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TOWN CLERK

Fire Services Review Special Committee

Minutes—Special Meeting May 29, 2025

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

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

Also present: John Mariano (Chief, Cohanzie Fire Co.); David Dow (Chief, Quaker Hill Fire Co.)

1. Call to order: Chair Tuneski called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Public comment: Ursula Moreshead offered comments on the need for strategic planning for entire service (attached).

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

a. Receive/review comments on draft of second half of report: Condon stated that while the outline was a good start, the drafts don't seem to match it and seem to include data not in the record or Howley's opinions. Inclusion of the regulations are good, he added, but there is no bridging between them and what we have to do to comply. He added that we need more input from all the advisory members' groups, not just the Director, and we need a faster way to flush out the data. He suggested that we need a roadmap of how best to scale up, with a ranking of each station's needs and capabilities. He offered his opinion that the station that should be next to get additional staffing would be Quaker Hill rather than Oswegatchie because the northern section is a "staffing desert" and that recent adjustments/cutbacks in Montville mean that we can no longer count on Montville for mutual aid up there as we have in the past.

Haley cautioned the committee to remember that data is liquid, impacted by outside influences such as Covid, business and residential development, and even changes in traffic volume. There has been some restructuring over the years, and recent addition of 24/7 staffing, but Fire Services is forced to be agile and is still desperately working to provide minimum standards of service. Recommendations for six months or so are one thing, he added, but the situation and needs could be very different in a couple of years.

Williams reported that he has requested response time data for the past 6 years, to include pre-Covid data, and that it should be available by the next meeting. Condon pointed out that the committee hasn't seen any of the revisions from earlier comments and the report seems to be built around a preconceived notion. Muckle stated that the Chair has full authority to edit the report as he sees fit and that we've had several comprehensive reviews of fire services over the years and they all determined that 5 stations are best. Driscoll pointed out that those reviews were all done 15 or more years ago and there was no decision on whether 5 stations are the best system; the fact is that 5 stations exist and were built by private groups long before decades of development altered the demands on fire services. She said the question now is how can or should the town best utilize them.

Condon said that whatever the final recommendations the report provides, Haley will need the support of the community behind him. Chair added that he wants to collect all written comments into a spreadsheet so we can track them and then he will bring them all together so the group can decide what goes into final version.

- b. *Consider releasing draft report to new Fire Services Director:* Haley stated that charting data such as response times would be like making a wall out of water. He explained that there are vast inconsistencies in the current and previous systems, such as part-time shifts going unfilled, that make it difficult to identify trends. He would not use current results because in his opinion things today are being held together for survival and we need to get certain efficiencies in place. He added that all we can say is that certain results have changed since the implementation of 24/7 coverage in some stations. Condon stated that we can use metrics to show certain changes and be able to say "how many responded in what amount of time." He added that response times are based more on adequate staffing rather than location and that while everyone says the fleet needs to be reduced, the new OSW station plan adds a bay and the politicians are saying we need a new building.

Haley noted that some of the information seems to have been taken from the plan he supplied for his interview, which included ideas on how to increase staffing, with offsetting savings to lessen the impact. He added that everyone involved in his interview process was on board with acknowledging the system needs to be fixed. Chair entertained motion to give drafts to Haley for his formal review. Driscoll noted that there is no need for official release; as advisory member, the Director has the drafts and will be part of the ongoing discussions, comments, and revisions as well as part of the decision-making process. She also asked if the Director would share his proposal with the entire committee.

Motion to have Director review draft by Muckle, second by Condon.

Motion passed: Yes-4 No-0 Abstain-1 (Driscoll)

- c. *Consider releasing draft report to RTM:* Chair reiterated RTM Moderator's request to have report for June meeting to supplement discussion on OSW bonding and entertained motion to present draft version to RTM. Muckle suggested that the draft be submitted with an FYI-only provision, so that RTM wouldn't comment. Condon and Driscoll noted that presenting it formally would demand comment/discussion by RTM and if any members were curious about FSRSC progress they could find the drafts in our minutes. Condon also argued that a draft presentation would make our credibility razor-thin and endanger our final report, which seems to have all been predicated on a need for a new station but has no data supporting that premise. He added that Cohanzie and Quaker Hill have also been suffering from long-time maintenance issues, but we haven't discussed them at all and the committee needs a decision-making process that is consistent and verified and involves input from all advisory members. Chair noted that we'll be getting initial comments from Haley at next meeting, and that we should then be able to issue the final report and be done rather than drag on. Chair then entertained motion to release draft to RTM. No motion offered.

4. **Next meeting:** Chair asked members who had written comments to send them to him and Driscoll the next day; he added that he would relay request to absent advisory members so comments could be reviewed at next meeting. Consensus to schedule next meeting for Wednesday, June 18, at 6:00 p.m. at Cohanzie Fire Station.

5. **Adjournment:** Motion by Muckle; second by Keatley to adjourn at 8:15 p.m. Voice vote: Unanimous.

Submitted by
Susan Driscoll, FSRSC Secretary

encl: Moreshead public comment

Public Comment for Fire Services Review Special Committee

5/29/25

Since the creation of this committee in 2021, what information has been collected on the condition of the OFS before the decision was made to completely rebuild? Is there an itemized list of what needs to be repaired at the station?

Asking the town's residents to pay \$12 million towards a brand-new fire station is nonsensical if the bones of the building are good. I can't imagine that a new roof and other necessary repairs would cost as much as it will to rebuild.

The BoS voted to table the resolution recommending the appropriation and bond authorization of \$12 million. This decision was smart, and it's a refreshing change from the frantic rhetoric that the fire station is literally collapsing on top of people's heads.

If we're looking at the trajectory of the town's fire services and the predictive issues around a country-wide reduction in firefighting staff (both paid and volunteer), we should be looking at making needed repairs, not rebuilds, in anticipation of consolidating stations. Has anyone tried bringing OFS and JFS to the table to talk about strategic planning? Combining staff and equipment is the smart decision to make because if the number of staff continue to decline, the \$12 million building will be obsolete.

A member of the BoF suggested that the town reduce the bonding to \$8 million and take the remaining balance from the General Fund to bring the cost down and make it more palatable for the taxpayers. Its shell games and decisions like these that create mistrust across the board, resulting in push-back from the public and, ultimately, from members of the RTM.

I would recommend that the town use some of the \$2.9 million from the OFS Building Renovations account to fund an outside consultant who can take an overarching look at the town's current needs and give recommendations to prepare for predictive changes within fire services.

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