

# TOWN OF SPENCER

## *Fire and Emergency Services*

*“On Call Professionals Serving Spencer with Pride”*

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Fire Chief  
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Adam Gaudette, Town Administrator  
Re: FY 2015 Budget

December 31, 2013

In reviewing the budget process this year the Fire Departments budget can be broken down into two categories. An operational budget which is our “day to day” budget, ie: utility costs and maintenance for our building and equipment, another section could possibly be considered service based or performance based. This would include the salaries for the firefighters and the equipment that needs to either be repaired or replaced and testing of the equipment. As is with most municipal departments we are not filled with frills and constantly need more funding of which we seek through grants etc to fill those gaps. Since coming to Spencer in 2002 I have been fortunate to achieve a total of **\$424,753.73** in grants that have helped fill in those areas where the town was unable to fund the items or programs. To further cut our department budget will affect training and our ability to respond to emergencies when needed.

1) Our salary budget of **\$216,715.00** consists of the following line items: Salaries for the Fire Chief, Deputy Chief, SEMA Director of Operations. These are more operational based rather than service based. Clerk and Custodian are paid hourly and the Clerk provides part time clerical assistance and other assigned duties and the custodian provides custodial services for the station and grounds as well as the training facility. Salaries for the firefighters are based on the amount of training scheduled on an annual basis and the amount of incidents throughout the course of the year. This would be considered more serviced based since they are paid per call per request for service. Over the last 10 years we have averaged 477 incidents and an average turnout is 8 firefighters. This year the

average pay is \$13.75 per hour. Based on this rationale the average pay for incidents is around \$53k and another \$26k for training. We lost \$30k four years ago cutting our training from twice a month and paying for firefighters to attend outside training to only once a month and not paying for any outside training. FY 14 our budget was reduced by \$5k from our salary budget for firefighters due to the school budget issue. This will be dangerously close to allowing us to pay for any drawn out incidents or an up tick in calls. That reduction in Firefighter Salaries brought them from \$91,532 to \$84,532 this current fiscal year. We should be expanding this not reducing it; training in itself is invaluable and needs to be ongoing and deliverable to the call firefighters. Our calls are unpredictable and have been steady in the numbers of incidents; the length of duration is what is the challenging factor; along with the type of incident.

Description	Staffing	Hours	FY 11	FY 12	FY 13	FY14	(Proposed)FY15
Fire Chief	1	Salary	\$66,278	\$69,216	\$77,550	\$80,262	\$81,016
Deputy Chief	1	Salary	\$8,060	\$8,189	\$8,426	\$8,578	\$8,578
SEMA Dir of Op	1	Salary	\$2,075	\$2,108	\$2,169	\$2,208	\$2,208
Firefighter Salaries	42	Hrly	\$87,380	\$117,441	\$89,614	\$86,532	\$91,532
Clerk	1	24	\$19,668	\$20,219	\$21,142	\$21,525	\$21,525
Facilities Maint	1	19	\$8,809	\$11,293	\$11,620	\$11,856	\$11,856

We respond to all types of incidents and they only increase in variety annually. Fire Departments have become an all hazards department and that's why our name was changed to Spencer Fire and Emergency services as we do a lot more than respond to fires. There is no other Department in Town that can respond to every emergency call no matter the type. We are the can do department. In the last twenty years responses have been reduced to a single company for most calls for strictly financial reasons. Remember our mission Statement. *Life Safety, Property Conservation and Incident Stabilization.*

From 5am to 6pm during the weekday each call is a full alarm pulling in every available firefighter, from 6pm to 5am and from Friday at 6pm to Monday at 5am it is the on duty company that handles the majority of calls.

