

West Natick Fire Station Study Committee Report

**Submitted to the
Natick Board of Selectmen**

March 6, 2008

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1. Executive Summary

- The West Natick Fire Station Study Committee (Committee) finds that the current West Natick Fire Station (Station 4) cannot accommodate the growing medical, rescue and fire response demands resulting from recent and anticipated growth within the West Natick area.
- The Committee recommends that Station 4 house an ambulance, pumper truck and ladder truck as well as the personnel required to fully staff these emergency vehicles, subject to available operating budget appropriations.
- The Committee, upon reviewing the options presented in numerous town commissioned studies, recommends that a new Station 4 be constructed on the town property adjacent to the current Station 4.
- The Committee recognizes that the need for improved public safety facilities, apparatus and staffing must be balanced against fiscal constraints and must follow a public process, and that this is a long term issue for the Town both in West Natick and throughout the community.
- The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Natick Board of Selectmen place three articles on the Spring 2008 Annual Town Meeting Warrant:
 - The first article requests Town meeting acceptance of the Committee's report and appropriation of "mall mitigation" funding for environmental assessment of the site adjoining the present Station 4.
 - The second warrant article seeks approval to acquire an adjoining parcel of land for a future Station 4
 - The third warrant article seeks appropriation of "mall mitigation" funding for conceptual design work subsequent to the environmental assessment.

2. Committee Charge and Composition

West Natick Fire Station Study Committee Charge (approved by the Board of Selectmen, November, 2007)

The Board of Selectmen has voted to establish the West Natick Fire Station Study Committee to review the findings and recommendations of the fire services studies conducted by the MMA Consulting Group Inc., the Maguire Group Inc. and the Natick Fire Department.

Such review shall include:

- Status of current facilities and site conditions;
- Feasibility of renovating current site vs. feasibility of site relocation to adjacent town owned land (assumes identification of programmatic needs)

The Committee will report back to the Board of Selectmen in advance of the close of the warrant for the 2008 Spring Annual Town Meeting, including a status report, recommendations for further action and possible suggestions for warrant articles.

The membership of the Committee will be comprised as follows:

- 2 members of the Board of Selectmen (to be appointed by the Board of Selectmen)
- Town Administrator or designee
- Fire Chief or other representative of command staff
- 1 member of the Finance Committee (to be appointed by the Finance Committee)
- 2 members of the Fire Fighters' Union 1707 (to be appointed by the Union)
- 1 member from the Deputy Chiefs union (to be appointed by the Union)
- 3 citizens-at-large (to be appointed by the Board of Selectmen)
- 1 Town Meeting member (to be appointed by the Moderator)
- 1 member of the Planning Board (to be appointed by the Planning Board)

Committee membership:

Kristine Van Amsterdam representing the Board of Selectmen (Chairman)
Joshua Ostroff representing the Board of Selectmen
Martha White, Town Administrator
Kenneth Soderholm representing the Planning Board
Fire Chief Gene Sabourin
Deputy Fire Chief Paul Tota
Firefighter Daniel Hartwell
Lieutenant Daniel Dow
Douglas Farquharson (representing Town Meeting Members)
James Everett (representing the Finance Committee)
Citizens: Anthony Nickinello, III
Alfred Doig, Jr. (Vice Chairman)
William Lederman

3. Background Materials

Prior to the Committee's first meeting each member received and reviewed the following three documents as part of its due diligence.

- Natick, Massachusetts – *Study of Fire Department Resources and Deployment*, prepared by MMA Consulting Group, Inc, June 2005
- Natick, Massachusetts – *Public Safety Impact of the Expansion of the Natick Mall*, prepared by MMA Consulting Group, Inc, September 2005 (revised February 2006)
- Natick Fire Department – *Natick Mall Impact Study Committee*, August 2006

MMA Consulting Group's June 2005 report entitled *Study of Fire Department Resources and Deployment* developed a series of recommendations across the entire structure and operation of the Fire Department. Recommendations V-1 and V-2 are related to this Committee's report.

- Recommendation V-1: Town should consider developing a long-term plan to consolidate Fire Stations 3 and 4 (page 46). This recommendation was given a priority classification of 4 in the executive summary of the report (page 9). Priority 4 recommendations are defined in the report as "Recommendations which can contribute to the continued improvement of fire, rescue or emergency medical services in Natick. These recommendations should be implemented as soon as resources and operating conditions permit."
- Recommendation V-2: Deploy EMT-Ps [Paramedics] at each fire station (page 46). This recommendation was given a priority classification of 1 in the executive summary of the report (page 9). Priority 1 recommendations are defined in the report as "Recommendations which directly affect the safety of personnel or the public, or establish the framework for other recommendations. These recommendations should be addressed immediately."

