



City of
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MASSACHUSETTS

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Albert Talarico

Director of Inspectional Services

Building Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 9, 2023
To: Honorable Council Members
From: Albert Talarico – Director of Inspectional Services
Building Commissioner
Subject: Inspectional Services Budget Proposal 2024

In an effort to better serve our community while striking a balance between the building department's needs and a responsible budget, I am putting forward this proposal for your review.

The Building Department consists of myself, one administrative assistant, and three part-time inspectors (building inspector, electrical inspector, and gas/ plumbing inspector). Last year (4/1/2022- 4/30/23), this office processed over 3636 applications, inspected thousands of construction projects, and collected \$1,138,920.00 in annual fees, all while understaffed and underfunded. Although the revenue collected is sizable, less than a third is used to fund the department salaries and expenses.

While I understand the city's constraints regarding the collective budgets and expenses, a well-equipped/staffed and funded Building Department would help alleviate some of those constraints.

Our budget increase for FYI 24 will be 11.2% from the previous year. These changes reflect an increase and continuing education, the addition of the part-time administrative assistant, and an increase in salary and wages reflecting the city's new salary plan.

Below I have outlined a list of what the department needs, and answers to your questionnaire.

1. Have there been any noteworthy changes or events that took place during FY23 in your department (staffing changes, technology upgrades, new regulations or procedures, etc.)?

Yes. This past year, I was hired as the new Inspectional Services Director, Patricia Bucciero was hired to replace Cathy Alphen as the Executive Assistant, and Steven Doucet, Building Inspector, had his hours increased from 24 to 28. On April 8th, 2022, our department started processing online permits through Simplicity. And on January 1, 2023, the State adopted a new energy code, the 2021 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC); a significant change from 2015.

2. Do all your department salaries come from the same budget? If not, please identify the split among multiple budgets.

No, all salaries come from the same budget.

3. Are there any significant changes to your FY24 budget compared to last year? Please explain.

Yes.

- **ADD - Part-time Administrative Assistant 18-hours – \$22,000**

The building industry and code compliance has gone through considerable changes over the last few years. Just this year alone, the State has updated the International Energy Code (IECC) from 2015 to 2021 as of January 1st of this year and is proposing to change the Building and Residential Codes in late summer; these will be major changes for homeowners and industry professionals. At the local level, Cities and towns look to make the necessary changes to their ordinances to reflect their community's changing needs and stay competitive in city development with surrounding communities. These changes will require more time to educate the public, review documentation, and, most importantly, the need to have administrative staff, support inspectors, and the public.

Patty Bucciero, my administrative assistant, needs help. Her role is vital to a smoothly functioning department. Over the past six months, she has managed to not only learn her new role without any mentoring or supervision; she has done so with a positive attitude and a welcoming demeanor during the difficult transitional period. Her daily job consists of supporting the inspectors, myself, departments within city hall, and the general public. She is the first point of contact that the public and contractors see when they walk into the office. Listed below is a brief description of her duties and why it is essential to add a part-time assistant, not only to help with the workload but to maintain the level of service expected from this department. This new position would enable us to be proactive instead of reactive; while assuring backup during vacations, sick time, and ascension planning. The intent is to have this position available as of January 1st, 2024.

Brief Job Description

- Telephone calls daily (many) from homeowners, realtors, contractors, attorneys, and internal departments, all requesting various things.

