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TOWN CLERK

Fire Services Review Special Committee

Minutes—Special Meeting Sept. 10, 2025

Members Present: Robert Tuneski (BoF); Susan Driscoll (RTM); Tim Condon (RTM Public Protection & Safety Comm.); Matthew Keatley (RTM) Richard Muckle (BoS); Ronnie Williams (WFD); Chris Haley (Director, Fire Services);

Members Absent: Steven Sinagra (Director, Emergency Management), Todd Patton (Chief, Goshen Fire Co.); Mark Greczkowski (WAS Director of Operations)

1. Call to order: Chair Tuneski called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

2. Public comment: None.

3. Previous Minutes: Motion by Muckle, second by Condon, to approve the July 9, 2025, minutes as presented.
Voice Vote: Unanimous.

4. Consideration of FSRSC's charge from the RTM (6/7/21):

- a. Review/discuss proposed "housekeeping"/edits to report submitted to RTM 7/23/25: Chair explained that the delayed presentation to RTM afforded the opportunity to take another look at that Draft Full Report (#2, see July 9 minutes). He used the time to clean up grammatical errors, typos, inaccurate job titles and dates; adjust color and shading schemes in certain graphs and charts to improve legibility; and asked for additional input from Director Haley, which resulted in some copy revisions. He tracked the new changes for our reference in the Draft #3/090725 sent with this meeting's agenda and offered to take us through all the changes.

Consensus of members to focus review on only the "substantial" changes—e.g., new or deleted content—rather than grammatical, spelling, or color changes. Members had no concerns with most of the latest copy changes (highlighted in yellow), but suggested some additional changes, to correct or delete some inaccuracies and clarify or update some statements. Group consensus was on these new revisions:

- all references to original Charter and ordinance changes to fire services should be 2011, not 2010;
- remove pg 1 reference to a Paid Fireman ordinance (not part of the 2011 revisions, no similar provision in current ordinances or the past 14 annual supplements);
- at the top of pg 3, change reference to copies of sources listed in bibliography being included in transmittal of report to "included FSRSC minutes and agendas on town website";
- on pg 4, last paragraph, remove "Town Fire Department with";
- on pg 6, add sentence to first paragraph explaining the definition of "active" in relation to qualifying for volunteer incentive payments;
- on pg 38, below the second set of bullets, delete statement about future town responsibility for current salary and multiple pensions per firefighter; and
- on pg 45, last paragraph, delete "The Fire Administrator."

- b. Discuss process/potential action to deliver revised report to RTM: Condon and Driscoll assured the Chair that, under updated procedures, he did not need to provide the RTM with hard copies of all documents utilized by the FSRSC. Driscoll confirmed she would provide the committee report requested by Atty Kepple at the Aug RTM meeting.

Condon and Driscoll explained that the RTM would be voting on acceptance of the report. If accepted as presented, FSRSC would be disbanded. If not accepted, RTM would then decide on whether to direct FSRSC to revise the report (with suggestions) or disband the current FSRSC and start anew in the term following election. Both emphasized they were clarifying standard procedures and had no predictions on the RTM's decision.

Discussion ensued on the proper language for the motion on the report and its delivery, debate on whether including a recommendation that "the RTM take no further action" was necessary, appropriate, or misleading since the report was supposed to provide recommended actions. Final consensus was to utilize two separate motions, specify the version number, and forsake the lengthy proposal that Muckle had relayed from Atty Kepple.

Motion by Muckle, second by Condon, to accept the changes as presented and as added during the review.
Voice vote: Unanimous. Motion passed.

Motion by Condon, second by Muckle, to authorize the Chair to deliver this "final" report, as amended on Sept. 10, to the RTM.

Voice vote: Yes 4 No 1 (Driscoll) Motion passed.

Haley and Driscoll reminded the Chair that the cover page of the submitted report should be labelled "Draft" with the version number and revision date. Once accepted by the RTM, those labels can be deleted, and the date of acceptance should be added at the bottom.

5. **Adjournment:** Motion by Condon; second by Muckle, to adjourn at 6:12 p.m. Voice vote: Unanimous.

