



# Town of Orleans

## Finance Committee

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## Memorandum

**To:** Fire Chief Geof Deering

**CC:** Deputy Fire Chief Tim Gula  
Select Board  
Interim Town Manager Charles Sumner

**Date:** January 6, 2023

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At our January 5, 2023 meeting, the Finance Committee voted unanimously in support of the Orleans Fire-Rescue Department's plan to apply for a FEMA-sponsored SAFER grant ("Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response").

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

In your November 2, 2022 and January 4, 2023 presentations to the Orleans Select Board, you outlined the need for additional resources for the Orleans Fire-Rescue Department ("the Department") and referred to a number of staffing-related action steps included in the Department's "Strategic Plan FY21 to FY25" that was published in February 2021, specifically:

Goal 2: Operations Excellence / Objective 3: Improve Organizational Model

Action Plan: Review and analyze 2 vs. 3 staff in ambulance as best service fit for community

- Review and analyze minimum required shift staffing for EMS and fire protection
- Provide for correct officer/rank on duty
- Create staffing model that achieves 2 ambulances staffed at a time or 1 ambulance and 1 fire apparatus staffed daily while appropriately using callbacks for surge and high demand times
- Examine cost/benefit analysis of callback (overtime) vs. additional full-time personnel vs. scheduled overtime
- Seek additional staff funding through SAFER grant to reduce costs of additional personnel to meet staffing levels

Some of the on-going staffing challenges noted in your presentations included increasing call volumes, increasing multiple/simultaneous calls, increasing complexity/duration of calls, decreasing availability of callback personnel, housing and response times and inadequate number of resources needed to respond to calls. All of these staffing challenges are well documented, with data to support the conclusions. As noted, the data indicate that on average, with multiple/simultaneous calls and limited callback resources, 30% of the time the station is left with just one or 2 or even no firefighters/paramedics to respond to the next call.

We understand that the Department works well with neighboring towns to provide Mutual Aid resources when needed. In early December, in Eastham, a pick-up truck fire in a residential driveway spread quickly to the house.

With all other resources on ambulances calls, the Eastham Fire Chief drove the fire engine to the scene. Mutual aid from Orleans, Wellfleet, Brewster, Harwich, Yarmouth and Chatham came to the scene while crews from Hyannis, Harwich and Dennis covered the Eastham station.

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

We understand that there could be opportunities for “regionalizing” certain aspects of Department operations. But most if not all towns on the Cape lack sufficient resources. “Regionalizing” front line staff likely wouldn’t solve this problem. However, perhaps there are opportunities with shared approaches for training, fire inspection/prevention and/or vehicle/equipment repair/maintenance and possibly other support activities. We understand that the Eastham Department has recently received a small grant to explore the possibility of a program to “regionalize” vehicle/equipment repair/maintenance, perhaps to the benefit of Orleans. That would be a good beginning.

Meanwhile, we support the Department’s plan to apply for a SAFER grant - with a goal of hiring an additional 8 firefighters/paramedics, adding 2 per shift, effective July 2023 (for the Town’s fiscal year 2024). We understand that the SAFER grant could cover staff salaries and benefits for the first 3 years for each new hire, with the Town then picking up the cost after the initial period. We understand that there are additional on-boarding costs for each new hire that the Town would have to cover (including turnout gear - approximately \$20k/new hire; Fire Academy costs - \$9500/new hire; and administrative costs - \$1500/new hire) - about \$30k-\$31k/new hire. And temporary bunk space/lockers would need to be added to the building - likely in the conference/storage room - another \$30k. These costs should be included in the Department’s FY24 Budget - or in a Warrant Article for the May 2023 Annual Town Meeting.

We also understand that after the first 3 years, the Town would need to assume responsibility for funding the salaries and benefits for any new resources hired under the SAFER program - \$70.6k plus benefits now per hire, with the per-person cost increasing over the 3-year period. Likely this would require a Proposition 2 1/2 override. But this override strategy has been used before - to fund additional resources for the Department, the schools and the Town.

One of the Department’s goals as stated in the Strategic Plan FY21 to FY25 is to “Seek accreditation from the Center for Public Safety Excellence”. This organization has noted that:

“Accredited agencies are often described as being community-focused, data-driven, outcome-focused, strategic-minded, well organized, properly equipped and properly staffed and trained.”

Clearly the Orleans Fire-Rescue Department is well on the way to hitting the mark for many of these metrics, with a “community-focused, data-driven, outcome-focused, strategic-minded (and) well organized (and) trained” Department. But we’ve got some catching up to do with “properly staffed” and “properly equipped” (with a new Fire Station sorely needed). We need these resources now due to the current demand on service, our current needs, and the expected future growth/increased population for the Town and the region that we need to plan for now. You’ve got our support.

On behalf of the Orleans Finance Committee,



Nick Athanassiou / Finance Committee Chair

Cc: Orleans Finance Committee