MMA Consulting Group's Revised February 2006 report entitled *Public Safety Impact of the Expansion of the Natick Mall* re-evaluated the recommendations made in its June 2005 report which "was prepared prior to the availability of the current detailed Mall expansion planning documents,..." (page 4). "The purpose of this analysis (was) to identify and examine fire and rescue service delivery problems or concerns resulting from the proposed construction and operation of an enlarged Natick Mall and adjacent high-rise hotel and residential structures. In conducting this analysis, (MMA) examined to impact of the Mall expansion on (Fire Department) workload, organizational structure, resource volume and deployment, training, incident response protocols, emergency response crew size, apparatus and equipment." MMA estimated the increase in calls for service attributable to the Mall expansion by projecting the increase to the total population of Natick to include visitors to the Mall expansion and other properties. MMA's analysis was predicted on the basis that "the current Department workload (was), in large measure, a function of the daily population serviced by the Fire Department."

MMA's population projections are outlined in Exhibit 3 from the MMA report, (page 6). In the Revised report, Recommendation V-1 was dropped but Recommendation V-2 was carried forward, (page 5).

The Revised MMA report also identified a series of Fire Department enhancements to service the projected increase in calls attributed to the Mall expansion. The top three enhancements identified were:

- “Construct a double-length bay addition to Station #4.....however...the condition of the station requires rehabilitation to bring the facility up to code. For safety reasons, there is a need to allow for drive-through bays.” As this Committee has reported, the current Station #4 site cannot accommodate double-length bays or drive-through access.
- “Move either Ambulance #2 or #1 to reserve and purchase a new ambulance to be housed at Station #4” This Committee supports the move of Ambulance #2 to Station #4 in order to meet the increase in medical response calls. Ambulance #1 will remain at the Central Fire Station (Station #1).
- “When the current Engine #2 (1986) is replaced, purchase a new pumper which has a 65-foot aerial ladderand deploy it at Station #4.” This Committee supports the housing of a ladder truck and pumper at Station #4.

In the summary of the Maguire Group Inc. report entitled *Existing Building Evaluation: Natick Fire Department Station #4* (December 8, 2007), it concluded that “the current West Natick Fire Station (Station #4) is too small to accommodate the current Fire Department's needs. Our evaluation also revealed that most critical building systems are in need of upgrade. Structurally, the building is sound but it does not meet current seismic code requirements.the apparatus bay has no expandability. [to] construct a new 4-bay apparatus bay [directly] adjacent to the existing facility, the deficiencies allocated with the front apron would not improve.”

4. Review of Public Safety Needs and Resources

The committee discussed the studies' findings and recommendations and identified the following issues related to its charge.

- The West Natick area has been and is expected to continue to be a focus of significant development. Major projects include the recently opened expansion of the Natick Collection, including the associated 215-unit condominium complex and future retail expansion on Route 9, and a high rise 183-unit apartment building under construction at the Cloverleaf Mall.
- Pending major projects in the West Natick area include a proposed high rise hotel and 400+ additional high rise apartments on Chrysler Road, and potential development at the self-storage facility directly north of the Natick Collection. These projects increase the transient and permanent populations in the area.
- The expanded mall complex is estimated to attract 10,000 people daily into the West Natick area. This development is projected to increase fire department calls by 10%, excluding the impact of pending development.
- The construction of underground garages and multi-story buildings has created complex firefighting, rescue and medical response challenges.
- Historical emergency response calls in District 4, the area of Natick in which Engine Company 4 is the first to respond, show a steady increase in calls. This trend is supported by recent response call data (see Exhibit A).
- The largest call growth in District 4 is for EMT assistance (see Exhibit B). Both Natick ambulances are currently housed at the Central Station, and only one ambulance is fully staffed.
- A fully staffed ambulance and ladder truck will ultimately be needed at Station 4 in addition to Engine 4 to meet changing and growing public safety challenges.

Given the Committee's agreement that a staffed ambulance and ladder truck should be housed with Engine 4 at Station 4, the Committee reviewed the current Station 4 facility. This deliberation included a tour by the Committee of Station 4. In addition, Committee members were each provided with two reports related to the Station 4 facility. These reports were:

- *Space Needs Program, Natick Fire Department, Station 4*, (draft) prepared by Maguire Group, Inc., September 4, 2007
- *Existing Building Evaluation, Natick Fire Department, Station 4* (draft), prepared by Maguire Group, Inc., December 8, 2007

The Committee identified the following issues related to the renovation of the existing site.