Submitted by
Susan Driscoll, FSRSC Secretary

encl: 9/10/25 Revisions to Report Draft #3

1.0 Executive Summary

Firefighting has occurred in Waterford from the earliest days of its villages as more structures were built which needed to be protected from the destructive damage caused by intermittent fire events. This largely community-based private firefighting effort took on a more organized form about a hundred years ago when four private firefighting companies, all started by volunteers, were established in the 1920's and the fifth was created in the early 1940s. The Town had financially supported these efforts in various ways for decades, which support was codified in a formal agreement with the Companies in 1978 and 1979. The Town established a Fire Commission under state statute, ordinance and ~~charter~~ Charter provisions to oversee the Town's financial participation of this private community-driven firefighting model. As the costs associated with firefighting in Waterford grew, for large, specialized fire trucks, equipment, gear and training, the Town contributed millions over the last century to Waterford's private fire service operation. In the early 2000s more and more discussion occurred about a larger Town role in the management of community fire services, culminating in a 2010 change in Waterford's ~~charter~~ Charter moving from the management of fire service by the Fire Commission to a Town Fire Department supervised by a Director of Fire Administrator Services. Serving as a department head in Town government, the Fire Administrator Director works under the daily supervision of the First Selectman as ~~chief~~ Chief executive Executive. A Paid Fireman Ordinance was adopted at the same time in recognition of an emerging need to have Town staff supplement the efforts of volunteers in the reliable provision of fire services across Waterford. Over the last fifteen years the Town has administered this emergent "combination" model of both paid and volunteer efforts with new issues arising constantly regarding the health and safety of firefighters, technological development and effective resource deployment strategies.

The Fire Services Review Committee was charged with studying this historic evolution of fire services in Waterford from a largely private endeavor to an increasing Town-Town-managed, staffed and funded effort. The Committee has reviewed extensive documentation provided by Town staff (primarily the previous Director of Fire Services), engaged in vigorous discussion over 25 meetings within the Committee and with members of the Committee. The Committee has identified numerous issues the Town will need to address as Waterford's fire service continues to evolve.

The Committee's objective is for the deliberative effort described above to be reflected in this report to the RTM and through them to the community so Waterford's decision-makers can make better informed decisions going forward about the Waterford's fire service, which performs a critical government function by protecting lives and the Town's 4.4 billion dollars'

information dating back to 1995 including *Task Force 95 Study*, and *Fire Service Study, 2001*. This compendium is a very valuable and relevant historical reference, covering substantial portions of Waterford's rich and diverse Fire Services history.

The balance of information surveyed is listed in the bibliography and copies are included in the Committee's transmittal to the RTM.

The process ~~then, that the committee~~ Committee followed in generating this report and the findings-/recommendations herein was one of deliberate discussion and debate on the topics of interest, as well as solicitation and retention of both quantitative and qualitative information as primarily provided by the Director of Fire Services, other advisory members, and the public as captured in meeting minutes. All information used by this committee (including various revisions based upon year / time) and used in this report has been originally presented to the committee. The source materials used to create this report are provided on the Waterford Town website under the Fire Services Special Review Committee title.

In January of 2023, an Interim Report was prepared and approved in a 3-0-1 vote and delivered to the RTM.

The report recommended that the Oswegatchie Fire Station, described as being in "extensively deteriorated condition", be demolished and that a new Fire Station be built to replace it. The findings of the Interim report were presented at the February 3rd, 2023, RTM Meeting by the ~~chairman~~ Chairman, at which time, partly because of the findings, the RTM unanimously voted to create the Oswegatchie Fire Station Building Committee.

3.0 Fire Services History

Prior to the incorporation of the private fire stations which occurred between 1920-1940, according to *An Illustrated History of Waterford Connecticut*, a bucket brigade was organized to put out the Baptist minister's neighbors' neighbor's house fire, and housewives used brooms to put out stubborn brush fires... Since the early 1900s the five private fire stations listed in Table 1 have served the Town of Waterford. Along the way, changes were made in how fire services were managed and administrated to grow with community changes.

In 201⁹, the Waterford Fire Department was created and the historic management structure for fire services in Town, the Fire Commission, was disbanded; in accordance with a Town charter revision. The new department was created via the Code of Ordinances (Chapter 2.36), and charged the RTM with appointing one person from each fire district to serve on a board of five commissioners. The commission had the authority to elect officers, establish rules of procedure, set meeting frequency, and possessed authority as vested by State Statute.

