

Press Release:

Duke St. Fire, E.G., RI

Andrew E. Nota, Town Manager
Town of East Greenwich

The Town of East Greenwich has and always will support the commitment and dedication of our public safety officials, in this case being the EG Fire Department. In this recent incident at 79 Duke St., the outcome was one that we many times hope for during such events, in that no resident or fire fighter was injured in the response, the structure was saved and the owner can and will proceed in making necessary repairs. That is about as good as it gets in such emergencies. Thank you for this effort, E.G. Fire on behalf of the entire community.

Also as part of this event, a narrative seemingly is being fostered in that we've had **Local IAFF officials quoted in the local and statewide media in leading residents directly affected by this emergency, to believe that lack of locally committed resources somehow contributed to this event or could have changed its outcome in some manner. I can emphatically state that this is not the case, in fact the present Town Council and Administration has invested more in this one department in the past two years with more plans over the next two years, in terms of technology, equipment and facilities than has been invested since the former fire district became part of the town back in 2013.** In a department of 36 members, four platoons of nine and several non-union administrative personnel, including the Chief, the department is by far the largest single department at \$7.5 million with significant capital requirements and operational supports in the hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, if not more. The department also annually receives above and beyond that of every other Town department dollar for dollar, excluding the school department.

In managing two fire stations both staffed with one engine and one rescue, in the past two years **the town has replaced a front line rescue and engine at \$1 million dollars, is budgeted in the coming years to replace a second front line rescue and engine at another \$1 million, has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on equipment replacement, has dedicated another \$1 million dollars of the \$3.9 million in American Rescue Plan funding for work on station 1 & 2, involving an expansion of garage bays on station 2 for added protection of equipment, building improvements and the replacement of a dated dispatch console located at station 1 that is integral to departments dispatch operations.**

For a town the size of East Greenwich with a (14,000 pop.) this is a **significant allocation of resources in one targeted area, when there also simultaneously exists needs in every other**

department throughout the community, many of which also directly touch the lives of residents, inclusive of our public education system that directly touches our younger community members.

The **Town of East Greenwich also has two (2) ladder trucks, which is unheard of for a town of our size. Through the dedicated effort of our Fire Chief, Bernie Patenaude, we acquired a second ladder and shipped it across the country within the past year, and have since had it running, inspected and available for service. This backup vehicle since being acquired has already been loaned to several other communities in need of equipment on mutual aid, whose own equipment was off-line while being serviced, like in this case.** It is so rare to have an extra ladder truck available, that we have yet been able to secure one locally in a timely fashion when ladder 1 went down for repairs, just last week. **Unfortunately during this recent event, both ladder 1 and 2 were off-line for different reasons, and mutual aid was required. It was purely a matter of timing and not one of resources as to why they were not available. The Town provides for internal repair services and also outsources such repairs, when necessary and timely.**

A greater concern at this moment, is that the Town and IAFF Local are presently involved in contract negotiations with many of the issues being publicly raised here by the union, being in fact the major issues raised confidentially in those discussions. Although the points being raised are not all being offered by the local executive board, some in fact are, while all others are being offered by active members of the department covered under the CBA. These comments have been open to the public and directly offered to residents that had just suffered a tragic experience. **The timing of such comments is truly questionable and uncalled for in the field, by any department member. The actions of town officials both elected and appointed, has and will continue to be supportive of the good work of the Fire Department that they provided the community during this event and many others on a weekly basis. We will work through the events of this recent incident and the associated commentary, in continuing to provide high quality and efficient services to our residents.**

I have reached out to the President of the Condominium Association and asked that we meet in person in the coming weeks, so I can reconfirm the Town's support of the residents impacted by this event and discuss up-to-date information on the investigation into the cause of the fire as well as dispel any mis-information that they may have heard onsite during the response. I truly hold hope that the comments made by one or more members of the department, were just misplaced, and made in error and not an attempt to utilize this tragic moment as a way to opportunistically bolster support and opinion regarding the department's inner workings and perceived needs. **A comprehensive professionally objective public safety study planned in 2023, will provide much needed perspective to many of the points raised.**