

FY 2024 Budget Questions & Answers
Finance Committee

Dept. Number, Name + Account	Questioner's Name/Question	Response
210 Police	Galvin: Have there been any turnovers with regard to police officers or any other position in the department? If so, how many personnel were affected and what impact will this have on operations and the budget?	Chief Chambers: One officer resigned in August to pursue a career in the private sector and one officer lateral transferred to Methuen PD at the end of October for a significant increase in base pay. There was a short-term impact to operations that left a shift rotation at minimum staffing. We had three new officers recently complete their Field Training that became available for assignment and filled the open rotations. We currently have two candidates scheduled to begin the Police Academy at the end of February. The budget will be impacted by saving a few months of a patrol officers wages until the replacements begin training.
210 Police	Galvin: Do you believe that the \$4.00 a barrel is stable estimate for gas prices?	Chief Chambers: WPD works with Dan O’Donnell each budget cycle and use his utilities analysis recommendations. A \$4 a gallon estimate should provide adequate funding that can be supplemented if necessary.
210 Police	Galvin: How many of the new Hybrid cruisers are now in operations. and how has their performance been so far? Greene: Could we get an update on the fuel savings for the Hybrid vehicles purchased as part of the FY22 budget	Chief Chambers: We currently have 5 Hybrid patrol cruisers and expect the delivery of 1 more this fiscal year. We are using fewer gallons of gasoline monthly, but there is still limited data for analysis. The first cruiser has only been in service for about 7-8 months. The first three hybrid cruisers received had significant electrical issues that have since been resolved by the vehicle upfitter. These electrical issues required the cruisers to have extended out of service

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		times.
210 Police	Galvin: What is the current number of officers assigned to detectives?	Chief Chambers: There are currently eight officers assigned to various positions within the Criminal Bureau.
210 Police	Greene: Is the additional \$4,500 for hybrid police vehicles over and above the initial \$3,200, or is this the total increase over a gas-powered police vehicle? Are we able to obtain any rebates for purchasing hybrid vehicles?	Chief Chambers: WPD purchases our hybrid cruisers through a vendor on the state bid contract. The cost of each hybrid cruiser with necessary equipment is \$57,122.35, which is \$4,500 over last year. The only change to the cruiser is the model year. There has been a significant increase the past two years in vehicle pricing, and we have been told to expect another increase of approximately \$7,000 for each vehicle next year. I do not have a quote for a gas-powered cruiser (which was the \$3,200 difference- gas v hybrid). There are currently no rebates that qualify but will take advantage of any that become available.
215 Public Safety Communications	Galvin: Is there any way to staff the requested Telecommuter position? If so how and when?	Whitcomb: Yes, there is, and it is critical to optimize service provided to police, fire, and the public, while reducing stress in a long-understaffed department. I have been requesting an additional Telecommunicator for seven years. The “how and when?” by reducing overtime and order ins, the added position would be partially funded by the savings alone. (As of 1/11/2023 we have spent approx. \$92,000

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		<p>in OT/OI, since 7/1/2022. Our OT budget is \$92,500.00 of that \$29,000.00 has been funded by State 9-1-1 Grants)</p> <p>If the town is willing to consider an ARPA funding plan to partially cover the expense of the position this position would be highly attainable in FY24. The final “how” would be reallocating some of the use of the 9-1-1 Grant to further offset increases to regular pay line. I would need Dan O’Donnell’s assistance to determine the exact cost of adding this position, and an ARPA plan.</p> <p>It should happen now; the added Telecommunicator position should and can be fit into the FY24 budget.</p>
220 Fire Department	Galvin: Are you utilizing the same \$4.00 a gallon fuel cost as the Police, and do you believe that is a stable estimate?	Chief Targ: It seems to be working out OK. We are a little bit over for the percentage for the year, however, that can also be attributed to the number of calls, their location, and duration.
241 Building Depart	Galvin: What is meant by Building Inspector coverage, Wiring Inspector coverage, and Gas and Plumbing coverage?	Fontaine: The budget for building, electrical, and plumbing coverage is when my Electrical and Plumbing inspectors are taking vacation time, personal time, sick time, or continuing education. Our alternates provide coverage so that we can provide inspections to keep the projects moving forward.
291 Emergency Mgmt.	Galvin: Can you please provide a description of how EM interacted with the Board of Health during the pandemic? Was EM activated during that period and was NIMs utilized at all?	Chief Targ: During the pandemic, communications between all departments were excellent. In most cases we talked several times

