HAMPDEN TOWN COUNCIL WORKSHOP

HAMPDEN MUNICIPAL BUILDING

MINUTES

MONDAY FEBRUARY 10, 2025 6:00 P.M.

In attendance:

Chair Matthew LaChance, Remotely
Vice Chair James Bailey
Councilor Christine Cubberley
Councilor Peter Erickson
Councilor Mark Cormier
Councilor John Swalec
Councilor Dennis Marble

Paula Scott, Town Manager
Jason Lundstrom, DFC
Jon Clements, PWD
Other Members of the Public

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Bailey called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

B. PLANNING & CED STATUS REPORT

C. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

D. NEW BUSINESS

a. Council discussion regarding Fire Department Staffing levels, *requested by Caleb Cullen, Town Resident.*

1. Public comment

2. Council discussion

Caleb Cullen introduced himself and outlined his EMS background and concerns about the fire department staffing levels. Cullen highlights the significant population growth in Hampden over the past two decades, citing census data, recent news articles, and the increase of call volumes from 2019 to 2024. He explains the current staffing model of the fire department, which operates with three staff on duty with a minimum of two, and its vulnerabilities during emergencies and emphasized the need for a minimum of five personnel for interior fire attack or rescue, as recommended by the National Fire Protection Association, to ensure safety. Deputy Fire Chief Jason Lundstrom supported Cullen's findings, confirming the challenges with current staffing levels. The council discussed the implications, including potential insurance cost reductions and the need for a structured evaluation process for the Town Manager. but no immediate decision was made. The discussion highlighted the need for potentially increasing staffing to ensure public safety, with the understanding that this would be further explored in future budget discussions.

Caleb Cullen's comments attached to the minutes as Exhibit A.

Note: Council will take a five-minute recess at 8:00 p.m.

b. Council consideration of Manager Evaluation Policy, *requested by Councilor Bailey.*

1. Public comment

2. Council discussion

The Council discusses the current process for annual performance evaluations and the potential benefits of a more formalized policy. The Town Manager explained the current voluntary nature of staff feedback and the benefits of a structured evaluation process. The Council agreed to review the current process and consider any necessary changes to ensure meaningful evaluations. No final decision was made, but the consensus was to have the chair and vice chair review the current process, consider drafting more formal guidelines for the evaluation and ensure the process remains confidential and professional.

c. Council discussion on the RFP process, *referred from the 2/3/2025 Council Meeting.*

1. Public comment

2. Council discussion

The council discussed the RFP process and the potential benefits of having a less formal discussion before voting on large purchases. Councilor Erickson proposed adding a workshop step for purchases over $10,000.00 to allow for more detailed deliberation before voting. The Town Manager and other Councilors expressed concerns about the potential delays and the need to trust staff recommendations, and talked about the current process already allowing for tabling or requesting more information. No immediate change in the RFP process was decided.

d. Council discussion on increasing communication and engagement via the Internet, *requested by Councilor Bailey.*

1. Public comment

2. Council discussion

Councilor Bailey initiated the discussion on increasing communication and engagement via the internet, specifically addressing concerns about Councilors' participation in Facebook groups. The Council focused primarily on social media interactions, specifically Facebook. Concerns raised included the risk of conducting town business inappropriately, potential legal risks, misinterpretation of online communications, and the potential benefits and risks of engaging in online discussion with citizens. Town Manager Scott explained the Town's current policy on social media engagement and the importance of maintaining professional boundaries. The Council agreed for the Town Manager to research policies from other communities regarding councilor engagement on social media and provide draft recommendations for Hampden's Ethics Policy.

E. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted, Gayle C. Decker, Town Clerk

Note: Council will take a five-minute recess at 8:00 p.m.

Exhibit A

Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. My name is **Caleb Cullen**, and I am a **resident of Hampden** as well as a **paramedic for a neighboring EMS service**. With firsthand knowledge of the challenges within our state's public safety system, I'm here today to discuss a critical issue that affects the safety of our residents and first responders: the staffing levels at our fire department.

