Run Summary - Includes 911 emergency response; property status change requests and citizen inquiries.

Year	Calls for Service	Incidents	Amb w/o FD Response	Fires
2007	21,048	7,522	5,655	349
2008	22,493	7,705	3,902	370
2009	24,157	8,312	4,169	289
2010	25,732	7,769	4,577	235
2011	29,348	8,206	4,700	284
2012	30,157	8,730	4,327	315
2013	29,304	8,579	3,943	307
2014	30,353	8,684	4,577	239
2015	30,295	8,927	5,416	281
2016	31,046	9,525	4,695	287
2017	35,717	12,571	3,243	293
2018	35,491	13,018	3,522	222
2019	37,318	11,270	4,723	231
2020	52,181	10,064	4,811	261
2021 - Fiscal year to date	50,001	9,061	4,815	267

Fire Marshals Division

With the volume of new construction projects both proposed and in progress, the bulk of the Fire Marshal's work is in plans review and site inspections. This division is understaffed to keep up with needed reinspections of occupied businesses. The Fire Marshal's Office is also month's behind in inspecting Places of Assembly. NH RSA 155:34 requires Places of Assembly to be inspected twice a year; we are only able to inspect once a year with current staffing.

Year	Inspections	Permits
2009	1,610	1,280
2010	1,363	1,118
2012	1,643	1,160
2012	1,669	1,162
2013	1,833	1,514
2014	1,387	2,192
2015	1,197	2,206
2016	1,280	1,078
2017	1,233	1,381
2018	2,115	1,222
2019	1,856	1,208
2020	701	1,656
2021 year to date	394	1,291

ESCI Master Plan Study Section 6 Recommended Future Delivery System Models - suggested actions.

- Dedicated IT person. (Sec 6 #6)**
- Online and cloud based training. (Section 6 #7)**
- Formalized Mental Health Training program. (Section 6 #8)**
- Funding for installation of the Selective Station dispatching system. (Section 6 #10)**
- Funding for the second Assistant Fire Chief Position. (Section 6 #19)**
- Recommendation to hire 4 additional firefighters each year over the next six years to achieve a 1.2% staffing relief factor. (Section 6 #21)**
- Reinstitute the Public Educator Position in the Fire Marshal's office (Section 6 #22)**
- Funding for Pre Planning Software for firefighter safety. (Section 6 #25)**
- Funding to add an additional Fire Inspector to bring inspection frequency into compliance with NFPA 1730. (Section 6# 26)**
- Funding for a plans reviewer in the Fire Marshal's office. (Section 6 #27)**
- Bring the Fire Alarm Division facilities into ADA compliance. (Section 6 #34)**
- Funding for Video Security, all facilities. (Section 6 # 36)**
- Funding for ppe gear rooms stations 1 and 5 to separate gear from other areas. (Section 6 #38)**
- Additional funding for facilities maintenance, all stations. (Section 6 # 39)**

Conclusion

As the information presented above shows, as an organization, we continue to respond to an increasing volume of emergency responses with less staffing than we had in 2007. The majority of our challenges are not only at the “boots on the street” Emergency Services Division. They can be found at the administrative and support function levels that are woefully understaffed. As the ESCI Master Plan clearly outlines, there are very specific areas that need to be addressed. We are in the process of developing a 3 - 5 year strategic plan that will incorporate the multitude of recommendations presented in the master plan. Many of these recommendations will require your financial support. We are working hard to prioritize the recommendations for inclusion into our strategic plan.

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to answering your questions on the 15th.