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		<p>during the day with other departments to keep us updated. In the beginning, information from the state or what the state would allow was the only restriction and eventually that worked itself out. At the recommendation of the state, we did have the town declare a state of emergency. Although it was not formally stated, the town did utilize the National Incident Management System (NIMS) in our planning meetings and daily operations. We also met with other Emergency Management agencies, police, fire, and communications departments to discuss operations and planning.</p>
294 Tree Warden	FitzPatrick: Why was such a large increase requested and what isn't able to be done with the reduction to the request in TMR?	<p>Cronin: The increase was requested to address some of the High and Medium priority items identified in the Town's Tree and Invasive Species Inventory and Management Plan. These are items that we felt we could achieve with existing staff and equipment. A copy of the recommended budget and related items is attached.</p>
640 Ambulance Enterprise	Galvin: Was there any bad debt that had to be written off by the ambulance? If so, please explain.	<p>Chief Targ: \$132,513.91 (4.49%) was written off for Westford Residents (Please see attached Westford Billing policy section that is highlighted regarding resident billing). \$17,297.50 (.59%) was written off with no further action because they were hardship cases. We sent a total of \$123,397.67 (4.18% of total</p>

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		revenue) to collections. Of that amount, 9.26% was for Westford residents. When residents do not respond to the department's request for information, or simply keep the insurance reimbursement check for the ambulance services, we send the resident to collections. For instance, we have a resident that has stated he pays for the ambulance service out of his taxes and he receives the insurance checks and refuses to turn them over to the town so we have sent him to collections.
640 Ambulance Enterprise	Greene: Can you please explain the sentence "\$278,196 of the ambulance billing was written off in FY22 with over 60% being non-residents." Does this mean that 60% of the written off amount was non-residents who did not pay?	Chief Targ: That is correct. Those patients did not have enough information to correctly bill them, never responded to us, or they kept the insurance funds.
640 Ambulance Enterprise	Greene: What is the cost of the billing service used? Is it a percentage of the money collected or flat fee?	Chief Targ: It is a flat percentage (3.5%) of the money collected.

TOWN OF WESTFORD AMBULANCE BILLING POLICY

The policy of the Westford Fire Department and the Town of Westford is to collect all receivables generated by the Westford Fire Department ambulance for non-Westford residents with the exception of cases where payment would create severe financial hardship. It is with this intent that the following ambulance billing collection policy is established.

BILL COLLECTION PROCESS:

1. The Town of Westford shall contract with a private medical billing company for billing services. The standard method of pursuing collections begins with a medical run report generated by the Westford Fire Department ambulance attendants related to a patient's treatment. The billing company will review pertinent patient care information and initiate ambulance billing by requesting payment from a patient's health insurance carrier. In the event that there is no available health insurance information, and the patient is not a resident of Westford, the billing company will issue an invoice to the patient in an attempt to obtain any further pertinent information and signature(s). Without health insurance information, the patient is solely responsible for the ambulance bill.
2. Since the Fire Department provides emergency medical care, as necessary, as a municipal service to benefit Town residents, if a Westford resident does not have health insurance, and the incident is not related to a motor vehicle crash where supplemental insurance or litigation may result in coverage, workers compensation case, or the insurance company only covers a portion of the amount billed, the remaining balance will be written off.
3. The Town will seek payment from a Westford resident if either of the following two scenarios occur:
 - a. The patient is reimbursed directly from his or her health insurance company for the cost of the services provided by the Westford Fire Department. In this scenario, the Town of Westford will seek full reimbursement from the patient in the same manner as if the patient were a non-resident.
 - b. The patient's health insurance plan has a health insurance deductible that needs to be met prior to the health insurance company covering the cost of the services provided by the Westford Fire Department to the Westford resident. In such case, the patient must pay the health insurance deductible to facilitate payment to the Westford Fire Department under the health insurance plan.