The types of incidents that we respond to are the following:

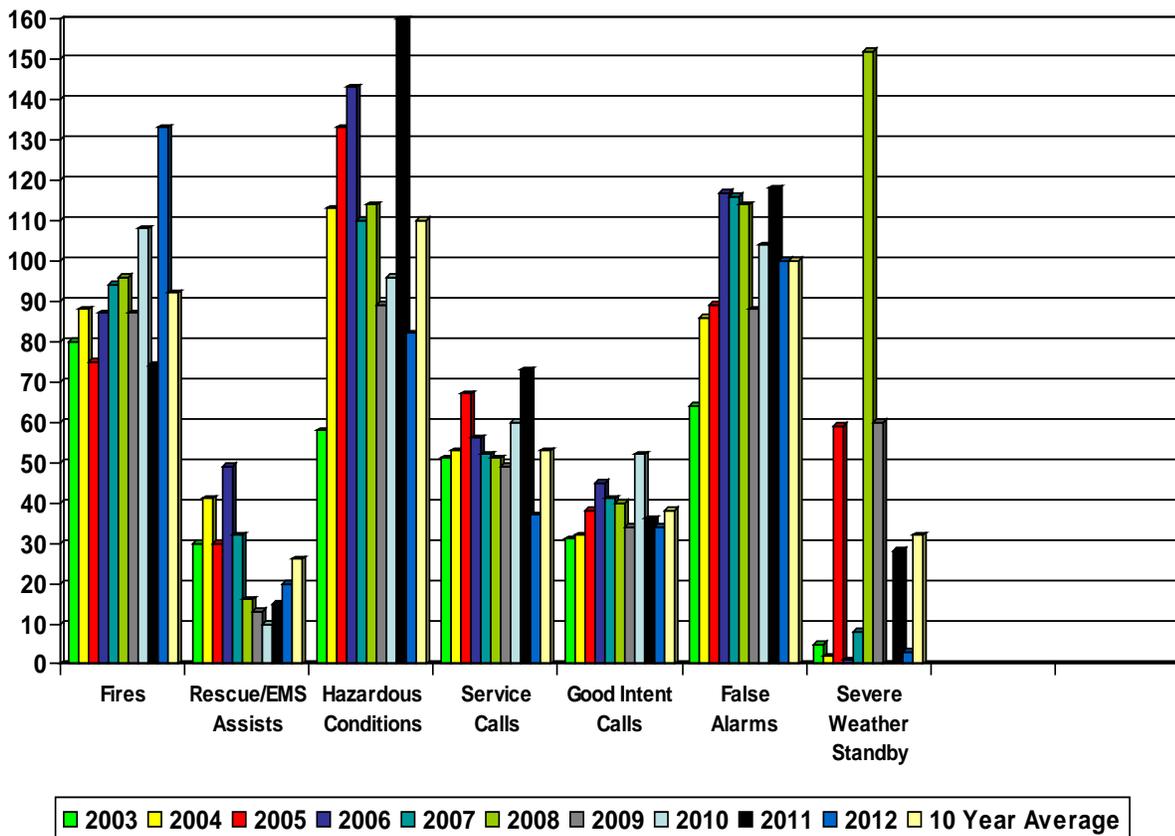
- ***Aircraft accidents***; of which we have had two plane crashes in the last 10 years with one being a fatality.
- ***Automatic Fire Alarms***; these come in from all types of commercial, industrial and residential structures. We have cut back on these responses in the last 20 years to now we respond only one engine and one company for any automatic alarms.
- ***Illegal burning***; has become an issue throughout the years with the majority in the summer months and is usually handled by only the on duty officer unless the dispatcher feels a company needs to respond or the officer requests a response. Minimal costs involved, typically followed with a citation to the person recouping our costs.
- ***Brush/grass/woods fires***; more prevalent in the springtime but we do get some in the summer and fall but minimal. These are dispatched for a single company response as well unless further assistance is needed.
- ***Bomb Threat, suspicious packages etc.***; we do get these but typically maybe one a year and will only require a response from the fire officer on duty unless an engine company/single company response is needed per the fire officer.
- ***Carbon Monoxide alarms***; again a single company response, this MUST be investigated and can not be ignored as this could be a life safety issue.
- ***Vehicle fires***, Single company response again unless in a garage or near a residence requiring a full department response.
- ***Chimney fires***; these require a two company response as this is a fire within a structure that could turn into something more serious that we are trying to eliminate. The on duty company responds as well as the Ladder Company.
- ***Stove or dryer fires***; full alarm response unless determined to already be out in which that case a single company will respond.
- ***Gasoline or fuel spills***; single company response.

