



APPENDIX B

**LETTERS FROM DEPARTMENT
HEADS**

TOWN OF LEVERETT

JUNE 2024



LEVERETT FIRE DEPARTMENT

**95 Montague Road
Leverett, MA 01054
Phone: (413) 548-9225**

Brian J. Cook - Fire Chief

4/18/2024

To Whom It May Concern:

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to you today to discuss a matter of utmost importance: affordable housing for our Leverett firefighters. As we all know, the role of on-call firefighters is vital in ensuring the safety and security of our residents and community, particularly in responding promptly to medical and fire-related incidents. However, without access to affordable housing close to the Leverett Public Safety Complex (ideally in Leverett), the effectiveness of their response is severely compromised.

For the town of Leverett, on-call firefighters play a critical role in our emergency response system. The fire chief is the only full-time employee and the remaining twelve members are paid on-call. As on-call firefighters they have no regular fire department hours, all work other full-time jobs causing them to be unavailable during weekday day time hours, and respond from home to the station and then to the medical and fire related emergencies. The further away on-call firefighters live from the station the more time it takes for them to get to the station, assemble, and respond to the incident.

Even with this on-call firefighters are often the first to arrive at the scene of an incident. Their ability to quickly assess and address emergencies can mean the difference between life and death, and every minute counts in such situations. Therefore, it is imperative that they are able to reside close enough to the station to ensure rapid response times. Unfortunately, the reality is that many of our on-call firefighters struggle to find affordable housing within a reasonable distance of the station. The last three firefighters who left the fire department did so because two purchased homes and one rented in nearby towns but the distance (and response time) was too great for them to stay on with us. Two of our most recent on-call firefighter hires live outside of Leverett. Only four of our firefighters (three on-call and the fire chief) own their own residences in Leverett. The remaining either rent in Leverett or live outside of town.

Overall rising housing costs have made it increasingly difficult for younger on-call firefighters to find long term or permanent housing in the communities they serve. This not only poses a logistical challenge but also undermines the effectiveness of emergency response efforts. Imagine a scenario where a medical emergency or fire breaks out in the middle of the night, and the nearest available on-call firefighter lives miles away due to unaffordable housing options. By the time they arrive at the scene, precious minutes have been lost, potentially leading to devastating

consequences. Ensuring affordable housing for on-call firefighters is not just a matter of convenience; it is a matter of public safety. When these dedicated individuals can afford to live close to their stations, they are better equipped to respond promptly to emergencies, safeguarding lives and property in the process.

Moreover, providing affordable housing options for on-call firefighters also fosters a sense of belonging and camaraderie within the fire department. When firefighters live in the communities they serve, they develop stronger ties with residents and gain a deeper understanding of local dynamics, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of their response efforts.

In light of these considerations, I urge you to prioritize the issue of affordable housing for on-call firefighters. By investing in initiatives that make housing more accessible and affordable for these essential responders, we can strengthen our emergency response capabilities and ensure the safety and well-being of our communities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your support in addressing this critical need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BJC', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian J. Cook
Fire Chief

