



6/30/2021

Dear Fellow Townspeople,

Please read the following information regarding our Emergency Services for the Town of Salem.

Be advised all Emergency Services will continue without disruption.

We are very fortunate for the many dedicated emergency responders in our Town that provide emergency service for our residents and visitors alike.

Salem, like other towns has seen less residents able to volunteer for emergency services. Declining volunteerism in emergency services is being felt on a state and national level. Factors included are people's busy lifestyle and their inability to commit to the required training. That being said, the Town of Salem has many wonderful volunteers at the Salem and Gardner Lake Fire Companies. Both departments welcome new volunteers.

The Town of Salem approves the Salem and Gardner Lake Fire Department budgets annually, as well as the Ambulance budget. The process follows our Town Charter. First, it is presented to the Board of Finance, it is shown again at Public Hearing and the Annual Town Meeting, then voted on by our residents. The budget information is available at each step for your viewing and input. The annual budget for Gardner Lake Fire Company, Gardner Lake Ambulance, and Salem Fire Company were approved at each step in the budget process. The town pays for the fuel for all emergency vehicles. The Town also pays for the utilities for both fire companies including electric, heating, and phones. The Town is required to budget and pay for Workers Compensation insurance for all volunteers. All these expenses are fair as we provide the needed emergency services for the Town. Volunteers are provided a \$1000 per year tax abatement off their property taxes. The Town of Salem also budgeted this year the amount of \$50,000 for nominal fees to the Gardner Lake Fire Company for their volunteers who cover the ambulance. All payments were paid to Gardner Lake Fire Company without interruption. These payments will continue through next year.

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The Town of Salem pays for two career Firefighters/Emergency Medical Technicians each Monday through Friday from 7am to 5pm. A third paid Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician is added several times per week to assist our Town career staff. All career staff and paid part-time staff have the required certifications and are well qualified.

Career Staff are required to work overtime when calls come in later in the afternoon, they are also assigned to work overtime during storm events and on some weekends if coverage is needed.

The Town of Salem funds and pays for the vehicles including the Fire Trucks, Tankers, Rescue Units and Rescue Boat. The Gardner Lake Fire Company owns the ambulance and keeps the revenue for the ambulance.

The Salem Fire Company and Gardner Lake Fire Company have mutual aid agreements with nearby Towns. On average, approximately 30 percent of the calls for service are out of Town. In return, nearby Towns respond to Salem when the need arises.

In 2019, the Town of Salem and numerous nearby Towns were made aware of a labor law that fell under Fair Labor Standards Act; which we were not in compliance with regarding the payments to volunteers from the Town. Quite simply, the law states that you cannot work for and volunteer in the same position for a municipality. This law was made to protect a paid employee from being encouraged to volunteer without being paid for their volunteer hours. We explained the Fair Labor Standards Act to both Salem and Gardner Lake Fire Companies and the employees and volunteers that it affected. Many other nearby Towns were also gaining compliance with this labor law. The Town developed a new stipend policy that brought the Town into compliance with the labor law.

Salem Fire Company acknowledged the need to be in compliance with the Law.

The Gardner Lake Fire Company disagreed with the Town's interpretation of the Law and the revised stipend policy. It has initiated a lawsuit against the Town of Salem. This occurred after several meetings and correspondence with attorneys, Selectmen and representatives of Gardner Lake Fire Company.

The lawsuit has not interrupted the monthly meetings between our Selectman Liaison to Emergency Services, Gardner Lake Chief, Salem Chief and Emergency Services Administrator to discuss the needs of the Town. The Selectman Liaison to Emergency Services has also reached out and met with the President of the Board of Directors of the Gardner Lake Fire Department. The Board of Selectmen held a Special Meeting with the Gardner Lake Fire Chief, Gardner Lake President and the Board of Directors as well. My Administrative Assistant and I recently met with the Gardner Lake President and Treasurer/Director. We agreed to meet again with our attorneys present.

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Our hope is to update the existing agreements and establish new agreements as we provide the needed emergency services for our fellow Townspeople.

We are fortunate for all of our Emergency Responders that have served and continue to serve our community.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K T Lyden', written in a cursive style.

Kevin T. Lyden, First Selectman
on behalf of the Board of Selectmen

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