- ***Explosions***; no exact location then a single company response, if within a structure a full alarm is dispatched.
- ***Hazardous materials incidents***; single company response unless more personnel and equipment is needed, ie: water emergency in 2007.
- ***Gas Odors***; in/or outside. Single company response.
- ***Requests for a landing zone for a medical helicopter***; single company response.
- ***Motor vehicle collisions***; single company response unless extrication is needed then a two company response for an engine and the Rescue. We do bill for fluid spills from MVCs so we do recoup some of the expenses involved. We also have a legal responsibility to clean up hazardous material spills.
- ***Medical Aid Calls***; we used to assist the local SRS for years on third ambulance calls to get there prior to mutual aid but stopped doing this a few years ago, unless requested by SRS or the Police to respond.
- ***Power line, poles down and transformer fires***; single company response.
- ***Water/ice Rescues***; full alarm response as this is a life or death situation. We do also respond to animals through the ice since those can become life threatening as well since the owners will typically go out on the ice to rescue their pet or another animal.
- ***Mutual Aid***; since we use mutual aid into our community greater than those where we respond out to. We would never deny someone our service. This is typically a single company response as well, depending on the situation and the apparatus requested.
- ***Any form of Rescue***; will generate two companies to respond as most of these can become very labor intensive.
- ***Smoke investigations***; single company response unless inside a structure then a full alarm.

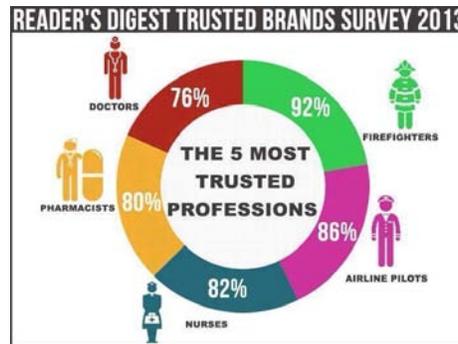
- **Searches;** the on duty officer is requested to be informed and then a determination of a response. This could be a full alarm needing personnel and Emergency Management personnel as well to respond.
- **Structure fires;** full alarm.
- **Strike team or task force requests,** depending on the request this could either be a single or two company response.
- **Rapid Intervention teams;** single company response to assist another community at a structure fire to be on stand by for firefighters that become disorientated or trapped.

*If the dispatcher does not know what to do based on the request she/he has the option and can not go wrong to just hit a full alarm bringing all available firefighters to the station.*

These are the majority of the calls we respond to on a daily basis. As I said we are the catch all department. If someone is trapped in an elevator, they call us, stuck on a roof, they call us, finger caught in a vent, they call us. If they don't know who to call we are the ones that get the call. Attached to this document is the Department's 10 year call volume of the graph below represents.



For us to say we will not respond to certain types of requests goes against our creed of helping people in their time of need. Our Fire Department has been serving Spencer since 1831 whenever requested by the populace and to deny them service would do a discredit to us in the eyes of the public. We are the most trusted profession out there; we can not lose that trust.



And as you can see since the 1990's with reduction in the department's budget we have reduced responses to most calls other than structure fires to one company responses. This limits the response to a group of approximately 10 people, or the on duty company, usually less due to work schedules etc. (on average about 6). Due to liabilities we can not go less in any of these responses in a justifiable manner. I have looked at reducing or cancelling responses to cellar pumps, animal calls or power lines down but the liability of someone getting electrocuted from trying to remove the water from their home themselves or falling out of a tree for a cat or falling through ice trying to save a dog is not worth it. Power lines down are a huge liability and since the New Jersey Fire Department that did not protect the public from downed wires and lost a \$20.5 million dollar lawsuits we will stand by lines down. The related article is located at the end of this document.

