



Public Forum on the Proposed FY26 Budget and Override Requests

April 14, 2025 at the Flint Public Library

Justin Sultzbach, Town Administrator

Jackie Bresnahan, Assistant Town Administrator

Sarah Wood, Finance Director



Annual Town Meeting 2025

Annual Town Meeting

Tuesday, May 13 at 7 pm

Howe-Manning Elementary School

Annual Town Election

Tuesday, May 20 at 7 am - 8 pm

Fuller Meadow School



Town Budget Process

- September-November: forecasting and preparation by Finance team
- December: Department heads submit their requests
- January: Administration and Finance review requests
- February & March: Budget is presented, deliberated by Select Board and Finance Committee. Updates are made as education, insurance, and other cost drivers are finalized
- April: ATM Warrant and Budget are finalized
- May: Town Meeting and Election
- July 1: Fiscal Year begins



Municipal Budgeting

- Towns must pass a balanced budget
- A Town department cannot exceed its budget (including schools)
 - Must use reserve fund or transfer from other line items in a surplus
 - Snow & Ice is the exception to the rule
- Town cannot end the year in a deficit
- Town Meeting has authority to make appropriations based on the estimated taxes and revenue of the Town
- Town Election has the authority to override Proposition 2 ½ to approve for more spending than state law provides for



FY 2026 Operating Overrides

What is Proposition 2 ½?

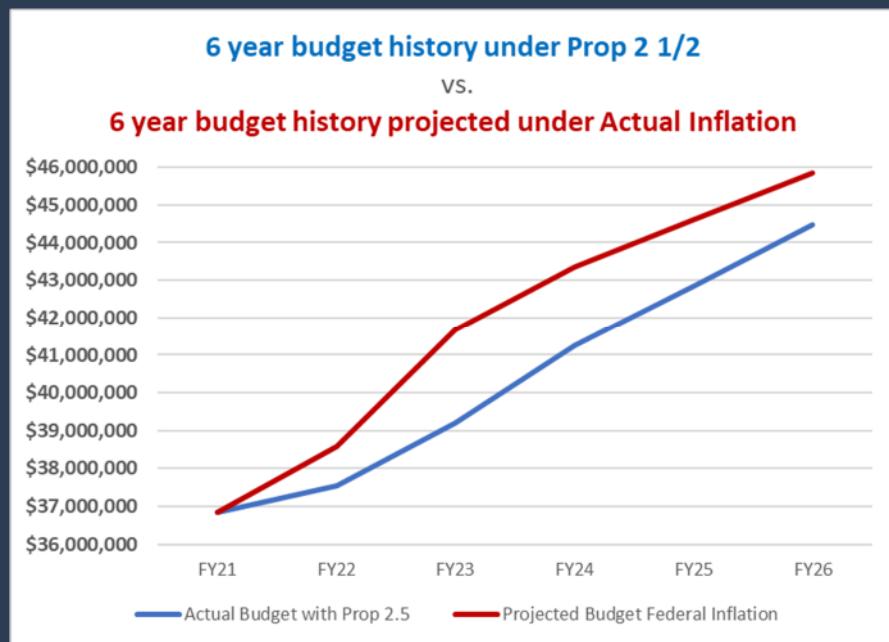
- A State law, enacted by citizen initiative petition in 1980, that regulates local property tax administration and limits the amount of revenue – the levy – a city or town may raise from local property taxes each year

What is an override?

- A vote to increase the amount of property tax revenue in excess of the automatic 2 ½ percent allowed under Proposition 2 ½. An override permanently raises the Levy Limit unless later reversed



The limitations of Prop 2 1/2



Setting debt aside, since FY21 our annual budget increased from \$36,841,236 to our proposed FY26 Budget of \$44,462,991 (less debt of \$3,859,476) under the limitations of Prop 2 1/2.

If our budget followed actual Federal Inflation Rates, which ran as high as 8% over that time period, our proposed budget would have reached **\$45,842,471** for the same services. This is **\$1,379,480** higher than the restraints of Prop 2 1/2 allowed.

Rising costs in materials, health care, and labor over the past five years have created historic pressures on municipal budgets throughout Massachusetts.