4. If there is no response to the first bill for payments outstanding after 30 days, the billing company will issue a second bill with the heading "Account Past Due." Additionally, the billing company will telephone the patient inquire as to the outstanding balance.
5. If there is no response to the second bill for payments outstanding after 60 days, the billing company will prepare a third bill with the heading "Account 60 Days Past Due." This bill will be on Fire Department letterhead signed by the Fire Chief.
6. If there is no response to the third bill for payments outstanding after 90 days, a fourth bill will be sent informing the patient that his or her account is "Seriously Past Due" and could be forwarded for collection.
7. For non-Westford Residents, after 135 days the contracted medical billing company stops billing for outstanding invoices. After 145 days the bill is sent out to a collection agency. At that point, the collection agency will work directly with the Town of Westford to recover outstanding amounts owed by non-residents.
8. When a non-resident account is six or more months overdue, determined to be inactive by the collection agency or abatement has been requested, the Fire Chief and Town Accountant shall review the account to determine whether a financial hardship abatement, or additional collection procedures, are warranted. If additional collection procedures are recommended (i.e. court action), such recommendation will be forwarded to the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen for approval.
9. In cases of financial hardship, ambulance bills may be abated by the Fire Chief in his sole discretion. To qualify for abatement, the following must apply:
 - a. If the patient has private health or accident insurance, medical assistance, Medicare, SSI or general assistance, he or she must apply for reimbursement under such programs prior to abatement consideration.
 - b. If the patient has been approved for free care by a recognized health care facility, a copy of said approval shall be included with the abatement request submitted to the Fire Chief.
 - c. If there is no insurance or governmental assistance available and the patient is the only responsible party for his or her medical care costs, the patient must complete a signed and dated abatement request to the Westford Fire Chief for consideration. Sufficient documentation, such as a notice of health insurance cancellation or paperwork showing that the patient is uninsured should, if available, be submitted with the request for abatement.

MEMO

Date:	January 4, 2023
To:	Dan O'Donnell Town Finance Director
From:	Dennis Galvin Member, Finance Committee
Subject:	Request for Data
Reference:	Public Safety Agencies: Police, Fire, Ambulance,

1. In order to become better informed about the public safety demands facing the town of Westford, so as to make informed recommendations relative to those departments responsible for this sector, I respectfully request the following information for the 2022 fiscal year.

GENERAL PUBLIC SAFETY 2022			
#Fatalities - MV Accidents	0	#Fatalities - Drug Overdoses <i>(Overdoses occurring in Westford)</i>	Microsoft Word - Opioid-related Overdose Deaths by City-Town -November 2022 (mass.gov)
#Fatalities - Violent Crime	0	#Fatalities- Fire or Explosion related	0
#MV Accidents with PI	Police-141 Fire-44	#Narcans Administered <i>(FD/PD combined)</i>	Police-7 Fire-6, see attached
#MV Accidents no PI	Police-452 Fire-41	# Fatalities – Workplace related	0
POLICE DEPARTMENT 2022			
Violent Crimes Investigated <i>(Felony Assaults, Felony Assault and Batteries, Rape, Criminal Homicide)</i>	35	# Cases involving Illegal distribution of cocaine, heroin, other opioid, methamphetamine	3
Property Crimes Investigated <i>(BEL/ MalDes, Auto Theft)</i>	57	#Cases closed by Detectives leading to prosecutions	34
# PSAP-Calls (911) <i>(Cases where a report is generated)</i>	7,579	# Applications for Search Warrants filed	30
#209A Emergency Restraining Orders applied for	53	#Search Warrants Issued	30
# Commitments to Detox	8- transported to a hospital	#Civil Actions Filed Against the Police Department	0
# Commitments to Dept. of Mental Health / include Drug commitments	68	#Officers Injured on Duty requiring time off	2
#Criminal Complaints Filed by the Department	250	#Officers Retiring or Leaving the Department	3
#MV Citations Written	3,207	#Firearms licenses issued, suspended, or revoked	LTC-294 /FID-9/ Suspensions-1
# Cases Assigned to Detectives	357	# NEMLEC Activations	43
FIRE DEPARTMENT 2022			
#House Fire Responses	14	#Mutual Aid Requests <i>(Out of town)</i>	30 Fire / 140 Ambulance
#Other Structure Fire Responses	359	#Mutual Aid Requests <i>(Made By the Town)</i>	49 Fire / 113 Ambulance
#Car Fire Responses	26	#State Fire Marshal Investigation into fires in town	4
#Non structure fire responses <i>(Brushfires, and other)</i>	53	#Fire Code Inspections conducted	640
# General Emergency Responses	3,137	#Fire Code citations issued	0
#HazMat Incidents Responses	75 Hazmat Calls 2 Dist. 6 Team Activations	# Firefighters Injured on Duty requiring time off	7