- Other items that have been discussed during the school budget debates were to eliminate the Clerk's position. Presently the current clerk is part time working 24 hours per week without any benefits. FY 15 has that position at \$21,525. She is also the permanent part time dispatcher for the 3-11 shifts weekends at the Police Department as well. If she gets laid off

then that would need to be filled as well with overtime at the police station. We would no longer be able to bill 21E calls which generate revenue to the General Fund. She is also the Town's Public Information Officer and the Fire Department Blood Borne Pathogen Officer as well as in charge of the inventory. She also does our payroll and takes care of the Town's ID program for Town employees. She is an additional CPR instructor and handles the Town's Connect CTY changes for the public as well as an additional dispatcher during the daytime and comes in at night for structure fires to assist the Police Dispatcher. The Clerk maintains the NIMS certifications for every Town employee. She handles all the Firehouse software incident reporting, schedules the SAFE education program with the schools and the Department's open house. This would leave the station unmanned most days as I am in an out of the station and totally unmanned when I am out of town. I can't see closing the station to the public as proposed as I am in the same boat then as I started and the public will just have to catch me at some point.

- Eliminating the custodian's position will reduce our budget by \$11,856. He also works only part time and collects no benefits. But by doing so the jobs will have to be borne by someone. Mowing the grass, cleaning the station daily, making repairs to the buildings and grounds will need to be accomplished by someone. He currently makes \$12.00 per hour. For me to hire a firefighter to perform these duties even if we use a call firefighter based on their duty weeks they will be paid more per hour than he currently gets. It will cost more money to have a firefighter perform these tasks and most likely some will not get done or be accomplished by me which in turn will not allow me to do the items that I need to get done on a daily basis.

Other savings mentioned for salaries are the following:

- ❖ No more station coverage for severe weather events: FEMA no longer reimburses for this expense so we will no longer provide the coverage. This is not figured in since this only occurs during severe weather events. Likely around \$1000.00 per event. These were done to allow for a quicker response during times of severe weather by having firefighters in the station ready to respond.
- ❖ No shoveling of fire hydrants. As we currently pay the firefighters to do this we will leave it up to the Water Department to take care of as they do belong to the Water Dept.
- ❖ No burning permits on the weekend. This is somewhat tough to swallow considering what we generate in revenue pays for itself even though the funds go into the general funds not our budget. We will fill in where there was a senior worker before with a couple of firefighters that would normally be used for inspections anyways. There will no longer be inspections at all of materials to be burned. Costs for the firefighters will be approximately \$1,500. Below are the total permits issued for the last two years as well as the amount issued on weekends, % total of weekend permits to weekday and the amount activated to burn on weekends versus weekday and the amount collected weekends to weekday.

Burning Permits	Seasonal	Wkends	% of total	Activated		Collected	
				wknd	Days	wknd	Days
<b>2012</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>1177</b>	<b>\$1,840</b>	<b>\$3,080</b>
<b>2013</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>899</b>	<b>\$1,070</b>	<b>\$2,510</b>

2) Looking closely at the Expense side of the budget **\$325,385.00** we see the following. *\$150,000* is set aside for EMS services, leaving a Department budget of **\$175,385.00** for the following line items.

a.) *\$25,000.00* for apparatus maintenance: As our vehicles age and are not replaced on a cycle of every 20 years pushing them out to 30 years we have more of a

need for repairs. This section has slowly crept upward over the last few years to reflect what we really spend on repairs. This line item goes for the normal maintenance of vehicles (12) oil changes, batteries, tires, brakes etc. to major repairs of which we have a multitude each year, springs, electrical work and transmission work etc. On any typical year we spend the entire amount budgeted and then some. As of today we have spent \$16,160.06 of this budget. (64% allocated). We could save some funds by not doing our regular maintenance on vehicles which in most cases as is your own vehicle will cost you more in the end with major repairs. When major repairs do come upon us, we could pull vehicles out of service and not do the repairs. Reliable apparatus is paramount to allow us to respond to emergencies within the community. The replacement of apparatus has been pushed out each cycle upwards today of 30 years for a front line apparatus, 6 years past the standard for Fire apparatus under NFPA, 10 years past where the community was replacing apparatus in the 1970's and 80's.