A breakdown of the FY 26 requests

Purpose	Total Cost	Tax Rate Impact	AVG Household Impact
Public Safety	\$975,000	\$0.30/\$1,000	\$289
Middleton Elementary Schools	\$537,000	\$0.16/\$1,000	\$154
Masconomet Regional SD	\$467,193	\$0.14/\$1,000	\$135
Total	\$1,979,469	\$0.60/\$1,000	\$578

Current average single family assessed value: \$962,949

Current average single family tax bill: \$11,449

Proposed Omnibus Budget average single family tax bill: \$11,863

Proposed Total Impact for average single family tax bill: \$12,441





Shall the Town of Middleton be allowed to assess an additional \$975,000 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of funding Public Safety expenses for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025?



FY26 Budget and Override Request

Justin Sultzbach, Town Administrator

Douglas K. LeColst, Fire Chief

William Sampson, Police Chief



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Ongoing challenges

- This is the second year for this request
- Additional public safety staff is needed to maintain level of services for current call volume
- In the past we utilized call firefighters/reserve officers to fill in gaps in staffing capacity. This is no longer an option because:
 - Training requirements have changed
 - Residency of town employees has changed
 - We can no longer rely on a robust roster of part-time members for coverage

FY26 Override Request – Public Safety

- Four (4) additional full-time Firefighter/Paramedics
 - \$585,000 including salaries, insurance benefits, equipment, training, certifications
- Three (3) additional full-time Police Officers
 - \$390,000 including salaries, insurance benefits, equipment, training, certifications



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Why The Need for Additional Firefighters?

- Increased difficulty filling station shifts
 - Too much reliance on part-time staff
 - 2-24-hour shifts per day
 - The role of the part-time employee has changed over the years
 - Very few looking for FT employment with Middleton Fire
- Decreased callback participation
 - Leads to difficulty staffing emergency vehicles
 - Leads to insufficient coverage during emergency calls
- Increased hazards and risks within the community
- Risk of increased burnout



Staffing Needs on Emergency Calls

- Medical Emergencies
 - At least 4-5 firefighters
 - The number of personnel increases based on the severity of the call.



Photo by MEB www.firenews.org

Typical Shift Configuration

Ideal Shift Strength is 5 members

- 3 full-timers
- 2 part-timers

Attempts are made to fill vacant shifts at overtime.

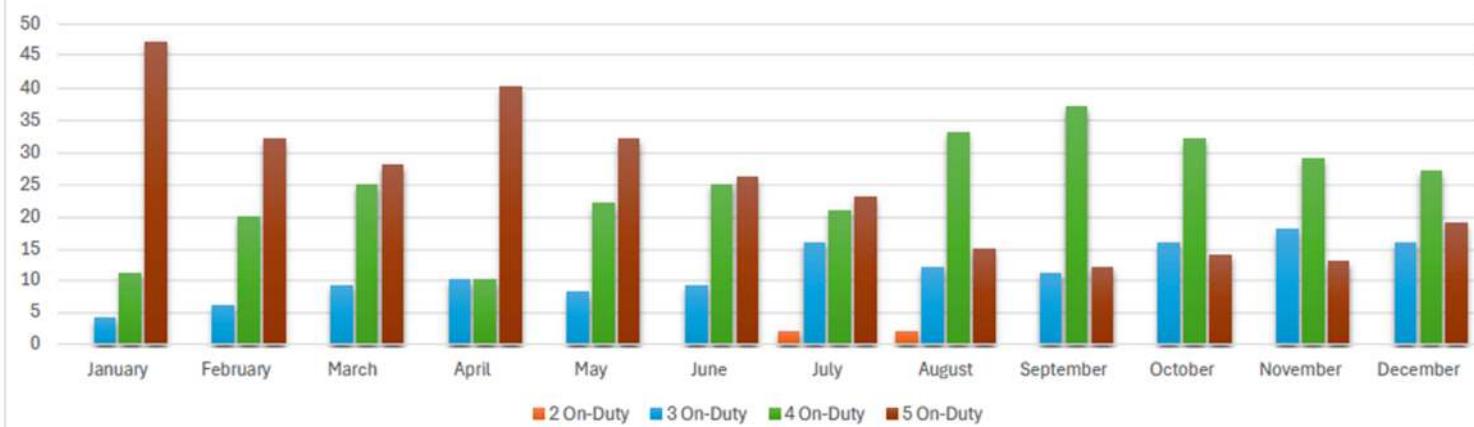
The goal is not to drop below 3 members on duty at any given time.



