



TOWN OF TRURO

P.O. Box 2030, Truro, MA 02666

Tel: 508-349-7004, Extension: 110 or 124 Fax: 508-349-5505

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 12, 2021

Select Board Ratifies First Fire & Rescue Contract Amid Staffing Crisis

At its Friday, October 8, 2021 meeting, the Truro Select Board announced that it ratified the first collective bargaining agreement between the Town and the newly formed Truro Permanent Firefighters Local 5281 union in executive session earlier that day. The agreement between the two parties comes amid the resignations of four firefighter-EMTs that took effect between September 23, 2021 and September 27, 2021. Prior to these resignations, a resignation of a fifth firefighter-EMT took effect in June 2021. Fire Chief Tim Collins notes that all four of the recently departing employees provided approximately two weeks of notice of their departure and that all left to pursue work at other departments on Cape Cod with more competitive compensation packages than Truro.

The Truro Fire & Rescue Department budgets for nine full-time firefighters who must have either an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification or a paramedic certification. Currently, two firefighter-EMTs and one firefighter-paramedic remain on the department. Staffing a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week, 365-day-per-year department with only three full-time staff members is a daunting challenge. With word of the resignations, Chief Collins prepared an operational and training plan and the Town made four conditional offers to firefighter-EMT applicants.

The Truro Select Board, citing public safety concerns due to the severe staffing shortage, adjusted the pay scale of the firefighter positions as part of the collective bargaining agreement negotiations to make Truro more competitive with surrounding communities in its recruitment and retention efforts. The newly approved pay scale raises firefighter compensation to significantly close the gap between comparable positions in the neighboring Outer Cape communities of Wellfleet and Eastham. A Town-wide classification and compensation study to be completed in fiscal year 2022 will provide an objective market analysis of similar and comparable communities and fire departments on Cape Cod. The study will enable the Town to develop a comprehensive compensation plan to address the hyper-competitive job market more proactively on Cape Cod in the future.

Town Manager Darrin Tangeman knows that addressing wages is only one aspect of addressing the workforce shortages faced by the department, the Town, and the greater community. "Workforce access to attainable housing within reasonable commuting distance and implementing a resilient fire & rescue department staffing model will help to mitigate similar public safety staffing shortages in the future," he explains. He anticipates that Town Meeting voters will be asked to approve additional firefighters at this year's town meeting so that staffing minimums can be maintained during vacancies and shorter-term leaves of absence and to allow Truro to prepare for longer-term, more significant changes to emergency medical services on the Outer Cape in the future.

At the September 26, 2020 Annual Town Meeting, an article for a general override to fund four full-time firefighter/ paramedic positions was deferred by Town officials to a future town meeting. The explanation for the article stated, “In anticipation of changes to the provision of EMS services in Truro, the Board recommends adding four (4) permanent firefighter/paramedics in Fiscal Year 2021. These four additional personnel will allow the department to operate three-person shifts, which will help the staffing levels meet community demand if contracted EMS service providers are no longer able to operate.” It is likely that a similar article could be presented to town meeting voters at the April 2022 Annual Town Meeting for consideration, especially in light of the recent staffing situation. The additional staffing would help the Town transition to a model that provides resiliency moving forward. Staffing shifts with three to four personnel would minimize the likelihood of service disruptions in the event of vacancies and leaves of absence and would allow Truro to be less reliant on auxiliary medical transport services and on mutual aid from the surrounding communities that face similar workforce challenges.

Most important, instituting a resilient fire and rescue department staffing model will save lives and property in our local community. Other benefits that result from a new model include improving the Town Fire Department’s Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification (PPC) score. Staffing levels, training, proximity to a fire house, water supply, and availability of fire hydrants play a significant role in attaining a lower PPC score. When a Town has a lower PPC score, it often plays a vital role in lowering homeowner insurance premiums due to superior property fire protection.

The four firefighter-EMTs expected to fill the current vacancies are anticipated to start in October 2021. Recruitment is ongoing to fill the remaining vacancies, including per diem positions that provide as-needed coverage and candidates for future recruitment efforts. In the coming weeks, the department will depend heavily on the remaining staff, including Chief Collins, regional support from mutual aid and the support of Lower Cape Ambulance. “We have a plan to address the current situation,” Town Manager Tangeman stated, “and we are establishing a plan to make sure we avoid being in this position again. We hope the voters understand the gravity of this situation and the importance of increasing staffing levels to sustain and improve Truro’s emergency medical services and fire response in the future.”

Contact:
Administration Office
Town of Truro
PO Box 2030
Truro MA 02666
(509) 349-7004 x110 or x124
Fax (508) 349-5505