- Assists contractors and homeowners both in person and on the telephone, as well as internal departments, with the new online permitting system, and this can take anywhere from 5 minutes to 20 minutes.
- Handles online permitting issues with Simplicity via the online ticket system.
- Handles various complaints from residents; also, many internal calls are forwarded from multiple departments.
- Manages all FOIA requests; (approx. 2 – 4/ month scans all information requested and processes/logs same accordingly with clerk’s office.
- Processes all reimbursements for overpayments by contractors/homeowners, continuing education reimbursements, etc., for inspectors.
- Processes weekly payroll and accruals.
- Process accounts payable invoices monthly.
- Completes monthly census reports.
- Completes monthly Schedule of Payments to Treasurer.
- Updates Inspection Services webpage as required.
- Currently, all Certificates of Occupancies for Home Based Business and Residential/Commercial properties are manually produced and tracked. Applicants must fill out the form; pay online on the City Hall Systems; then the card is typed/processed (all new construction of homes and newly renovated commercial businesses require a Certificate of Occupancy; therefore, it involves scheduling between applicant and bldg. Dept. and the same process applies for all Certificate of Inspections (110 Inspections) permits; however, these inspections also need to be scheduled with the applicants/building inspector and fire dept. Accordingly.
- Certificate of Occupancy Permit is required for all “Business Certificates” issued from the Clerks’ office; if new, the applicant must complete the application/pay; if an existing business must pull files and copy for owner – vary approximately 10 – 20/week.
- Issues all Dumpster permits, and Parking permits manually input into the system and logged accordingly.
- Yard Sale Permits – not online; must log into the system manually and type up the card.
- Close out building permits as necessary – once work is completed and paperwork sent in affidavits, etc., info. You must log into the system, close the project, and file paperwork.
- Assist the Weights and Measures Inspector with payments and schedules and ordering supplies and required equipment.
- Electronic files (M Drive) need to be archived/updated accordingly.
- All file cabinets in Inspection Services need to be gone through, and disposal of records is no longer required per State Archive Info.

- **Additional funds for continuing education increase to \$2600.00**

Our annual combined line item for education and seminars is \$1300. This amount does not accurately reflect the expenses generated by my inspectors, an additional \$1300 is needed for account #540700.

- Building inspectors (2) require 45.2 hours of continuing education every two years. Continuing education classes provide between 1 to 3 credits per seminar. The seminar typically costs between \$35.00 to \$60.00. For two building inspectors – 45.2 a year at an average of \$45.00 per 2 credits would amount to \$1012.50.
- Plumbing and gas Inspectors (1) require 24 hours of continuing education credits every two years. Approximately \$800 per year
- Electrical (1) require 24 hours of continuing education every three years plus monthly meetings – approximately \$800 per year.
- Weights and Measure inspector (1) – Two seminars a year

- **Salary increase**

Salaries were adjusted to reflect the actual wage calculated using the city's new salary plan.

4. Any events or changes you anticipate in the department for FY24?

- **Document scanning – All folders and Plans**

As I stated during the appropriations meeting with the City Council, storage is one of the most critical issues in the building department and throughout City Hall. Funding for this work frees up space, gives the public instant access to our records, and reduces clerical work, wasteful copying, and our carbon footprint. This work will also help with the Freedom of Information Act request, which takes considerable time to complete.

- **Permitting Software Change Recommended OpenGov**

Since starting here in Melrose and having met with the Board of Health, Planning and Zoning, and DPW, we've discussed how to better communicate and share information with other departments. The permitting process is collaborative between many departments and entities, not just the Building Department, and this is why it's critical to have a permitting system that is comprehensive, flexible, and allows for workflow accountability. Our current software program is adequate to process permits, but unfortunately, approvals take considerably longer because of the inability to connect/collaborate with other departments in real-time. It also allows for

mistakes when a property's location is not identified through a flagging method; (in the event there are outstanding issues/violations/conservation/historical issues, or fees owed, etc.)

The permitting system I highly recommend is OpenGov. I have used this system for the past several years in Peabody. I have found it to be the best product in the market, not only for the Building Department's needs but for any department in City Hall that works with collecting and sharing information or permits. The product has features that allow the user to create new forms (applications), workflows, fee collection, fee creations/changes, analytics custom reporting, and flagging properties; all without a developer being involved or any additional fees charged.

5. Summary and utilization of revolving account.

The Building Department has a yearly revolving account of \$15,000. These funds are allocated for state-mandated certificates of inspection, multifamily inspections, equipment, contracted inspectors, education, and printing.

This year we have spent a total of \$5595.16.

- Copies leasing in 2022.
- After hours emergency inspections, requested by the Fire or Police Departments.
- Purchasing of equipment and supplies related to inspectors' duties and inspections.

Thank you for your time, and I will be available to answer any questions you may have.

Regards,

Albert Talarico, CBO
Building Commissioner / ISD Director
City Of Melrose