Shift Strength Breakdown by Month for CY2024

	2 On-Duty	Percentage 2OD	3 On-Duty	Percentage 3OD	4 On-Duty	Percentage 4OD	5 On-Duty	Percentage 5OD	Total Shifts
January	0	0.00%	4	6.45%	11	17.74%	47	75.81%	62
February	0	0.00%	6	10.34%	20	34.48%	32	55.17%	58
March	0	0.00%	9	14.52%	25	40.32%	28	45.16%	62
April	0	0.00%	10	16.67%	10	16.67%	40	66.67%	60
May	0	0.00%	8	12.90%	22	35.48%	32	51.61%	62
June	0	0.00%	9	15.00%	25	41.67%	26	43.33%	60
July	2	3.23%	16	25.81%	21	33.87%	23	37.10%	62
August	2	3.23%	12	19.35%	33	53.23%	15	24.19%	62
September	0	0.00%	11	18.33%	37	61.67%	12	20.00%	60
October	0	0.00%	16	25.81%	32	51.61%	14	22.58%	62
November	0	0.00%	18	30.00%	29	48.33%	13	21.67%	60
December	0	0.00%	16	25.81%	27	43.55%	19	30.65%	62
Average		0.54%		18.42%		39.89%		41.16%	100.00%

Shift Strength



Sudden decrease in 5 on-duty starting in August can be attributed to full time member being out on long-term disability



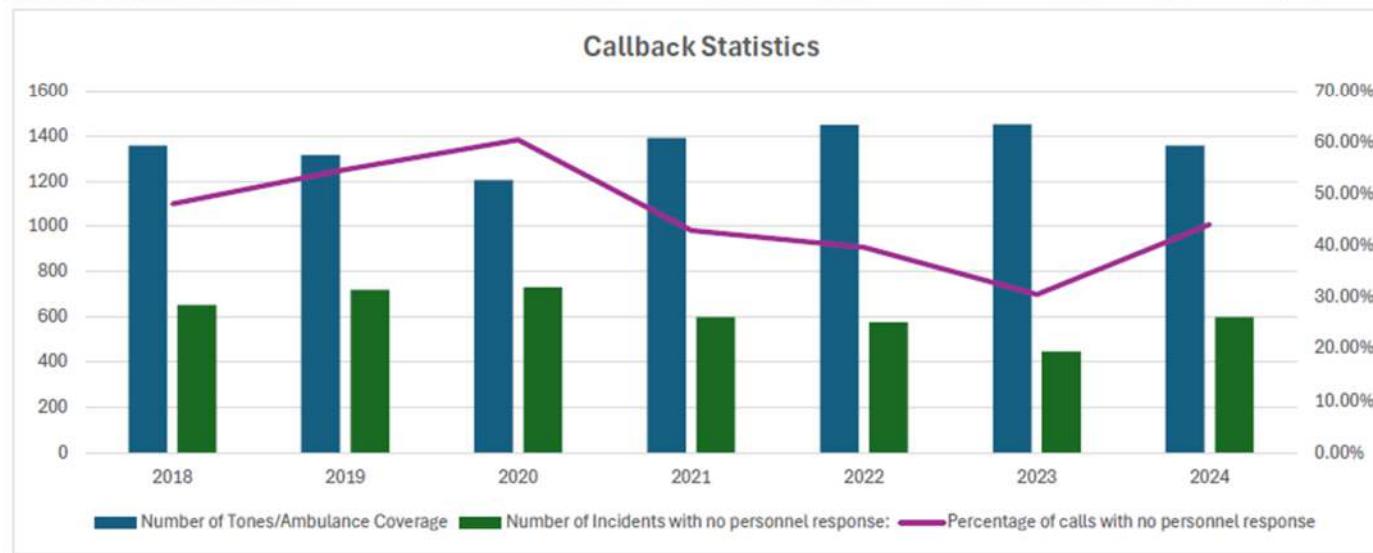
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Callback Statistics for CY2024

An "All Tone" is sounded when there is a need for additional personnel at the scene or to cover the station during an emergency

Ambulance Coverage is utilized when the ambulance transports out of town. The station is filled on a one-for-one basis.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of Tones/Ambulance Coverage	1358	1317	1206	1393	1450	1452	1358
Number of Incidents with no personnel response:	654	721	730	599	576	445	600
Percentage of calls with no personnel response	48.16%	54.75%	60.53%	43.00%	39.73%	30.65%	44.18%
Average Callback per member:	3.33%	3.38%	3.27%	4.35%	3.88%	4.35%	3.76%