As we all know, Hampden has experienced significant growth over the past couple of decades. Between the 2000 and 2020 census, our population increased by **22%**, growing from approximately **6,300** to **7,700** people. Projections indicate that this trend will continue, with the population estimated to be over **8,000** in 2024. A recent news article highlighted Hampden as having the hottest real estate market in the state, and a national community ranking site, **niche.com**, recently named Hampden the **#1 town to buy a home in Maine**. This growth presents new challenges for our fire and EMS services at a time where communities , including rising call volumes, and it's imperative that we address these challenges head-on.

Currently, our fire department operates with an average of **three firefighter/paramedics per shift**, with a minimum of **two personnel** if someone is out sick or injured. This staffing model places our community in a vulnerable position. One emergency call can tie up our entire crew, leaving us unable to respond to simultaneous incidents. Given that **minutes** can mean the difference between the loss of life, property, or business, this is not an acceptable staffing model.

With only three personnel on shift, we don't have enough resources to safely conduct critical operations like **interior fire attack** or **rescue**, especially in high-acuity incidents such as **building fires**. The **NFPA (National Fire Protection Association)** standards stress that **five personnel** are required for a safe **two-in, two-out interior fire attack or rescue**. With only three responders, we're not meeting these standards, which unnecessarily puts our firefighters and the public at risk.

Additionally, many high-acuity medical calls, such as cardiac arrests, require more than 3 personnel to perform effective advanced life support care. Other scenarios, such as motor vehicle accidents with entrapment would provide significant challenges to the duty crew to be able to perform extrication, ensure scene safety and incident command, and simultaneous medical care. It simply is not possible for two to three personnel to perform multiple simultaneous tasks effectively, increasing reliance on mutual aid.

As the volume of **EMS and Fire calls** in Hampden continues to increase, it only exacerbates the staffing issue. To shed light on this, I obtained official data from **Chief Bailey** through the **Maine Freedom of Information Act**. Between 2019 and 2020, Hampden Fire had an average of **1138 fire and EMS calls for service per year, an average of 3.12 per day**. Of these calls, there were **697 EMS calls** in Hampden alone annually. There were 57 requests for mutual aid EMS response to outside communities. Also, of note, Hampden Fire responded to 13 building fires in 2020.

Using data from 2024, Hampden Fire had **1486 fire and EMS dispatches, an average of 4.07 per day. This** reflects an increase of 30% over the last 5 years. Of this data, EMS calls in Hampden accounted for **813 calls**—an increase of **17%,** and building fires accounted for **32 calls, an increase of 246% from 2020**. There were additionally 106 times when Hampden was requested for a mutual aid EMS call to a neighboring community, **an increase of 86% in the last 5 years**. As of **January 27th of this year**, Hampden Fire already responded to **79 EMS calls** in Hampden in just **27 days** , translating to an average of **2.92 calls per day**. The 2025 data does not include any requests for mutual aid or fire calls; however, the EMS call volume for 2025 thus far in our community alone reflects a **31.6% increase year over year from 2024.**

When you call 911 for an ambulance, dispatchers follow specialized protocols to triage calls based on severity. **Alpha level** calls are non-life-threatening, **Delta** level calls are potentially life-threatening, and **Echo** level calls indicate imminent death. **Delta** and **Echo** level calls—such as **cardiac arrests, chest pain, or difficulty breathing**—are where every second counts. Delays in response could mean the difference between life or death.

While our call volume is rising, so is the **acuity** of these calls. In 2020, Hampden Fire responded to **149 Delta and Echo level emergencies**. By 2023, that number had increased to **207**, and in 2024, it was **193**. These are high-acuity emergencies that require

immediate, skilled intervention. Delays in response can lead to poor outcomes, including permanent disability or death.