#Plan Reviews conducted		# Civil Actions Filed Against Fire Department	0
AMBULANCE ENTERPRISE 2022			
#ALS Responses	1,426	#BLS Responses	143
#Ambulance Attendants Injured on Duty Requiring Time off	2	# No of Incidents Involving more than two-hour response	44 5 Transports to Boston 3 Med Flight
#Civil Actions Filed Against the Ambulance Service	0	Percent and amount of bad debt from reimburse failure	\$132,513.91 (4.49%) written off due to Westford residents, \$17,297.50 (.59%) written off no further action and write off for collections \$123,397.67 (4.18%) the total percent written off for residents and sent to collections was 9.26

Respectfully submitted

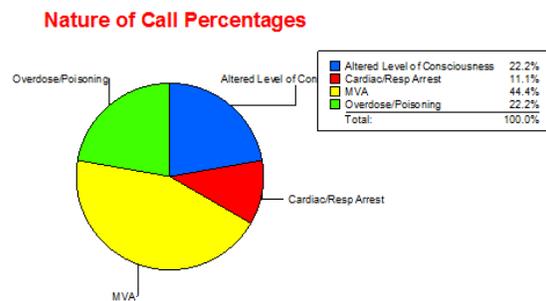
Dennis J. Galvin
Finance Committee

Between 07/01/2021 and 06/30/22 The Paramedics at Westford Fire identified the nature of the call to be “overdose/poisoning” on 6 occasions. This includes: 4 patients transported to the hospital at the ALS level, 1 patient refusal, and 1 patient refusal against medical advice; for a total of 6 incidents identified as “Overdose/Poisoning”.

Trip Count by Outcome		
Company IS Westford Fire Department; AND Trip Date IS BETWEEN 07/01/2021 AND 06/30/2022; AND Nature of Call IS OverdosePoisoning		
Westford Fire Department		
	ALS	Total
PATIENT REFUSED CARE	1	1
Refused Transport (AMA)	1	1
TREATED, TRANSPORTE	4	4
Total	6	6

Between 07/01/2021 and 06/30/2022 Naloxone was administered on 5 occasions. This includes: 1 administration for “Altered Level of Consciousness”, 1 administration of “Cardiac/Respiratory Arrest”, 1 administration for “MVA”, 2 administrations for “Overdose/Poisoning”.

Nature of Call Summary		
Company IS Westford Fire Department; AND Trip Date IS BETWEEN 07/01/2021 AND 06/30/2022; AND No Group; AND No Group; AND Intervention IS Narcan		
Westford Fire Department		
Nature of Call	Count	Percent
Total Altered Level of Consciousness	1	22.2%
Total Cardiac/Resp Arrest	1	11.1%
Total MVA	1	44.4%
Total Overdose/Poisoning	2	22.2%
Total Westford Fire Department	5	



We do not track cause of death or fatalities from overdose. The cause of death is determined during investigation and/or autopsy by the Medical Examiners office. The Medical Examiners office would need to be contacted for metrics pertaining to # of fatalities due to overdose.