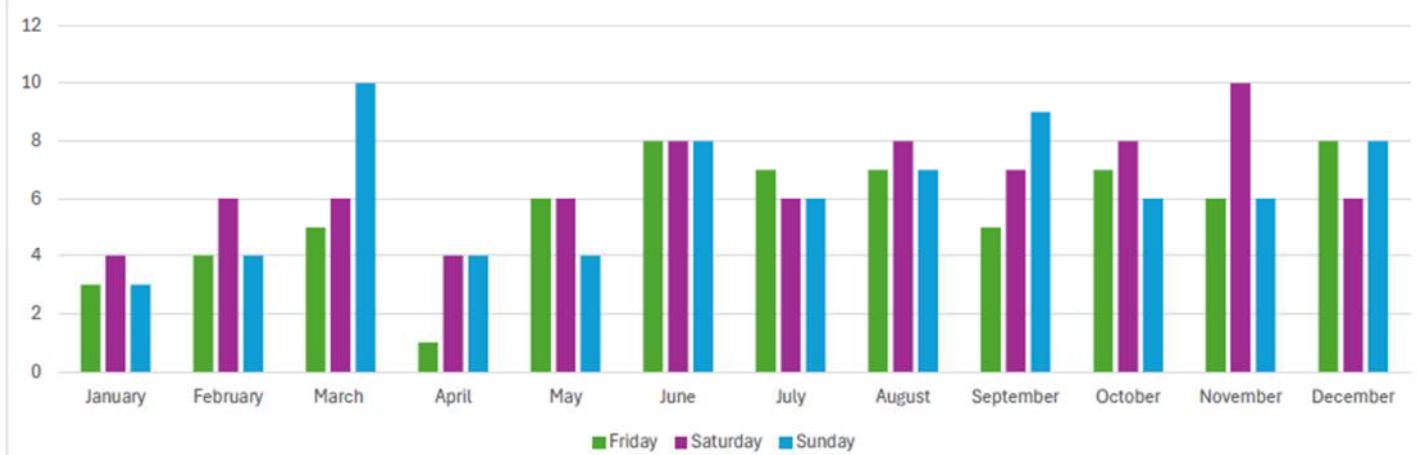


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Weekend Shift with Less Than 5 Members On-Duty