Furthermore, we're seeing increased reliance on **outside agencies** and mutual aid from neighboring towns, which brings extended response times, risks poorer outcomes, and results in **loss of billable revenue** from passing EMS transports to other communities. In 2021, Hampden Fire had to rely on outside agencies for **63 EMS calls**, or **1 in every 12 calls**. In 2022, that number was **44 calls** (1 in every 16.7 calls), and in 2023, it was **51 calls** (1 in every 15.3 calls). In 2024, **11% of all EMS calls** overlapped—meaning the crew was already tied up on another call when the next one came in. Of note, I'd also like to mention that when a Hampden Fire ambulance responds to an EMS call, paramedic level of care is guaranteed. This level of care is not a guarantee when relying on an outside agency, which ultimately may mean a member of our community gets a lower level of prehospital care than they require.

As some of you may know, the duty officer often calls in off-duty personnel for station coverage when the duty crew is tied up. This results in **excessive overtime** spending, which quickly depletes the overtime budget. In some cases, it becomes financially impossible to fill open shifts or provide callback coverage, putting our fire department leadership in a difficult position where it's hard to balance staffing and finances to meet the needs of the community. Regarding staffing, I'd like to draw attention to the fact that, during 2024, 1 out of every 5 days had minimum staffing of two, a total of 73 days throughout the year.

This strain on resources also affects neighboring communities. Hampden Fire has often been asked to assist towns like **Winterport, Newburgh**, or **Hermon**, but because we're stretched too thin in our own town, we cannot always help. This situation may mean leaving our own taxpayers without coverage, forcing duty officers to make difficult weighted decisions. For serious calls such as cardiac arrests, they have to make the ethical choice to assist neighboring communities—often leaving Hampden residents without adequate personnel to respond to emergencies in own town.

Now, let's look at a couple of real-life scenarios to help illustrate the gravity of this issue.

Scenario 1: A Cardiac Arrest at Hampden Academy Imagine a bystander at a sports event collapses and goes into **cardiac arrest** at **Hampden Academy**. With Hampden Fire, this is at most a **two-minute response time**. However, if the crew is unavailable, **Bangor Fire** would take approximately **11 minutes**, and **Northern Light** would take roughly **12 minutes** —not including any dispatch delays. Current evidence-based studies show that the chance of survival for someone suffering an **out-of-hospital cardiac arrest** drops by **7-10%** every minute without immediate intervention. After the eight-minute mark, survival chances are slim to none. In this case, the critical gap in response time could be the deciding factor between a resident or visitor to our community and someone's loved one dying.

Scenario 2: A Building Fire on Perkins Drive Let's say there's a **building fire** on **Perkins Drive** in Hampden. However, the duty crew is tied up at a motor vehicle accident on the interstate. Dispatch advises that there is a **trapped resident** inside the burning building. This address is **8 minutes away** from Hampden Fire. **Winterport Fire** is also **8 minutes away**, but because they're volunteer, their response time isn't guaranteed, and their personnel may be responding from home or work. The closest **staffed fire department** is **Bangor Fire**, which would take **15 minutes** to respond. This is critical—newer homes can become **fully engulfed in flames** in just **4-6 minutes**, and older homes in **12-15 minutes**. If this resident was relying on a mutual aid department instead of our Fire Department, they would not survive this scenario.

Now, let's say that Hampden Fire wasn't at the car accident on the interstate and is able to respond with three personnel, one more than minimum staffing. In order to rescue this individual, the crew would have to go against NFPA guidelines of 2-in and 2-out to rescue the victim, risk their own lives in the process. If they decide to enter the building and rescue the occupant, this also means the crew would have to stop firefighting efforts to focus on medical care until mutual aid arrives, causing critical delays in fire suppression and potentially resulting in the loss of additional property. **It's not physically possible** for them to perform all necessary tasks simultaneously—fire suppression, rescue, and medical care for the rescued resident. With **five personnel**, the crew could safely divide duties, safely enter the

building and rescue a trapped occupant, and simultaneously provide **medical care and fire suppression** until mutual aid arrives. This is why safe staffing is essential.