- Station 4 was built in 1955 and has two apparatus bays. At the present time, Engine 4, a pumper, an aluminum rescue boat and a State of Massachusetts Hazardous Materials Response Truck are housed at the station. The existing bays are too small in all dimensions to accommodate modern fire apparatus.
- The structure's location has a number of deficiencies. The most significant of these is a dangerously short apron entrance with limited sight distance into a merge of a one way ramp from Route 9 West onto Speen Street South.
- The Route 9 and Speen Street interchange geometry requires Engine 4 to take a complicated and time consuming route to Route 9 West and the Sherwood Plaza area.
- Renovation of the structure is precluded since the distance from Speen Street to the rear property line of the current site cannot accommodate new apparatus bays and extended apron requirements. Furthermore, given the extensive nature of renovations required, the cost of renovation would exceed that of new construction, and would require temporary housing for Station 4 staff and equipment.

The Committee also identified the following issues related to the construction of a new station on town- and state-owned land adjacent to the current Station 4:

- Need for working with State to resolve deed restrictions on town-owned land where new station would be situated.
- Need to acquire an additional parcel of state-owned land between the Pet World site and town-owned land.
- Need for environmental testing on land where new station would be situated.
- Need for maximum mitigation funding from projects which will have a public safety impact on West Natick. A new Station 4 would primarily be funded via mitigation monies. Mitigation funding can not, however, fund operating budgets.

5. Conclusions

The Committee finds that Station 4 as currently constructed and sited cannot accommodate the growing fire, rescue and medical response demands resulting from recent and anticipated growth within the West Natick area.

- Response calls from the West Natick area to District 4 have been increasing annually and at the highest rate of any district in the community.
- Medical emergencies requiring the response of a Town ambulance make up the largest percentage of calls. The increase in medical response calls associated with the Mall opening in September 2007 and other ongoing development in the district can be seen in the quarterly call trend data for 2007 vs. 2006 (Exhibit B). For 2007, District 4 medical calls increased at nearly twice the rate of increase of the Town as a whole (+12.4% vs. +6.8%).
- Furthermore, underground parking and high-rise construction of recent and anticipated structures in the area present the potential for complex fire, rescue and medical assistance scenarios for the Natick Fire Department.

Consequently, the Committee recommends that Station 4 house an ambulance, pumper truck and ladder truck as well as the personnel required to fully staff these emergency vehicles.

In order to house this equipment and personnel, the Committee concluded that a new Station 4 should be built. This Committee's assessment resulted in the conclusion that the current Station 4 structure cannot be renovated to meet the expanded mission for Station 4 due to severe site limitations as well as the extent of needed renovations.

The Committee recognizes that the cost of a new Station 4 can not be accommodated within the current Town budget, and that other demands on the Town's financial resources are anticipated. It therefore recommends a strategy to obtain mitigation funding from future development to be combined with mitigation funds previously negotiated in order to provide all or most of the anticipated expense of a new Station 4.

The Committee further acknowledges that the cost to fully staff a Station 4 that is intended to house the recommended apparatus will likely represent an increase over existing Fire Department operating budgets. Therefore, a strategy to address the necessary operating budget requirements should be developed alongside the process of designing and funding a new Station 4.

6. Recommendations

The challenges of addressing the public safety demands of growth and change in West Natick is a long term issue for the Town. The Committee therefore recommends a phased approach to accommodating these demands.

Spring 2008 Town Meeting

The Committee recommends that the Natick Board of Selectmen place three articles on the Spring 2008 Town Meeting Warrant:

- The first article requests Town meeting acceptance of the Committee's report and appropriation of "mall mitigation" funding for environmental assessment of the sites adjoining the present Station 4.
- The second warrant article seeks approval to acquire an adjoining parcel of land for a future Station 4, using "mall mitigation" funds. Initial contacts between the Town and the State are underway in the event that Town Meeting authorizes this acquisition.
- The third warrant article seeks appropriation of "mall mitigation" funding for conceptual design work subsequent to the environmental assessment.

Next Steps

- A Building Committee with appropriate expertise should be established if Town Meeting provides authorization to develop a conceptual design.
- A mitigation funding strategy for an expanded Station 4 should be incorporated into negotiations with West Natick developers.
- A funding strategy for staffing an expanded Station 4 should be pursued in concert with building design.
- The ultimate disposition of the current Station 4 structure should be considered as part of the long term plan.