~~The board oversaw the funding of fire services. It worked with each fire station in determining equipment and operation needs, although it did not have direct control over the day to day operation of the individual fire districts. The board set policies for fire and rescue services and coordinated the provision of those throughout the Town.~~

~~The board had oversight of the over the Fire Marshall's office and the Town Communications Center.~~

The Town is divided into ~~5~~five fire districts, each with its own fire department and fire station. Each fire department is incorporated as a non-profit corporation under the General Statutes of the State of Connecticut. Each fire department has an individually signed legal agreement with the Town stipulating that ~~they~~ it will provide fire services in exchange for an annual funding appropriation from the Town. Historically, Each~~each~~ fire department was required to prepare and submit a budget to the Board of Fire Commissioners, who then would tabulate it with input from the other fire departments, the Fire Marshall's Office, and the Emergency Communications Center, and submit this to the Board of Finance for review. Each fire department is independently managed and operated, in accordance with bylaws established by each, and has its own hierarchy of officers. Each department provided volunteer fire-fighting activities to the Town, and there were provisions made to provide mutual aid among companies.

In essence, with funding provided by the Town, until 2011 the Board of Fire Commissioners managed Fire Services for Waterford. The organization was largely distributed with multiple levels of volunteer oversight, ~~few if any~~limited checks and balances, and no direct Town accountability to the Town. But it was a step towards a more centralized organization to better address Waterford needs.

~~The Board of Fire Commissioners was replaced in 2010 by Charter revision. Revision by a Town Fire Department with more centralized management structure, featuring~~ administered by a
DIRECTOR OF FIRE SERVICES
Director of Fire Services. This position eliminated the second tier of management over the private fire departments, instead creating a direct line of reporting and accountability from the individual fire departments to a professional Town Fire administrator. This change in organization established accountability for the efforts of the fire companies, as well as the full and part-time paid fire fighters, by to the Director and ultimately the First Selectman of the Town, as Chief Executive. It also centralized the budget creation and allocation process. The current Director of Fire Services, per Town Ordinance, is responsible for all fire service-related functions including:

- Policy development and management
- Equipment, procurement and maintenance
- Hiring of paid firefighters in association with the Human Resources Department

fire fighters as replacements to provide acceptable levels of fire service to the Town. Currently there is an active list of 30 volunteers, as characterized by responding to at least one incident annually, as reported in data provided by the previous Director of Fire Services. Some fire departments stations have a more robust level of volunteer support while others are nearly at risk of becoming non-functional and therefore in breach of the Agreement with the Town, due to their limited volunteer participation.

"ACTIVE" THE VOLUNTEER MUST MEET THE TOWN ORDINANCES, IN ORDER TO BE CONSIDERED
In general, the volunteer fire fighting corps of the past has dramatically declined, and the future is pointing to the need for more paid firefighters.

IN ORDER TO REBUILD
THE INCENTIVE

The Town of Waterford now functions as a "combination" fire service composed of both paid and volunteer firefighters. Due to similar economic issues nationally, this is becoming the normal situation for many municipal fire services. What cannot be achieved historically with volunteers is being augmented by part time or full time paid fire fighters.

Combination fire services departments have consequences, some good and some not so good. Among the upside consequence is that coverage of certain parts of Town can be provided part or full time by paid fire fighters. They can also be deployed to various stations as need dictates. They are independent of a specific fire station. Among the downsides is that the additional coverage comes with increases in operational costs and unfortunately has resulted in occasional chafing between the paid and unpaid ranks, despite all certified firefighters, volunteer or paid, being trained to the exact same standards. The failure to sometimes get along is a potential distraction and if unaddressed a possible detriment to Waterford's fire services.

At the other end of the fire services spectrum, there are some towns, for example New London, which have fire services composed entirely of paid fire fighters. Moving to an all-paid firefighter service will come with a large cost that will only grow with time, based upon annual increases in salary, benefits, and retirement costs.

The Town has historically benefited greatly from depending on an all-volunteer service for many decades nearly a century. The only financial burden previously born by the Town was associated with training, materials, and equipment, and maintenance (vehicles and buildings). Salaries, and the associated benefits, were not part of the equation.

