

FIFTEEN ROPE FERRY ROAD
WATERFORD, CT 06385-2886



PHONE: 860-442-0553
www.waterfordct.org

FIRE SERVICES REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE REPORT JUNE 7, 2021 – SEP 22, 2025

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On June 7, 2021, the RTM established the Fire Services Review Special Committee (FSRSC) and issued this charge:

"Review issues including performance, policies, and staffing and present their findings/recommendations on any changes needed to enhance public safety, creating a steering document and strategic plan."

The charge and membership parameters were adopted from the Public Protection and Safety Committee's recommendation and committee report on their Aug. 2020 charge by the RTM to "review of creation of an ad hoc in regard to Fire Services." That charge was in response to serious concerns about public safety failures that had made the news, as well as longstanding issues with contracted rescue services, that had triggered the then-First Selectman's statement to the RTM that "It's time we took a hard look at how our fire service is manned and make sure we're providing full service to our community." [The Day, 2/7/19]

FSRSC MEMBERSHIP:

This committee is unique in that, for what is believed to be a first, it included members from all of the town's governing bodies involved in budgeting, appropriations, and legislation, as well as representatives of all of the stakeholders.

Voting Members: two members of the RTM, 1 member of the RTM's Public Protection & Safety Committee, 1 member of the Board of Finance, and 1 member of the Board of Selectmen

Advisory Members: Director of Fire Services, Director of Emergency Management, Waterford Ambulance Service Director, 1 full-time firefighter (chosen by a vote of all career firefighters, and 1 Volunteer Chief (chosen by a vote of either the 5 chiefs or of all 5 volunteer companies)

The intent was to have experts from all those involved in fire and rescue at the same table to share not just their data, but their insights and concerns, in frank discussions to determine what we have, what we need (now and in 5-10 years) and what we need to do going forward to ensure the safety of our first responders, our citizens, and our property.

MEETINGS:

Due to delayed appointment of the Board of Selectmen's member, the initial meeting did not take place until April 2022.

Apr 18, 2022: The FSRSC's first meeting, which had been delayed until the appointment of the Board of Selectman's member. When newly elected Chair Tuneski opened the floor for suggestions on how to focus efforts, the First Selectman declared that FSRSC needed to recommend the creation of a building committee because the engineer had informed the town that the Oswegatchie fire station's roof was in danger of collapsing at any time. Members suggested that a direct request to the RTM by the First Selectman and Director of Fire Services would be the standard—and much faster—procedure. Chair asked members to come up with 3-4 critical issues that the FSRSC should consider for review and recommendations.

The committee then met monthly (except for June) from April 2022 to Feb 2023. During that period, about half of each meeting was spent discussing the need for a new station (the engineer's report was not provided until Nov. 2022), the rest of the discussions focused on determining the most critical issues to address—such as updating communications systems,

adequate staffing at stations and overall, recruiting (both paid and volunteers), trends in volume and type of calls, response times (e.g., whether noticeable impact since 24/7 could only be achieved at two stations), apparatus and equipment (quantity, condition), impact of recent and planned developments, extreme competition for new hires as towns statewide adjusted to diminishing numbers of volunteers (due to a number of societal changes as well as the increased training demands as the nature of firefighting changed drastically). Topics changed from meeting to meeting—and within each meeting. Summaries are provided in the minutes, which can be found in the FSRSC's section of the *waterfordct.org* Agenda Center. *No decisions were made or votes taken during this period, save for the OSW interim report. [Note: In response to suggestions made by Fire Services Director Howley, the RTM revised the Volunteer Incentive Program in April 2023 to give credits/payments for the hundreds of hours of training needed for a volunteer to become an EMT or be certified to actively participate at a fire incident.]*

March 2023 through Jan 2024: No attempts to schedule meetings.

Feb 12, 2024: This was a regroup/restart meeting. General consensus on the Chair's summary of issues in the FSRSC pipeline: facilities 10-year capital plan; fleet management 10-year plan; staffing plans (volunteer and career, as well as specialties such as marine and fire police, training, and succession planning); mutual aid plans; and the interrelationship of the 5 fire stations and contracted rescue services. [Note: This was the last meeting attended by the WAS Director.]