Exhibit A: 3 Year Incidence Trend by Fire District

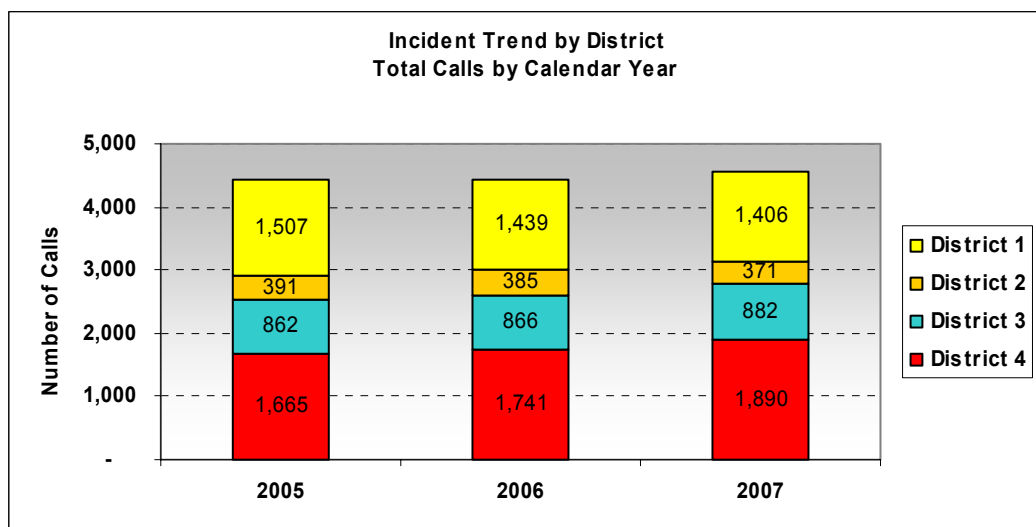
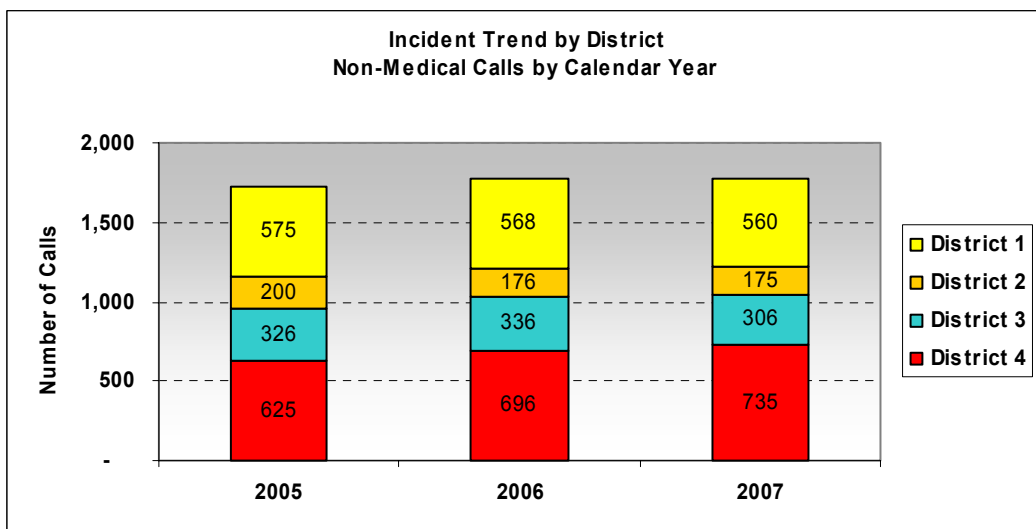
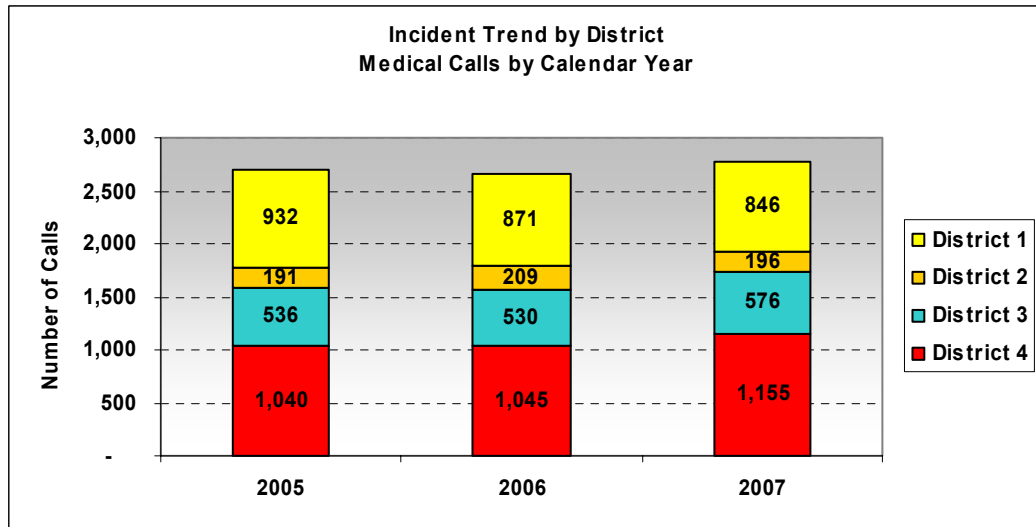


Exhibit B: Quarterly Response Data, Calendar 2007 vs 2006

