

RECEIVED TOWN OF WATERFORD
JUL 31 2020

2020 JUL 31 PM 4:45

Waterford, CT 06385

Christopher Venditti
443 Sipple St.
Oceanside, CA 92058
(860) 287-4644

07/27/2020

Rob Brule
First Selectman
Town of Waterford
15 Rope Ferry Rd.
Waterford, CT 06385

I'm writing you today with a few concerns that I have regarding public safety within the Town of Waterford. As of now, I have not resided in town for about 7 years due to Active Duty Military orders, but I do still pay property taxes, and I keep a special interest in local issues because many of my family members are residents (mother, sister, nieces, and nephews).

The first topic I would like to bring up is the overall lack of fire protection within the Town. I have a unique perspective on this issue because I've been a member of Waterford Fire Engine Co.1 since 2009 but have not lived in town since 2013. I don't believe anyone can deny that the number of incidents the town fire services respond to is decreasing, but we can all agree that volunteer participation is at an all-time low. It's my understanding that more fulltime professional firefighters have been added to the payroll in recent years, and the stations and hours they work has been restructured. With that in mind, I find it very interesting that the town thought it was acceptable to have no fire coverage from 0200-0600 daily. If there's anything that being an Infantryman in the United States Marine Corps has taught me, it's that you cannot predict when you'll need to be ready to fight and work you schedule around that, but rather you need to maintain the highest state of readiness possible. I feel we as a Town are lacking here.

Just last year on October 22, 2019 at 0445 a town resident had his life cut short due to this lack of fire protection. The incident took place less than 1 mile from Waterford Fire Engine Co.1. The first piece of fire apparatus was driven by the bunkman, and he could not adequately perform the initial functions of being the first due piece by himself.

These functions include:

- Scene size up – Confirm or deny initial reports of fire, confirm location of fire, confirm location of water supply, position the vehicle in an advantageous location for its function, confirm or deny if anyone is present in the structure, identify entry and exit points, identify locations of possible victims, *ensure adequate resources are on the way*, direct those resources until an INCIDENT COMMANDER assumes the role.
- Initial entry and search – search for fire and victims
- Initial fire attacks – advance the first hose line and attack the fire.

All of these functions should be taking place nearly simultaneously, but you tell me how long it would take you, BY YOURSELF. Now put yourself in the shoes of the homeowner who's being overcome by smoke and heat. We cannot afford to put that much stress on our firefighters and our residents due to a lack of manpower. We are making an already bad situation worse.

I bring this up because even though we are staffing 2 firefighters in town from 0200-0600 currently, it's not enough. These hours are also not part of their contract so theoretically they could be cut at any time. I challenge you as the First Selectman to answer this question- Is the reason for not having better fire protection money, or a lack of understanding? The Waterford Police Department has been advertising a string of car break-ins on their Facebook page for what feels like months now, which is a great way to remind residents to lock their doors. But does a large amount of car break-ins mean we add 2 additional officers to an overnight shift on overtime? Is the cost worth the benefit? Are you familiar with the Kansas City Preventative Patrol Experiment? This was a year-long study conducted by the Kansas City, Missouri Police Department to see if they could make a correlation between visible police presence and crime, and fear of crime. The conclusion was that whether the city was having police proactively patrolling an area or staying out until called in (reactive patrolling) had significant effect on burglaries, auto thefts, larcenies, robberies, and vandalism – crimes traditionally thought to be deterrable.

I say all of that to say this, if we as a town are willing to ADD 2 officers to a shift due to car break ins (property damage and stolen goods) which is proven to not stop the crime, how many more CITIZENS need to DIE for us to add adequate fire protection for the overnight hours?

The concerning thing for me is that this lack of regard for residents when it comes to fire protection isn't a one-time thing in Town. In fact, it's starting to become normal, which is not acceptable.

Next I would like to talk about what it means to have leadership present. The Police department is staffed to have a Sergeant on every shift. Why is that? I'm sure your answer will have something to do with having a high level of accountability at all times and degree of tactical expertise ready to respond to any situation at a moments notice. Is the fire service any different? Not only do they never have leadership present (Waterford Fire Engine Co.1 hasn't had a fire officer (leader) respond to an emergency call since October 2019), but now the firefighters are forced to make up for this by using manpower needed elsewhere on the fireground. Referencing back to my initial functions on the fireground, the following should be handled by the incident commander - Confirm or deny initial reports of fire, confirm location of fire, confirm location of water supply, confirm or deny if anyone is present in the structure, identify entry and exit points, identify locations of possible victims, *ensure adequate resources are on the way*, direct those resources in, send necessary notifications to dispatch.

- Why does the Police Department get leadership and the Fire Department gets Volunteers who don't have to have the same level of training as the firemen they "lead" (we use that term loosely)?
- Why do you think it's ok to let a failing system continue to fail?
- Have you ever coached a team without captains?

In closing, I have many issues with the way tax dollars are being spent, particularly when it comes to public safety. My mother, sister, brother-in-law, three nieces and nephews live in town, and I fear if something were to happen in their home that at least one of them is liable to not make it out. I've already instructed them to give the address for our neighbors up road who live in the City of New London if something happens because they'll respond with an 16 man crew within minutes (made up of 12 firefighters, 3 lieutenants*, and a battalion chief*). The same crew that has bailed Waterford out recently for their lack of manpower. Offering \$7 per call will not make these "volunteers" just appear, and if it does, they won't be better trained than the professional firefighters. I look forward to hearing from you, Mr. Selectman, as well as a representative from the Towns Public Protection and Safety Committee. I can send a hard copy of this email if needed.