In both scenarios, **minutes matter**, and the consequences of **inadequate staffing** are far from abstract—they could result in the **loss of life or property**. Additionally, we cannot always rely on outside agencies, as they are also struggling to handle their own calls and may not be available to respond.

When comparing our staffing levels to those of nearby towns with similar populations, the differences are striking. For example, the **Old Town Fire Department** operates with **six personnel per crew**, with a minimum of **five**. In comparison, Hampden Fire operates with just **three personnel per crew**, with a minimum of **two**. This is not sustainable, especially with our growing population. While Old Town itself has a slightly lower population, they provide EMS coverage to a slightly larger population due to contracts with the neighboring small towns of Alton, Argyle, Bradley, and Greenbush. However, Old Town's population is declining while Hampden's population continues to grow.

I understand that increasing staffing levels comes with a cost. However, here's the reality: a taxpayer with a **$5,000 tax bill** currently contributes only about **5%** of that to **Fire and EMS services**, which equates to **$247 per year**, or just **$20.58 per month**. That's about the cost of one large cold brew at Dunkin'

per week, and less than the monthly cost for both a Netflix and Hulu subscription.

If we increase staffing to five personnel per shift with a minimum of four, we would need to hire **eight additional staff members**. Let's say that each new employee—covering salary, benefits, and equipment—would cost roughly **$125,000**, raising the fire department budget by approximately **$1 million in total.** While this is a significant increase, it would result in only a **5.8% increase** in an annual tax bill. For a $5,000 tax bill, that means an additional **$290 per year**, or just **$24 per month, less than the cost of two cocktails at a local restaurant**. I know no one likes paying more in taxes, myself included. However, I ask you to consider this as an investment in our **safety**—much like an **insurance policy**. Our community continues to tip the charts in being a top community to relocate to and live in, and it's time to make sure that our public safety budget reflects that.

There are available options to make this more financially feasible. The town could pursue a **SAFER grant**, which would subsidize the increased staffing, giving us time to phase in the cost over a few years. Additionally, we could consider hiring **Firefighter EMTs** or **Advanced EMTs**—a cost-effective way to supplement the current paramedic staffing while reducing overall expenses. More staffing would also increase **revenue from EMS transports**, as we'd rely less on outside agencies for calls in Hampden and be in a position to provide mutual aid response without compromising our own community.

The data does not lie, there clearly is a demonstrated need for increased staffing for our Fire Department. With our current healthcare system, communities across the country with stable or declining populations are still continuing to see sharp increases in request for fire and EMS responses. Considering the rapid growth that Hampden has experienced and continues to experience, our community is going to continue to see up trending data for fire and EMS response, and our current staffing model is ineffective at meeting the needs of our community. While I understand that there have been staffing increases over the last decade, there still continues to be a growing inequality between demand and available resources. If we do not approach this in a proactive and sustainable manner, I know that it is only a matter of time before there is a preventable tragedy in our community.

While I realize that I am simply a member of the community, I can assure you that the information that I am sharing is factual and also based on my knowledge and understanding as a member of the regional first responder community. I am confident that a costly staffing study performed by an outside consulting agency would provide the same insight, and recommendations, if not more than what I'm here advocating for.

I urge you to consider increasing fire department staffing to 5 personnel per shift, as the need for adequate staffing is clearly demonstrated. Let's ensure that our first responders are properly supported to handle emergencies **safely and effectively**. Let's be

proactive now, before we face a situation where our lack of personnel leads to a preventable loss. We owe it to our first responders and our community to invest in the **safety** and **well-being** of everyone who calls Hampden home.

Thank you for your time, and thank you for considering the future safety of our community. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have about any of the points I've raised.