The committee then met monthly from March through June 2024. In March, Director Howley distributed draft FY24-30 Fleet Management and Staffing plans for discussion at a later meeting. In the following meetings, he provided updated (i.e., reduced) numbers in volunteers, and added that previous stop-gap efforts of pulling 3 of the 4 fire marshalls into firefighting created difficulty in keeping up with inspections. He explained the recent drop in volunteer incentive payments was not due to a further drop in volunteers, but because after discovering 95% of those getting credit for rescue calls were performing them as staff of WAS, he stopped authorizing payments for WAS rescue calls. Fire Captain Martin noted that the historical response time data we have doesn't reflect impact of both reduced staffing in some areas and the increased traffic due to development and changing traffic patterns on several roads. Director Sinagra offered to help pull data from the new system, including reporting the incident district and the responding district/station. Director Howley will update the vehicle ratings for fleet and update the VIP payment reports to the number and types of incidents and certification status for each responder (with codes rather than names, to protect privacy. At the May meeting, members had a brief generic discussion on possible content for the final report and recommendations, which should incorporate data provided/promised by advisory members. Sinagra offered to draft a section on recent and planned changes in communications systems, including putting radio/pager replacements on a rotating schedule to avoid the recent huge hit to the budget when they had to be replaced all at once.

July 2024 through April 2025: No attempts to schedule meetings.

Mar 6, 2025: Chair presented a draft outline for the final report and told members he had been working on the report since the June 2024 meeting and hoped to have a partial draft ready in a few months. Members suggested, and voted on, changes to the outline and a formal draft review process to avoid multiple re-editing—i.e., provision of a partial draft at least a few days before a meeting so they had time to read and prepare suggestions/comments; review all proposed changes and get consensus/re-edit/reject, with a vote on each amended section before proceeding to the next. Committee also reviewed, and added to, the list of long-standing deliverables requested to provide data and documentation. (see pg 4)

Mar 27, 2025: Public comment and three members noted several factual errors, wrong names and dates, and lack of source citation in the first half of the draft report, which Chair had emailed to the committee the night before. Members Condon and Driscoll expressed concern on the lengthy history and outdated studies mentioned, and the lack of current data and specific recommendations and asked where some of the content came from, since we had not seen or discussed some areas in committee. Captain Martin suggested two IAFC Reports on combined departments that would be useful resources. Member Muckle stated that because the science of firefighting has become more efficient over the years, fewer responders are necessary. Atty Kepple advised the committee that while he appreciated the committee's efforts, there was no need to struggle with a lengthy report and they could make a recommendation and disband. Condon and Driscoll pointed out that the RTM charged the FSRSC to provide thorough review and present a report with specific recommendations. Kepple questioned the role or authority of FSRSC in charting the course of the town when there will be an administration or new director who has their own plan. Condon pointed out that the problems we have now are a result of the town not following through since 2011 on the initial plans and ordinances to implement the necessary policies and procedures. He also reminded members that the FSRSC was created after disturbing failures in fire and rescue services and citizens and elected officials were calling

for accurate review. While times and players may change, he added, a detailed, accurate, and well-publicized report would be reference for future officials. Discussion moved to asking members for progress reports on finding a potential outside reviewer critique the report before submitting to the RTM.

May 1, 2025: Chair noted that RTM Moderator had asked that report be delivered at the June 4 meeting. He asked members to submit their final edits to the first half of the draft report so he can tally comments and requests for additional information for review at the next meeting. Discussion moved to the first draft of the second half. Chair explained most of the information had come from Director Howley, but he also consulted the town website and Finance and Planning Directors. On the advice of others outside the committee he altered the style in the second half to be less "sterile." Discussion focused on fleshing out this half, with updated information on the communications system and the forthcoming response time/headcount data. Chair noted that we still have no information from WAS, other than that their current staffing is now one 24-hour shift and one 16-hour shift. Condon cited the lack of justification for decisions or how/why the current status exist. He suggested that members Patton and Williams could provide insight into the evolution to a 3 core/2 satellite stations system, which would be the way to lead into staffing recommendations. Proposal to hire outside report reviewer passed over with no discussion.

May 29, 2025: First meeting with new Director Haley as an official member. Firefighter Williams reported that he had put in a new request for the long-awaited response time data and expected it to be available for our next meeting. Two members commented that the two drafts do not match the agreed-upon outline and explanations include opinions with no supporting data or data unshared with the committee. Haley noted that some of the information seems to have come out of the plan he supplied for his interview. Condon asked for more input from all our advisory members and suggested the report provide a roadmap of how to scale up, with a ranking of all 5 stations needs and capabilities. Haley cautioned that data is "liquid" and influenced by outside factors such as Covid, development, and traffic volume. He added that while the recent restructuring to focused 24/7 staffing has helped, Fire Services is forced to be agile and working desperately to provide minimum standards of service. Condon noted that whatever the final recommendations are, Haley will need the support of the community behind him. Chair explained his plan to collect all members' written comments into a spreadsheet the committee can use to decide what goes into the final version of the report at our next meeting. He then entertained a motion to submit the draft version to the RTM. Condon and Driscoll pointed out that submittal would demand comment/decision by the RTM and that submitting a draft with known errors and seems to have been predicated on the need for a new station yet lacks data supporting that premise would make our credibility razor-thin and jeopardize the final report. No motion offered to submit draft. [A draft version, erroneously titled "Final Report" was posted on the OSW Building Committee's website in June.]

