



TOWNSEND FIRE-EMS DEPARTMENT

Proudly serving the citizens of Townsend since 1875

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Fire-EMS Quarterly Report

ACTIVITY

The second quarter of the year has been plagued with number of opioid overdoses. Over a two week period we responded to eight OD's resulting in the death of a twenty one year old female and a twenty nine year old male. We continue to get the opioid life-saving drug Narcan from the district attorney office at no cost but supplies are running low and these drugs will expire in November of this year. This fall it is likely we will have to purchase a significant amount to replace supplies on all Fire-EMS vehicles.

Overall call volume has been average, EMS calls are up slightly.

POLICY CHANGES

A draft policy to mentor officer candidates is up for consideration and comment. The intent of the policy is to succession plan and give personnel on the promotional list an opportunity to be mentored and learn the ropes before becoming an officer. After reviewing membership participation records we realized more than half of the department is not meeting the minimum requirements for attendance at meetings, training and calls. We feel this is a sign of the time we live in. Members simply do not have the time with all the competing interest and family obligations. The Officers are currently considering a two prong approach of coaching and mentoring our members to keep members engaged while lowering the minimum requirements.

The Officers are also revisiting the policy for duty officers. Currently the Officers are on a rotating schedule where two officers remain available and in town nights and weekends. This is a common practice in paid-on-call departments and essentially insurance that two of the department's leaders will be available to respond and manage any major incident in town. If we are called to a major event out of town or if one of the officers has a personal issue to deal with we still have an officer in town. They are compensated \$250 a week which equates to \$2.32 per hour during this time plus regular pay rate during any calls they respond to. Again I believe this is a sign of the times, what I am hearing from the officers is they do not have the time to fulfill this obligation and they are burned out. Responding to 8 or 10 calls on a Saturday or Sunday is becoming a common occurrence. We will be considering adjusting this policy at our next meeting. The underlying request is to drop to one officer

cutting our coverage in half and increasing the risk this officer could be tied up on a call, out of town for several hours on a mutual aid call leaving the town uncovered.

PERSONNEL

Over the last three months we have hired two new per diem paramedics and one new paid-on-call Firefighter/EMT that is certified. We recently interviewed two new paid-on-call Firefighters that hold no certifications. Once we receive background checks and physical results I will be recommending they be appointed by the board. It typically takes a year for new on-call Firefighters to get signed up and complete certification training.

STAFFING

As mentioned in previous quarterly reports and in the 2019 budget request, it is time to look at the overall staffing strategy of the Fire-EMS Department. As mentioned above our officers are burning out, we are not their primary employer and source of income and many are struggling to dedicate the time needed to assure the Fire-EMS Department has sufficient staffing and coverage.

2017-2018 Shift Shortages

	ALS Short (HRS)		No ALS (HRS)		NOBODY WORKING		Fire Short (HRS)		Total	
	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017
January	13	9	42	0	0	0	0	4	55	13
February	16	18	1	19	14	0	0	1	31	20
March	5	18	0	27	0	0	10	11	15	56
April	24	0	24	7	10	0	20	0	78	7
May	55	20	27	5	0	0	34	18	116	43
June	63	17	27	28	0	0	30	11	120	56
July		36		32		0		4		72
August		38		47		0		30		115
September		15		76		0		11		102
October		18		38		0		0		56
November		0		37		0		20		57
December		24		37		0		15		76
Total	34	161	43	251	14	0	10	189	415	673

As you can see in the chart above we continue to struggle filling per diem shifts. The total hours of shortages for the first half of this year are more than double the same time period last year. To put this into perspective I started tracking these shortages in 2015 and discovered we were short 1,499 hours. We made an effort to address this issue in 2016 by hiring additional staff and increase paramedic wages and reduced the hours to 448. 2017 despite the continued efforts the short hours increased to 673 and we are on track to be short nearly 1000 hours this year. I hope to meet with the board in September to discuss transitioning to primarily full-time staff to eliminate shortages.

BUDGET

We ended the 2018 fiscal year with a surplus of approximately \$42,000 in wages and less than a thousand in expenses. The surplus in wages is attributed to the number of hour we were short last year. I am hopeful the three dollar per hour wage increase for per diem paramedics will entice people to take more shifts and keep the per diem staffing strategy afloat for another year.

GRANTS

In January we received our annual fire SAFE grants for kids fire safety and senior safety program totaling \$6,123

In the fall of 2017 Townsend Fire-EMS entered into Mass Health Ambulance CPE program in an effort to recover additional Medicaid reimbursement funds. The CPE program is an ongoing cost-based reimbursement program designed to help public ambulance/EMS providers recover additional federal revenue up to the actual incurred cost of providing services to MassHealth beneficiaries.

As a result the program found our allowable costs for MassHealth services exceeded the MassHealth interim payments received through the traditional fee for service billing, therefore we have received an additional reimbursement in the amount of \$26,018. Essentially what this means is the cost for us to provide ambulance services to MassHealth beneficiaries exceeds the fees we are allowed to bill. A memo to the Board of Selectmen will be forthcoming to accept the reimbursement and place the funds in the ambulance receipt account.

Although we have received a rejection letter from FEMA for our Fire Act Application to send four people to paramedic school, the Massachusetts Grant Office has requested we verify our bank account numbers and update our systems for awards (SAM) account. This is typically an indication we are about to be awarded a grant. We have taken the requested steps and waiting for additional information from the grant office.

WEST FIRE STATIONS STATUS

This project well behind schedule but on the home stretch. The building is 90% complete with finish work such as panting and installation of cabinets that will be completed soon. The next step is move the fire apparatus out of the old station and into the new so the old station can be removed to make room for the septic system and parking area. Asbestos abatement of the old station is complete. Water, gas and electricity will be disconnected in the next week or two and building demolition will begin July 23rd.

Once the demo is done we have about a month of site work, landscaping and finish work to complete before the project is completely done.

COMMUNICATION CENTER

After a long 18 months the transition to NVRDD is complete. I hope to publish a final transition update memo before the end of the week. Although the transition is complete we continue to have problems communicating with NVRDD over the radio on the fire channel due to interference on NVRDD end of the system. We are also work through issues with software, policies, procedures and monitoring of fire alarm systems.

Respectfully

Chief
Boynton