b.) *\$15,000.00* for electricity. This is a utility commodity that increases about 2% each year. This is priced based now on the Fire Station and Annex being used full time. Level funded.

c.) *\$19,300* for heat. Another utility commodity that will be for both buildings being used full time. Level funded.

d.) *\$3,060.00* for telephone service. This has been level funded as in prior years. Level funded.

e.) *\$2,600.00* for internet services, this provides our internet services through Charter Communications. Level funded.

f.) *\$4,200.00* town sewerage. I have tried unsuccessfully to get them to eliminate or reduce this amount. They still bill us for the water usage within the building which does not realistically meet what we actually use for the sewer system. We did get them to agree to bill us for the minimum for the Annex Building. Level funded.

g.) *\$1,041.00* copier maintenance agreement, no reduction can be done here since that is the contract for the copier. Level funded.

h.) \$3,000.00 for office supplies needed on an annual basis to run the department. Level funded.

i.) \$20,700.00 for testing and repairs to equipment. Annually we test our ground ladders and aerial ladder as per NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) specifications. Our hoses, fire truck pumps, self contained breathing apparatus and air compressor all require annual testing to provide the safety to our firefighters as required again under NFPA. In 2008 we were successful in obtaining an over ride to provide us the funding to provide the necessary testing that was not being done. To stop doing the testing of this equipment would leave the town in a vulnerable position of liability. As we saw in Sturbridge where the Fire Chief lost his job due to the lack of this testing we do not want to be put into the same position as he was. These funds also are used to repair the small equipment on each and every apparatus when needed. We have millions of dollars in vehicles and hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment. We must be able to maintain the equipment fire ready to be available for use at all times. The radios we use on a daily basis are also repaired from this account. That includes pagers, portable radios, mobile radios, base radios and the console. We have over 70 pagers, 42 portable radios, 30 mobile radios, 5 base radios that are all maintained and serviced annually. Level funded.

j.) \$7,000.00 building maintenance is used for both buildings and the training center. Paper goods, janitorial supplies, repairs to lawn mowers, snow blowers and other ancillary equipment used by our custodian. The building still needs capital repairs as do most town buildings which would provide us with additional energy savings and effectiveness of the department.

k.) \$4,480.00 for travel, meetings, seminars and dues. This allows me to attend the Fire Chief's Association of Massachusetts seminar which is required to maintain my MA Fire Chief's credentialing and to attend the bi monthly arson seminar classes to maintain my ability to investigate fires, as well as the annual Arson Conference on Cape Cod for certification. Level funded.

l.) \$21,970.00 for the VFIS insurance for firefighters is a contracted amount and can not be reduced. This is for accidental death and disability benefits since the firefighters are not covered under workmen's compensation.

m.) \$3,700.00 for SEMA expenses. This has been reduced greatly since I have taken over SEMA with a high of \$10,000.00 prior to our merger; this provides supplies, equipment and sheltering funds. Level funded.

n.) \$26,040.00 for equipment. This is to replace or add equipment for the apparatus and firefighters. Some examples of items that need to be purchased annually are gloves, hoods and boots. All gear worn by firefighters has a 10 year life span per NFPA. (This includes the \$6,000.00 per year to replace three sets of turnout gear of which we really need to do \$10,000.00 per year to be able to replace 5 sets per year as we have close to 50 firefighters and would allow us to meet that 10 year mark without needing a larger amount occasionally when a majority of the gear needs to be replaced.) We still should be replacing gear on an annual basis. This next fiscal year we need to replace the Cutters Edge vent saw on Engine 3 that went out of service in August of 2013, replacement cost is \$2,500.00. Age of that saw was 15 years old. We need to replace the port a tank on Engine 4 which is 25 years old, and replacement cost is \$1,500.00. Each time we need to replace equipment it is expensive. This account also encompasses the Rescue Truck and their equipment, this past year we replaced two cold water suits and this coming year we need to replace two more. Level funded.