A significant takeaway from the change in composition of Waterford's fire services is the focus on performance and cost. The use of data, emergency response type, time, frequency and from which part of town, now become important in conducting ongoing cost/benefit analysis analyses by the Town. Are there adequate responders to address the risks? Does the Town have adequate enough funding to provide adequate staffing of fire services?

Not having significant numbers of volunteers to augment the efforts of paid staff creates ongoing resource allocation decisions for the Director and ultimately the First Selectman. These

Staffing Plan

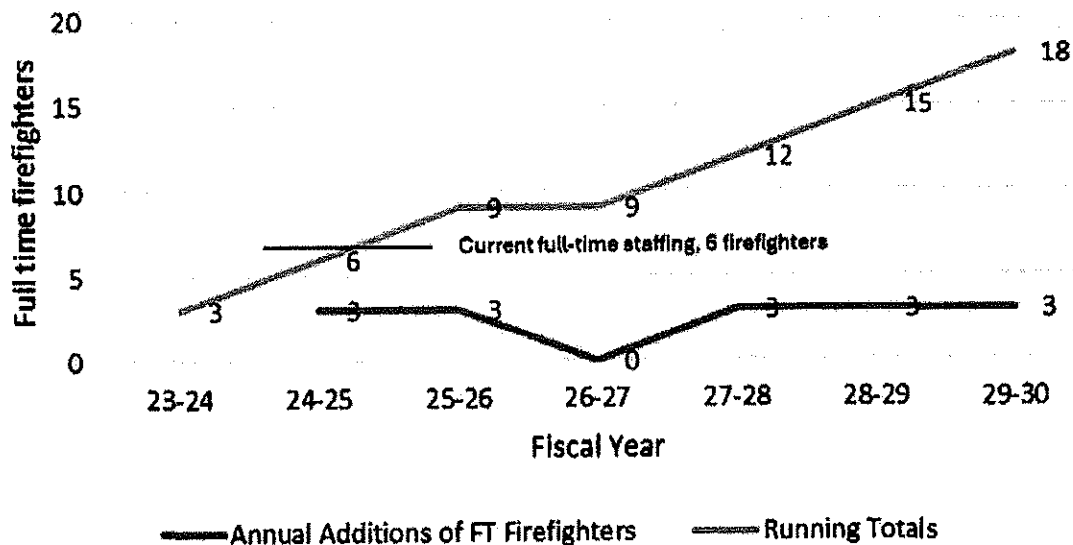


Figure 12- Current and Projected Staffing

This is an increase in the previous numbers of firefighters from the previous year. Appendix B outlines the previous Director of Fire Services' recommendation for staffing the fire stations in Waterford over the next 5 years. A summary of his assessment is provided herein. Figure 12 also graphically depicts the proposed increase. The dip in hiring reflects a pause to assess needs. The new Director of Fire Services will be making his own staff recommendations to the Town in next year's budget cycle.

It is important to underscore that staffing levels for the Waterford Fire Department have increased since the inception of the Ad-Hoc Fire Services Review Special Committee.

The previous Director of Fire Services has expressed a strong belief that staffing should continue to grow to meet both the current and future demands facing the community. This view has been echoed by the new Director. Increased construction, population growth, and rising call volumes will require additional response capabilities to maintain Waterford's public safety standards.

Key Takeaways from the Director's January 2025 Staffing Report

- Full-Time Staffing of Three Fire Stations
The Director ~~recommends~~ recommended that three fire stations should be staffed full-time with career (paid) firefighters:

- A 24/48 schedule (24 hours on, 48 hours off)
- A blend of part-time staffing seven days per week
- Full operations from all five fire ~~Fire stations~~Stations
- Deployment of a variety of apparatus tailored to incident needs.
- Standards of Response Coverage (SOC) Analysis
The Department should consider conducting a Standards of Response Coverage (SOC) analysis to formally evaluate operational efficiency and identify opportunities for improvement.

In presenting his Staffing Plan, the ~~former~~ Director ~~also provides~~provided a brief history of the Waterford Fire Department's staffing evolution. The trend reflects a slow but steady migration toward paid firefighters, driven by challenges in retaining and recruiting sufficient volunteer personnel.