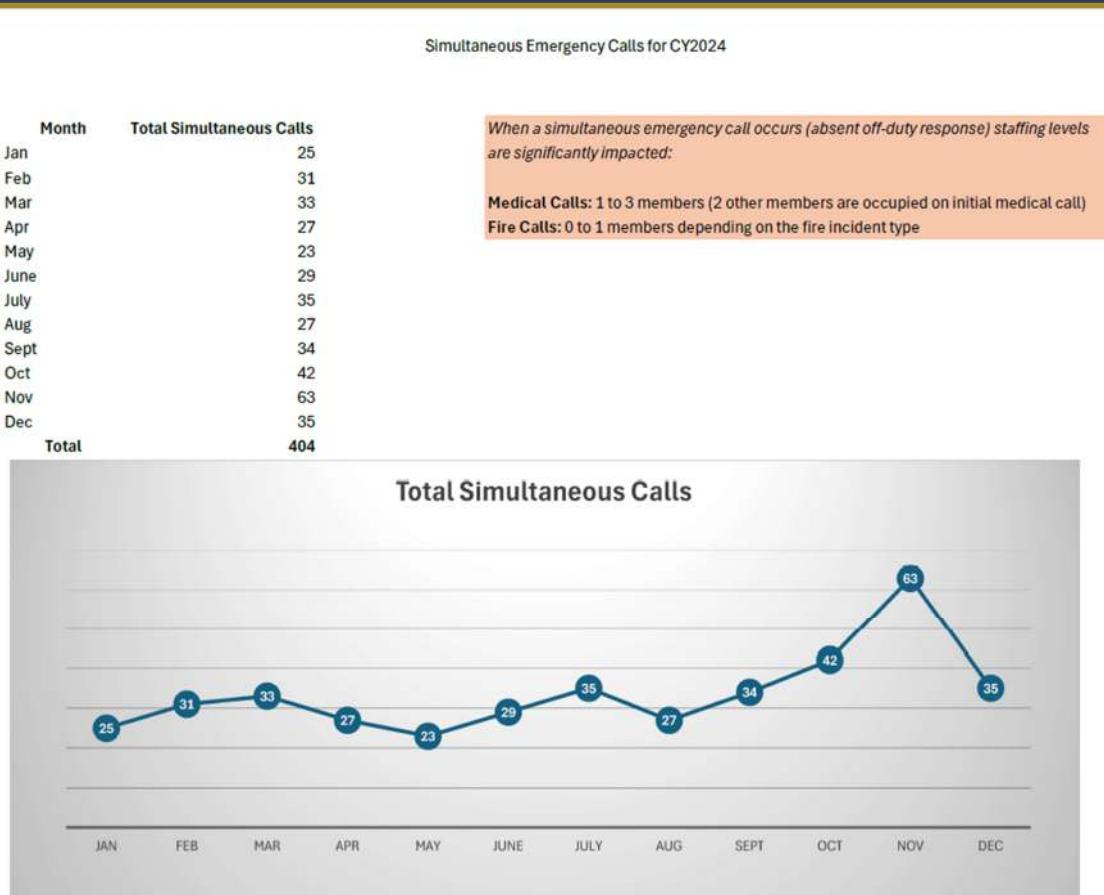
	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
January	3 38%	4 50%	3 38%
February	4 50%	6 75%	4 50%
March	5 50%	6 60%	10 100%
April	1 13%	4 50%	4 50%
May	6 60%	6 75%	4 50%
June	8 100%	8 80%	8 80%
July	7 88%	6 75%	6 75%
August	7 70%	8 80%	7 88%
September	5 63%	7 88%	9 90%
October	7 88%	8 100%	6 75%
November	6 60%	10 100%	6 75%
December	8 100%	6 75%	8 80%
Total	67 65%	79 76%	75 71%

Weekend Shift with Less Than 5 Members On-Duty



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Simultaneous Emergency Calls



- Defined as an additional emergency call(s) while the initial crew is committed to the first call.
- Decreased shift strength combined with decreased callback leads to increased difficulty in responding to calls.
- Increased reliance on mutual-aid resources.
- Decreased ambulance revenue.



What Would Hiring 4 Firefighters Accomplish?

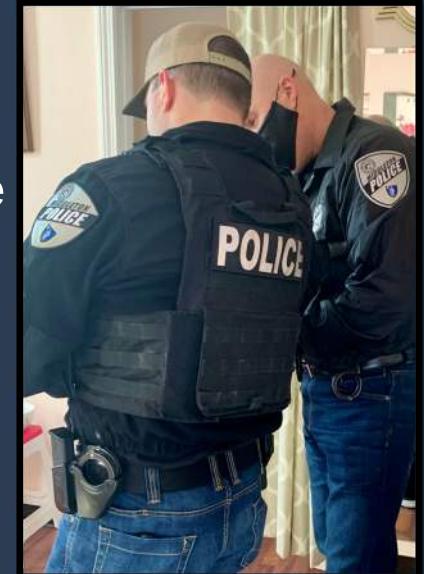
- Increase Full-Time staffing base from 3 to 4 members
- Allow for more consistent staffing
- Less reliance on part-time staffing
- Less need to fill part-time staff with overtime
- Decreased need for shift holdovers



****While these additional positions would help immensely, they will not eliminate the ongoing staffing issues****

Why the need for additional Police Officers?

- Applications for police officers' positions are down nationwide and there is new training criteria of the MPTC and POST
- Reserve Officers are becoming harder to find, creating an increase in the overtime budget and a reduction of current capacity. Adding 3 new full-time positions will provide adequate staffing levels for patrol shifts and specialized units to increase public safety.
- This request is being made to keep staffing adequate for future growth and to avoid jeopardizing public safety in the future.



