

To: Westport Town Selectmen,
George Richardson, Gerry Bodmer, Ross Norton

May 21, 2018

I am writing to explain my reasoning and to ask for your support for some significant budget changes that I believe are important to enact for the Westport Volunteer Fire Department (WVFD). The first change is to increase our annual budget to be closer to our expected operating costs. The second change is to begin compensating our active members. I believe these changes are essential for sustaining this department so that it can continue to provide quality care and service to our community.

In reviewing our annual budget, we found that our operating expenses have been consistently more than our budget. We made only modest increases in our town funding and have relied on donations to fill the gap. This puts the WVFD at two disadvantages: first, we have to divert time and energy towards fund raising; and secondly, we can't adequately predict what our finances will be for the year. We need to be able to plan for training, maintenance, equipment and for all the other expenses associated with operating a fire department.

Below is a chart that illustrates our expenses by general category from the past two years. Note that in the 2015-16 fiscal year, the department received a large grant for equipment. I have removed as much of that as possible from the chart to keep the annual values comparable. The figure for the current year 2017-2018 is based on expenses to date as May 18, 2018.

Expense	2015-16	2016-17	2017-2018
Fire/EMS - Eqpt/Training	\$9,685.26	\$11,801.28	\$10,040.21
Business	\$12,224.03	\$7,973.88	\$7,230.87
Vehicle Maint/Fuel	\$3,395.30	\$10,014.60	\$9,138.43
Station Maint/utilities	\$12,480.77	\$19,682.77	\$9,653.66
TOTAL	\$37,785.36	\$49,472.53	\$36,063.17

Due to MMA regulations and liability, we are no longer able to do any electrical work or building maintenance beyond minor repairs. Nearly all of this we used to do in house, but now must hire outside contractors. The same is true with vehicle maintenance. While this allows us to concentrate on fire department business, it also means we have to pay for any services we need.

The WVFD has many generous supporters and donors. I cannot fully thank them for all the generosity. But I don't want that just going to making ends meet. I want to harness those donations to allow the WVFD to pursue significant items that better the department. Several of the improvements we are currently evaluating include: adding garage door openers on the two remaining manual doors to improve responder time and safety, replacing two of the three exterior doors, replacing several SCBA bottles that are near the end of their service life and adding a set of firefighter turnout gear.

Another consideration is that we do not have a savings account to act as a reserve or for emergency funds. We know that there will be major financial events in the future – whether it is a major vehicle maintenance bill, a repair to the building, or the need for new equipment such as switching over from our analog to digital radios. We currently do not have the financial capability to handle these types of events.

The other major change to the department budget is to provide stipends to active members of the department. We are all proud volunteers. However, I know over the next few years I will face the retirement of several key members. I currently have another member actively looking to move away and yet another with plans to move away in several years. That represents half the department. I must do something to attract new members. The requirements to be an active firefighter or EMT can be overwhelming, especially for those that are doing it as a “second career”.

I will be offering active members a yearly stipend of \$1000 that will be awarded quarterly. Stipends will also be prorated based on involvement in organized training and calls. This provides an incentive but isn't overbearing. For example, a member that makes at least 75% of calls and training would be eligible for the full stipend. Offering stipends will be the easiest to manage and most cost-effective way to administer rather than tracking hours and dealing with payroll. This is to make it easier for both the fire department and its members.

With the possible exception of the Monhegan Island Fire Department, the Westport Volunteer Fire Department is the only unpaid department in Lincoln county. We also provide both fire and medical responder. We answer to approximately 85-100 calls per year as well as other public services such as providing a warming station. We take pride in our service to our community and seek to continue to offer the best service we can in the future.

Sincerely,

Stacey Hutchison

Fire Chief, WVFD