



Boston City Council Committee on Ways and Means

Dockets #0588-0596 FY21 Budget

Boston Fire Department

Working Session: Monday, May 11, 2020, 3:00 p.m.

Hearing: Thursday, May 21, 2020, 10:00 a.m.

The following is a collection of questions that were asked by the Committee regarding the Boston Fire Department's budget at the Working Session on Monday, May 11, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. Recording here: <https://youtu.be/2LdrTo1GtUA>

The Administration is requested to respond to all questions in one of three ways:

1. Verbally at the hearing on Thursday, May 21st, at 10AM.
2. For factual questions, through written responses supplied prior to May 21st, including budget book page numbers or other references where appropriate.
3. By deferring to a specific scheduled departmental budget hearing.

Please annotate and return this information request before May 21st, indicating how each question will be answered.

Boston Fire Department Budget Questions

Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:

- The FY20 recruit class was delayed until March. Where is that process currently?
- Is there a possibility to fund a fire cadet program?
- While I know it's done in conjunction with PFD, could you speak to the timeline on the repairs to the Engine 33 fire station? Will any of that work improve firefighter safety, re carcinogens etc.?
- What about the timeline for station replacement at Engine 37 on Huntington Ave?
- For the work on the Fire Alarm building in the Fens – what's the timeline on that, and is it being approached with the relevant expertise for that historic building?
- Could you speak to the efforts to curb overtime costs in the department? How successful were they this year?

Councilor Michael Flaherty asked:

- What is the attrition rate for BFD? Over the next few years we expect to see large waves of retirement in our public safety agencies; are we on pace to keep force numbers stable? This seems to be particularly important to think about as the pandemic continues to strain our public safety agencies.
- Several years ago, two district chief positions were eliminated. One of these positions was in District 8, around the hospitals, and the other was in District 6, around the gas pipeline. Due to the nature of these areas, it seems important to restore these positions.



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Councilor Liz Breadon asked:

- There has been a significant growth in the population of Allston/Brighton over the last decade. Are there any plans to evaluate the need for increased fire services in District 9? (*Previously asked 4/16*)

Councilor Kim Janey, President, asked:

- Please provide an update on department diversity numbers, including a breakdown by race and gender.
- There are high levels of trauma that may experienced working in a public safety capacity. Please talk about services available and issues surrounding mental health for fire fighters.
- Welcome to the new fire commissioner. Please discuss your goals for the department, especially as they may pertain to changing the culture at BFD.
 - Please provide an update regarding the commitments made by the previous commissioner - where are we in terms of fulfilling commitments, and where are we in terms of additional investments to support women fire fighters?
- There is an increase to BFD's budget. Does this account simply for cost of living increases or does it cover additional investments as well?
- Investing in our workforce is incredibly important. Please discuss training and professional development provided by the department, including the dollar amounts that support these efforts.

Councilor Andrea Campbell asked:

- The Council has advocated for a BFD cadet program in order to help increase diversity in the department. Are there any status updates on adding a cadet program?
- What trends have you been seeing with regards to domestic violence cases? Where is additional support needed?

Councilor Annessa Essaibi-George asked:

- Please discuss coverage in the Seaport, including traffic issues that affect access and response.



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- A hearing order was filed regarding wellness for our first responder agencies and access to mental health services and physical health supports. Can you speak to this?
- Please discuss BFD's involvement in sharps pickup and disposal.
 - What is the volume of sharps pickup done by BFD?
 - What role do firehouses play in sharps disposal? Are there sharps boxes in every firehouse? How are the boxes used? How are sharps disposed of? What kind of volume are we seeing? Are there any notable trends you've seen regarding use of these disposal boxes?
- BFD is doing great work in response to a SAMHSA Grant that supports substance use and mental health services. What role does BFD continue to have in responses to families and residents in crisis who are dealing with an overdose?
- Please discuss the work of BFD in accessing residents hoping to access recovery programs. All three public safety agencies do work in this regard, and a better coordinated approach among the three agencies would yield greater success for those looking for recovery.
- Due to the cancellation of parades and festivals in the current and first half of the next fiscal year – will we see any savings? Have these already been associated with other costs for COVID-19 response?

Councilor Matt O'Malley asked:

- BFD is seeing a \$4M increase, mostly for personnel. BFD is also realizing \$3.9M in salary savings. Please provide more detail on salary savings.
- BFD is seeing large decreases in equipment leases. What does this mean? How many vehicles do we lease? What percent of leased vehicles are electric or hybrids?
- Please discuss response times and trends we are seeing in fire safety. Are there any things the Council can do to respond to these trends (e.g. a few years ago the Council passed a sprinkler systems ordinance in response to a trend)?
- How much is the City spending on upkeep of call boxes. How many people are using the call boxes? Is there an opportunity to make changes to upkeep or usage?
- The City's population has grown significantly over the past few years. Are we seeing responsive increases in BFD hiring and staffing?

Councilor Ed Flynn asked:



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- Any updates regarding the ongoing study on getting a new fire station for the South Boston Waterfront? Public safety city services are missing from this area and desperately needed for handling an emergency. (*Previously asked 4/16*)
- Health and wellness for our first responders is more important than ever. We need to ensure that they're receiving the resources, education, and time off to keep themselves healthy and continue to work. I am a member of the Gulf War Registry for veterans who were exposed to toxins in the air. The registry is used to track people's health and get information about programs and resources available. Boston should create a registry of all first responders exposed to COVID-19, as this will likely be a long-term process. In addition to ensuring we study the impact of the virus on first responders testing positive, the City should plan to look into and plan for impacts on their medical insurance, time off, sick leave, retirement, etc.
- Mental health resources and support, including adequate counseling services, for first responders is critical. Please describe the supports in place.
- Please provide a breakdown of response times.
- Please discuss retention and retirement.
 - Please provide an estimate of the number of retirements anticipated over the next three years and the effect this will have on the department.
- I support the re-addition of the Boston fire district chiefs in West Roxbury and Longwood area.
- Health and wellness in an important goal for the fire department. Please provide updates on the maintenance division and fire apparatus conditions.
- Is there a way for veteran first responders to use a different pot of sick leave to go to VA medical appointments?

Councilor Julia Mejia asked:

- One recommendation was that BFD holds regular meetings with female firefighters, in order to bring about changes in office culture.
 - What is the status of this recommendation? How many meetings have been held? How many firefighters participated? What takeaways have come about as a result of the meetings? Have any actions been taken based on these takeaways? Are there any memos from these meetings or other progress tracking mechanisms we can see?
- One of the department's accomplishments from FY20 was evaluating each firehouse to ensure they met the needs of female firefighters. What did this look like and what did they find? What benchmarks are used to measure success?



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- Please provide a breakdown of languages spoken by firefighters other than English. Can you speak to any strategy, capacity, or resources used for responses in neighborhoods with high incidences of languages other than English?
- Please discuss BFD's recruitment and retention goals.
 - What are the department's current recruitment strategies to recruit more women and people of color? What can be done differently? What has worked? What can the council help with?
 - What is the budget for recruitment and retention efforts?

Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:

- Why is there about a 18% decrease in Non Personnel for the Boston Fire Suppression operating budget?
- What efforts are the BFD making to diversity their employees?
 - 18.3% black employees, 8.1% Hispanic, and 72.1% white
 - Also 6% female and 94% male
- Out of about 104 contracts, only 1 is WBE and SLBE and none are MBE: What is the BFD doing to diversity their vendors and encourage more MBE and WBEs to apply for contracts?