The Director ~~identifies~~identified four critical factors justifying the continued expansion of paid staffing:

1. Nationwide Decline in Volunteer Firefighters
Recruitment and retention challenges mirror a broader national trend.
2. Increased Calls for Service
Higher call volumes place additional strain on the fire response system.
3. Commercial and Residential Development
Development in Waterford is progressing at a pace that threatens to outstrip current service capabilities.
4. Service Response Times and Their Impact
Variations in response times can have serious consequences for life safety, property protection, and insurance costs.

Establishing appropriate staffing levels of fire stations can be a challenging task. There are no definitive legal requirements, whether federal or state that dictate the specific number of firefighters each town or station must have. There are two primary organizations whose standards influence fire departments throughout the state and nation. These are:

OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration)- a federal agency under the U. S. Department of Labor responsible for setting and ensuring safe and healthy working conditions for employees, through the issuance of enforced standards.

In addition to the broader reasons supporting the five-station model, the following specific points highlight why replacing the Oswegatchie Fire Station is critical to Waterford's future:

1. Strengthens Public Safety

- A new OFS Ensures-ensures continued fire and emergency support for the Oswegatchie Elementary School and surrounding neighborhoods.
- It Provides-provides a modern, safe, and secure facility for housing part of the Town's paid firefighter workforce.
- It Creates-creates an ideal location for a future operational/educational hub command center for Waterford's growing team of career firefighters.

2. Supports the Town's Vision for a Combination Fire Department

- A new station Advances-advances Waterford's transition toward a combination fire services model, blending career firefighters and volunteer support—consistent with national best practices and Waterford's evolving needs.
- It Positions-positions the Town for a stronger, more resilient-flexible fire service well into the 21st century.

3. Enhances Recruitment and Retention

- A new, state-of-the-art station will boost the recruitment and retention of both career and volunteer firefighters.
- A modern facility focused on firefighter safety, training, and well-being demonstrates the Town's serious commitment to public safety services.

4. Protects Waterford's Long-Term Financial Interests

- Repairing and renovating the existing station is not cost-effective according to the Town's architect and construction project manager. The construction program manager provided an estimate of \$11.1 million to renovate the building as new, while a new building could cost approximately \$12.6 million, with contingencies and soft costs included in each.
- Delaying construction would significantly escalate costs—potentially requiring \$15–20 million within 7–10 years for new construction and interim repairs.
- Building the new station now is the fiscally responsible choice for taxpayers.

5. Continues a Century-Long Success Story

- Oswegatchie Fire Company has served Waterford from its current location for over 94 years.
- Maintaining a station at this location honors a proven, historic fire station model that has effectively covers-protected all 37 square miles of the Town.

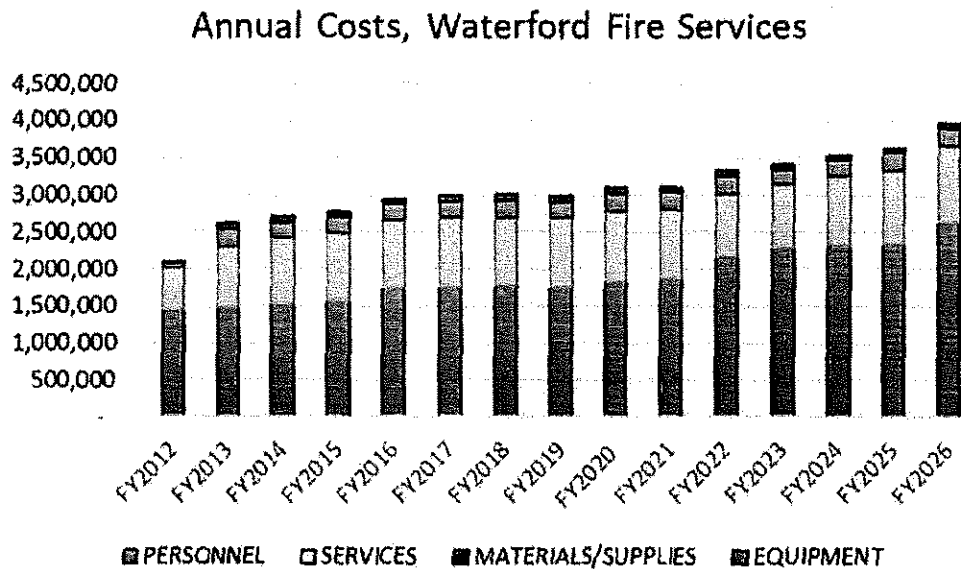


Figure 13-Waterford Fire Services Annual Costs, 2012-2026

Today, while many stations remain crucial geographic and operational assets, they are no longer community hubs filled with volunteers during downtime. Instead, they serve primarily as deployment outposts for paid staffing and critical equipment.