June 18 2025: Firefighter Williams brought the 300+ pages of response data that had been delivered to him that day and that the new system provided the details on number of responders and incident/responder districts. Director Haley offered the proviso that data from years before the new system was not as accurate and there was some skewing of results during the Covid era. Condon offered to scan the pages so members would have access to the data and ability to present summarized info in the report. Lengthy discussion followed Haley's status update on the fire services fleet, including Haley's new plan for rolling stock as well as issues with, and possible adjustments to the town's fleet management/capital budgeting plan that has not been reviewed or updated since 2011. annual allotment has not kept up with inflation/assumptions for fire apparatus are similar to those for much smaller, less costly vehicles and do not account for the 2-3yr delivery timeline for new purchases. Consensus that a detailed fleet management section with recommendations should be part of the final report. Condon offered to bring some suggestions to the next meeting for review by committee and specifics from Director Haley.

June 25, 2025: Director Haley reported that he had found the town's last ISO report rating, which gave us impressive scores for our water system. He noted that it is more than a few years old, and expects higher scores for staffing and dispatch, but the amount of research and documentation required to get a new rating could take more than a year, especially considering the more pressing issues he needs to address. Discussion moved to potential changes to the fleet management plan, which has had no assessment since 2009, including carving out new fire service-specific guidelines, adjusting allocations for specific apparatus, regular actuarial reviews, and revising the implementation process. Condon explained that the RTM could adjust the plan through ordinances; Haley noted that the immediate need is staffing, not fleet management. Muckle stated that *circumstances are forcing the FSRSC to get the report out so funding for the new OSW station can go forward.* Condon said the process behind the new station needs to be changed, and there should be a plan to evaluate and address the condition of all 5 stations. Chair promised a new draft, with both halves combined and edited according to members' comments in the previous three meetings, with a summary of recommendations.

July 9, 2025: Chair Tuneski and Muckle insisted that the report needed to be submitted ASAP, to help with the OSW bonding request. Members commented that many changes and corrections specified in the initial review had not been done, but new content had appeared in places. Condon noted that a decision to build a new OSW station had implications for the other 4 stations' future, and that while the Chair had added photos and undated estimates for the other stations, the committee had not discussed or agreed on an infrastructure plan. Driscoll questioned the push, when we finally had—but had not discussed—updated response times and had agreed to working on a fleet management section. Muckle stated that we had spent long enough and the report needed to get out. Committee voted to authorize Chair to present to RTM in August.

Sep 10, 2025: Extra meeting to consider "housekeeping" and other amendments Chair had done after the RTM presentation was delayed. Members asked for date and title corrections requested and approved in March, and specified a handful of new changes [specified in minutes] before authorizing Chair to present the second version of Draft #3.

Submitted by Susan Driscoll, FSRSC Secretary

March 6, 2025 update

DELIVERABLES

	Requested Information	Requested	Status/Date Rec'd
	Current roster of WFD paid/volunteer, with their certifications	Mar 2025	
	5-year fleet management plan	Mar 2025	
	Last ISO rating report	Mar 2025	
	WAS response data by district	Jan 2023	
	Phasing of staffing growth projections by firehouse, by year	Dec 2022	<i>Being compiled</i>
	5- or 10-year Emergency Mgmt staffing plan	Dec 2022	<i>Working with union on schedules</i>
	Data on impact of development in past 12 months on Dispatch call volume	Dec 2022	<i>Being compiled</i>
	Fire companies' bylaws	Nov 2022	
	Response times from staffed firehouses to incidents in each district	Jul 2022	<i>Partial/data being extrapolated</i>
✓	Home/business development growth projections	Jul 2022	<i>Aug 2022 (Planning Dept info)</i>
✓	Current housing/census/demographics data	Jul 2022	<i>Aug 2022</i>
	Response times and call type/location stats	Jul 2022	<i>Jan/Feb 2023; coming later—new system will have updated info with who/how many responded</i>
✓	FY22 volunteer incentive analysis	Apr 2022	<i>RTM PP&S Committee revising program</i>
✓	Fire Services Org chart	Apr 2022	<i>May 2022</i>
✓	OSW Engineering Report	Apr 2022	<i>Nov 2022</i>