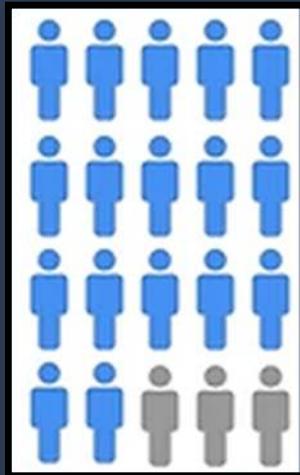
Middleton Police Department Staffing Breakdown

- Current: Seventeen (17) full-time police officers (including the Chief and Captain positions) and five (5) reserve officers.
- New POST regulations mean a reduction in the ability to train/hire reserve officers. This creates difficulties for back filling and recruitment.
- In the past, the Middleton Police relied on reserve officers to augment the department to increase coverage and serve as a source of new recruits. This is no longer a viable option under POST.



Why the need for additional Police Officers?

- According to the State and National Average of Police Officers, the Middleton Police Department has:
 - 64% the officers per capita as the state average
 - 68% the officers per capita as the national average
 - 80% the officers per capita as similarly sized cities across the country.
- To match state, national, and peer department sizes Middleton Police Department should have between **20** and **25** total full-time officers.
- The three requested officers would get Middleton up to **20**.



Comparable communities

Why do we need additional personnel?

Compared to other departments, Middleton Police is leanly staffed. Even with three additional full time officers, Middleton would be at the lower end of the middle of the pack for staffing. In addition, community population does not always tell the entire story.

Middleton sees a significant amount of through traffic along Rt 114 between neighboring communities.

Additional staffing would allow for an increased presence.

Community	Population	Square Miles	Police F/T	Police P/T
Lynnfield	13,000	9.86	32	0
Ipswich	13,785	32.11	31	15
North Reading	15,554	13.16	27	0
Tyngsborough	12,442	18.1	25	0
Norfolk	11,550	14.9	21	7
Littleton	10,141	16.52	19	3
Middleton	10,000	13.45	17	6
Boxford	8,203	23.56	11	11

Thank you



Important Dates:

Annual Town Meeting

Tuesday, May 13 at 7 pm

Howe-Manning Elementary School
Gymnasium, 26 Central Street

Annual Town Election

Tuesday, May 20 at 7 am – 8 pm

Fuller Meadow School



Back Up

Essential Functions of a Firefighter

- Perform Emergency Functions
 - Fire Suppression
 - Emergency Medical Services
 - Haz-Mat Mitigation
- Fire Prevention Activities
- Training Activities
- Maintenance Activities
- Perform other duties as assigned



Staffing Needs on Emergency Calls

KEY REQUIREMENTS



Occupancy Type: Single-Family Dwelling
Deployment: Minimum of 16 members or 17 if aerial device is used

The initial full alarm assignment to a structure fire in a typical 2000 ft² (186 m²), two-story, single-family dwelling without a basement and with no exposures must provide for a minimum of 16 members (17 if an aerial device is used).



Occupancy Type: Open-Air Strip Mall
Deployment: Minimum of 27 members or 28 if aerial device is used

The initial full alarm assignment to a structure fire in a typical open-air strip shopping center ranging from 13,000 ft² to 196,000 ft² (1203 m² to 18,209 m²) in size must provide for a minimum of 27 members (28 if an aerial device is used).



Occupancy Type: Garden-Style Apartment
Deployment: Minimum of 27 members or 28 if aerial device is used

The initial full alarm assignment to a structure fire in a typical 1200 ft² (111 m²) apartment within a three-story, garden-style apartment building must provide for a minimum of 27 members (28 if an aerial device is used).



Occupancy Type: High-Rise
Deployment: Minimum of 42 members or 43 if building is equipped with fire pump

The initial full alarm assignment to a fire in a building with the highest floor greater than 75 ft (23 m) above the lowest level of fire department vehicle access must provide for a minimum of 42 members (43 if the building is equipped with a fire pump).

• Fire Emergencies

- Higher probability that additional resources will be needed

• Structure fires

- Today vs. 30 years ago

• Two in, Two out minimum requirements

- Current staffing levels would often result in one firefighter responding to a building fire while awaiting mutual aid resources.



