



#### **Fire Department**

### **2025 Fall STM Select Board Presentation**

Fire Chief

**Justin Alexander** 

**Deputy Fire Chief** 

Jonathan Carroll



- In FY23, the department operated with four shifts of nine firefighters each, though the original budget called for ten per shift.
- This was done to maintain operations amid a challenging hiring market and paramedic shortage
- Vacant salaries were converted to overtime funds
- While this model worked day-to-day, the heavy overtime burden took a toll on members
- Through discussions with union leadership, it became clear that a new staffing model was needed.



- A detailed budget analysis led to a revised staffing model
- By reallocating overtime funds, we implemented four shifts of eleven firefighters
- This was done without the need for additional funding by dropping Staffing to eight when members used time off, such as vacation time
- This model reduced burnout, stabilized costs, and improved overall morale and efficiency within the department



- With new equipment, the promise of new stations, and a strengthened staffing plan, Easton became a sought-after destination
- Several firefighters transferred from other communities to join our team
- For the first time in years, Easton Fire was seen as a model for mid-sized departments across the Commonwealth
- Morale and outlook were high.



- Despite modest budget cuts, the department remained stable and productive
- However, by midyear, it became clear that FY26 would bring serious financial challenges
- After a December retirement, a town directive froze hiring before we could reach our goal of 11 firefighters per shift.



- Initial FY26 projections were bleak, with potential layoffs on the horizon
- This news spread quickly, shaking morale and creating uncertainty among newer members who had just transferred to Easton
- These new members felt that their jobs were on the line and feared for their livelihood
- An announced retirement further ensured that no active firefighter would lose their job, but the damage was done



- The override failure accelerated departures
- Younger members saw the instability as a multi-year issue likely extending into FY27 and FY28
- Combined with retirements, long-term injuries, and promotions, we entered FY26 projected to be nine firefighters short
- Post override failure, the department quickly lost its morale and forward progress



- FY26 began with two positions cut and nine vacancies unfilled
- Forced overtime became the new norm
- Despite recruitment efforts, Easton's uncertain fiscal outlook made hiring nearly impossible in an already competitive market
- Easton is now faced with job openings we cannot fill, and firefighters are being overworked, which is a recipe for disaster



- By September 2025, another firefighter left, bringing our total vacancies to ten. This equates to 23% of the department being vacant
- With another significant budget cut expected in FY27, our options are Limited
- Although the town is considering another override attempt for FY27, July 2026 and the lack of certainty of success until then is too far away to address operational severity today
- We began exploring alternative, long-term solutions to stabilize operations



- Our firefighters are our most valuable asset
- We must ensure their safety and sustainability
- With current staffing, we cannot safely operate two ambulances and two engines while maintaining proper incident command
- After extensive analysis, we determined that the safest, most stable staffing model is to privatize ambulance transports to the hospital



## Easton Fire Department Current Operational Model







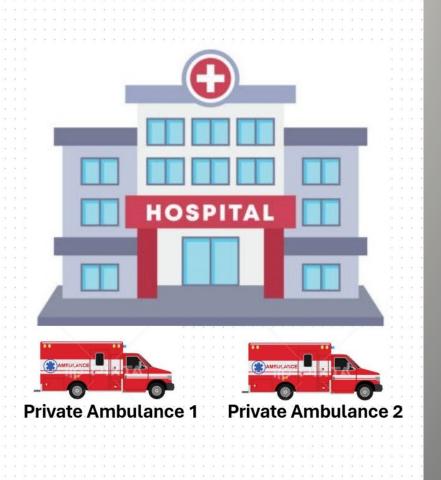




#### Easton Fire Department Private Ambulance Model

Eight Firefighters Working (All Assigned Firefighters Working)







#### Easton Fire Department Private Ambulance Model

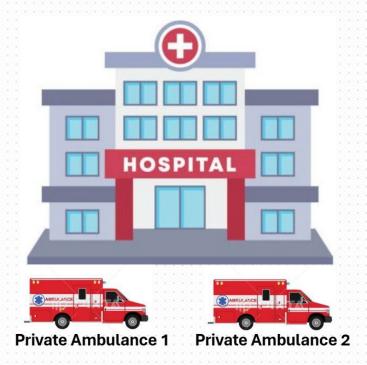
Seven Firefighters Working (Minimum Staffing Level)













## Easton Fire Department Moving Forward Late FY26 into FY27

- In the private ambulance model, our fire trucks will be more consistently and safely staffed than any other model tried to date
- The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), which provides the guidance on safe operations, calls for four firefighters per fire truck to be properly staffed
- Under this model, Easton will achieve
  - A fully staffed engine company and a staffed ladder truck
  - Lieutenants assigned to every apparatus
  - A dedicated command officer ensuring clear oversight and incident safety



## Easton Fire Department Moving Forward Late FY26 into FY27

Residents will see no reduction in response times and may, in fact, experience improvements

- Easton Firefighter/Paramedics will continue responding to all medical emergencies
- EMS service will remain at the Advanced Life Support (ALS) level currently provided
- Two private ALS ambulances will be based in Easton and dedicated to Easton to ensure no reduction in ambulance availability to our residents
- Easton Firefighter/Paramedics will often be first on scene, delivering ALS care using fully medically equipped fire engines



## Easton Fire Department Moving Forward Late FY26 into FY27

- Easton Firefighter/Paramedics will also assist private ambulances as needed to ensure the highest standard of patient care
- Fire protection will be improved by increasing the minimum number of firefighters available when both ambulances are out by 75-100%

This model balances operational stability, fiscal responsibility, and the continued delivery of exceptional emergency services during a very challenging time for Easton



# Easton Fire Department Moving Forward Summary

- Not our first choice, but the only stable path forward given fiscal constraints and job market challenges
- Resident services will remain consistent, with no noticeable decrease in quality or response
- Firefighter safety, morale, and job stability will improve through predictable staffing
- Fire suppression capacity will be stronger, with more firefighters per apparatus
- ALS-level emergency medical care will continue to be delivered by Easton Firefighter/Paramedics.
- The Easton Fire Department will oversee the private ambulance service to ensure accountability and professionalism.



#### 2025 Special Town Meeting and Beyond

- Article five is a request for funds to assist with the transition to the private ambulance response model
- The funds will assist in providing a third-party implementation analysis to guide us during the transition, as well as provide public outreach related to the transition
- Additionally, the article will provide stabilization funds for the department to handle expenses related to the transition, and for unforeseen items that may arise
- As we approach the transition, more information will be provided to residents



## Thank You For Your Continued Support!

Questions?