o.) \$8,800.00 for expenses goes for everything that doesn't fall under our normal expenditures. Some examples is the bottled water for the station, I am Responding for firefighters to use to show who is responding to the station, e dispatch to notify firefighters outside of the reaches of our radio system of incidents, postage machine etc. Klems, Ahearn's, Bug Y bills etc. Level funded.

This explains our budget and how it is devised on an annual basis. Our budget represents 4.7% of the town's budget and is funded per resident at \$33/resident for FY 14.

## FY 2014 Comparison Community budgets

Community	2010 population	FY 14 Salaries	FY 14 Expenses	FY 14 Total FD Budget
Spencer *	11,688	\$210,961	\$175,385	\$386,346
Athol ***	11,584	\$1,421,466	\$229,945	\$1,651,411
Charlton ***	12,981	\$1,252,080	\$216,918	\$1,468,998
Dudley ***	11,390	\$572,604	\$154,500	\$727,104
Leicester	10,970	\$133,633	\$76,915	\$210,548
Millbury	13,261	\$342,368	\$97,750	\$440,180
Northbridge ***	15,707	\$1,052,384	\$235,811	\$1,288,195
Oxford ***	13,709	\$836,021	\$169,200	\$1,005,221
Palmer **	12,140	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ware ***	9,872	\$1,176,589	\$165,228	\$1,341,817
Webster	16,767	\$470,303	\$189,627	\$659,930

\* Does not include in expenses the \$150,000 for EMS services provided through Spencer Rescue.

\*\* Palmer is not a municipal run department, operates under the Palmer Water District and encompasses the areas of Palmer Water District and Thorndike. Does not include Three Rivers or Bondsville Fire Districts which have separate Fire Departments and budgets.

\*\*\* These Departments run Fire based EMS of which is included in their overall budgets.

### Summary:

Our budget line items are based on what we do to provide the service the community expects from us as stated in the 2012 Residential Survey for excellent service. We have minimized our budgets to the best of our abilities to still be able to affectively do the mission that we have been given to accomplish. We have responded to incidents with the bare minimum we can without affecting the safety of firefighters or the community. The ability to repair and replace equipment will allow us to continue to operate the apparatus and equipment to serve the public. Any reductions to our budget will adversely affect our ability to respond to serve the community.

## ***Respond To Wires Down?***

*Tuesday, November 8, 2011*

*A Monmouth County (New Jersey) court is holding a fire department 60% responsible and the electric power company 40% responsible for injuries suffered when a man stepped on a downed 7200 volt electric line in his home driveway. The damage award was \$20.5M.*

*THE ISSUE: The court determined that the fire department departed the scene without taking sufficient action to prevent the accident.*

*The jury awarded the \$20.5 million in damages Friday after the man lost an arm and a leg in 2007 after stepping on those live electrical wires that had fallen on his driveway during a storm. The man was awarded \$18.5 million and his wife, Patricia, was awarded \$2 million.*

*A jury deliberated more than 5 hours last week before they returned the unanimous verdict that found Jersey Central Power & Light Co. 40 percent responsible for the injuries and the Northside Engine Company, a fire company in Tinton Falls, 60 percent responsible.*

*The settlement amount was to cover medical costs, disability, deformity, physical suffering and the cost of prosthetic devices which have to be changed every three to five years.*

*===NOTE: The court determined that the FD had left the scene of the downed high tension wires knowing that the 7,200-volt wire was still on the ground and in the mans driveway....the FD called electric utility company, but they then left leaving the area unprotected.*