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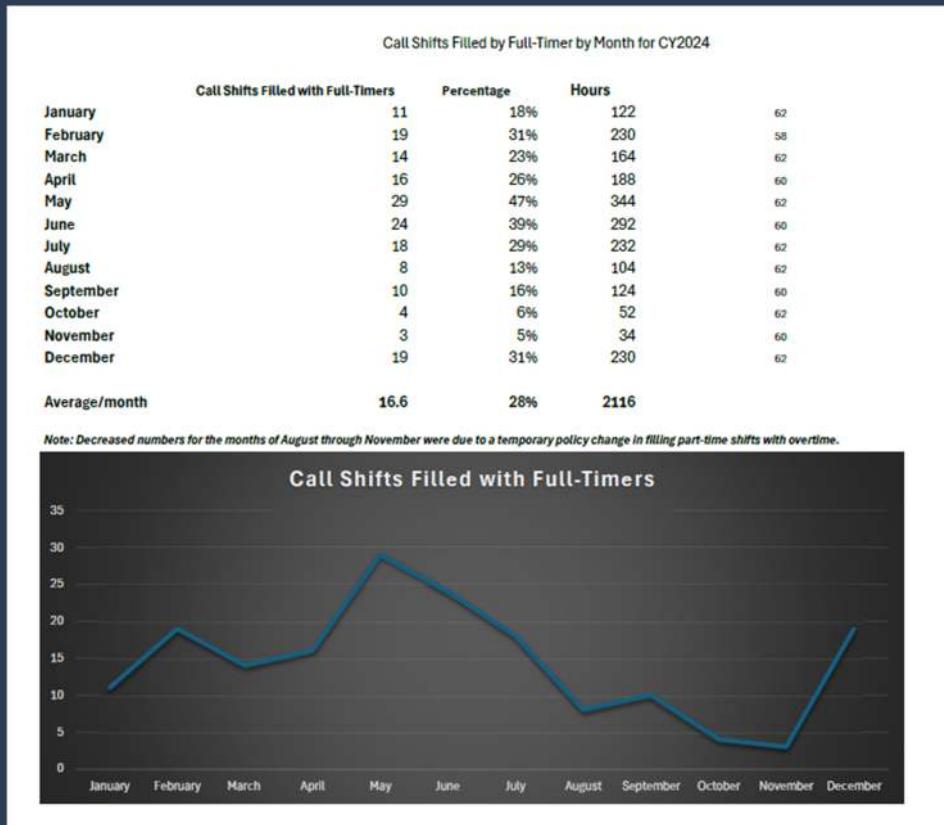
Fire Department Comps

Department	Call Volume	Firefighters on Shift	Full-Time FPO	Full-Time Deputy
North Reading	3010	6	1	1
Lynnfield	2266	7	1	1
Littleton	2458	5	1	1

These departments are combination departments that utilize both full-time and part-time members.

Similar to Middleton, these departments continue to struggle with callback participation.

Part-Time Shifts Filled with Full-Timers



- Monthly breakdown showing call shifts filled with overtime
- On average 28% filled with OT
- Leads to higher overtime costs
- Leads to increase burnout
- Lead to less off-duty participation (callback)
- \$112,000 was spent filling part-time position with overtime

Staffing Breakdown: Resident v. Non-Resident

- Current staffing numbers (Full-Time and Part-Time): 37
- Members who reside in town:
 - Full-Time: 5
 - Part-Time: 1
- Percentage of staff who reside in town: 16%
- Percentage of staff who resided in town 20+ years ago: 100%
- People who want to do this job cannot afford to live in the area.
- This greatly impacts the ability for callback responses.
- Further strengthens the need for consistent shift staffing.



FY26 Supplemental Budget Request(s)

As reserve officers retire, accept full-time positions in other agencies, or resign we must be prepared to either increase the overtime budget substantially or add additional full-time police officers to fill that void. Adding three new full-time positions will reduce overtime, while providing adequate staffing levels for patrol shifts and specialized units to increase proactivity and public safety. With applications for police officers' positions being considerably down nationwide and the new training criteria of the MPTC and POST, this request is being made to keep staffing adequate for future growth and to avoid jeopardizing public safety in the future.

Middleton, in comparison to comparable communities, have fewer police officers than those with similar populations. The following are a few examples:

Community	Population	Geographic Area	Police F/T	Police P/T
Middleton	10,000	13.45 sq. mi.	17	5
North Reading	15,554	13.16 sq. mi.	27	0
Littleton	10,141	16.52 sq. mi.	19	3
Boxford	8,203	23.56 sq. mi.	11	11
Ipswich	13,785	32.11 sq. mi.	31	15
Lynnfield	13,000	9.86 sq. mi.	32	0
Tyngsborough	12,442	18.1 sq. mi.	25	0
Norfolk	11,550	14.9 sq. mi.	21	7

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