Since the late 1990s, volunteer recruitment and retention have faced major challenges—consistent with national trends. As volunteer numbers declined, Waterford responded proactively by:

- Hiring part-time and full-time firefighters to maintain/improve service levels
- Strategically deploying full-time paid firefighters to Oswegatchie, Jordan, and Cohanzie
- Assigning part-time paid firefighters to Goshen and Quaker Hill

Today:

- Full-time paid staffing covers the Town's busiest districts.
- Part-time staffing supports areas where volunteer activity has declined but where service demands remain critical.

Deployment patterns reflect careful use of demographic, call volume, and risk data (see Figures 7-10), aligning staffing levels with service needs to ensure efficient and economical operations.

8.2 Staffing: Strategic Management for Waterford Fire Services

Overview

Staffing is consistently the most expensive element in the provision of fire services for any municipality in Connecticut, including Waterford. Figure 13 depicts this fact.

These costs are driven by:

- Salaries for full-time and part-time personnel
- Health insurance, workers' compensation, and related benefits
- Pension obligations (firefighters often retire after ~~relatively short~~ sometimes shorter careers compared to other public-employees)
- Ongoing municipal training requirements to maintain certifications, safety standards, and operational readiness

Financial Impact of Staffing

Assuming a typical municipal fire service career trajectory:

- Average hiring age: 20–25 years
- Average retirement age: 50–55 years
- Average years of service: 20–25 years

~~At any given time, the Town could be financially responsible for one current salary and up to two pensions per active firefighter when factoring in past retirees.~~ This underscores the long-term budgetary impact staffing decisions have and highlights why municipal governments must approach staffing planning with careful strategic consideration.

Challenges in Staffing Decisions

Determining appropriate staffing levels is highly complex, involving a blend of:

- Objective data: such as call volumes, response times, and mutual aid frequency
- Subjective factors: such as organizational culture, volunteer availability, and emerging community risks

Both types of information must be analyzed continuously to adjust staffing models appropriately over time.

- Consider transitioning toward smaller, more flexible vehicles if Emergency Services activities continue to dominate responses.
 - Consider rotating insurance coverage is uniformly distributed between vehicles to minimize wear and tear and obtain better warranty support.
- d. Plan for Asset Replacement
- Establish and adhere to an active service life policy of approximately 15–20 years for major apparatus unless chronic maintenance issues suggest otherwise.
 - Routinely retire and liquidate outdated or unnecessary vehicles, using sales proceeds to offset new equipment purchases—keep only those vehicles which are deemed necessary based on contributions to current operations.
- e. Buy Standardized Equipment
- Prioritize purchasing "off-the-shelf" apparatus where feasible, avoiding unnecessary customization that adds cost without improving core functionality.
- f. Strategically Position Assets
- Match vehicle deployment to population density, risk profile, and response data to optimize readiness (e.g., assigning lighter, quicker vehicles to suburban or low-density areas, retaining heavy apparatus in high-risk commercial zones).

Waterford's investment in *Fleetio* software and its commitment to strategic asset management positions the Town to:

- Improve emergency response readiness
- Extend the life of *critical but costly* apparatus
- Make smarter, data-informed budget decisions
- Strengthen overall operational efficiency

As Waterford's Fire Services continues to evolve into a modern Emergency Services operation, fleet management will be a key pillar of success—ensuring that both the community's safety and the taxpayers' investments are protected for the long term.

Waterford's future is not just about owning more vehicles—it's about owning the right vehicles, maintaining them properly, and deploying them smartlyeffectively.

8.6 Overall Strategic Plan

The Fire AdministratorConsistent with the Fire Department Ordinance, the Director of Fire Services and First Selectman shall annually monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of fire services in Waterford and recommend appropriate revisions to departmental operations including but not limited to staffing adjustments, policy changes and capital expenditures to meet the ongoing requirements of an evolving hybrid combination department. The respective funding authorities (BOS, BOF, RTM) with input from the community. shall respond to these