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TOWN CLERK

Fire Services Review Special Committee

Minutes—Special Meeting March 27, 2025

Members Present: Robert Tuneski (BoF); Susan Driscoll (RTM); Richard Muckle (BoS); Matthew Keatley (RTM); Tim Condon (Public Protection & Safety Comm.); Mike Howley (Interim Director, Fire Services); Tom Martin (Captain, WFD)

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

Also Present: Town Attorney Nick Kepple

1. **Call to order:** Chair Tuneski called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.
2. **Public comment:** Erik Pawlak (Captain, WFD) noted that he began his service as a teen-age volunteer firefighter before the WFD was combined in 2011 and offered to discuss the change in relations between career and volunteer firefighters at a future meeting. He pointed out several factual errors in the draft report that had been sent the night before. (*attached*)
3. **Previous Minutes:** Motion by Keatley, second by Condon, to approve the June 25, 2024, minutes as presented.
Voice Vote: Yes-4 No-0 Abstain-1 (Condon).
Motion by Keatley, second by Condon, to approve the March 6, 2025, minutes as presented. Voice vote: Unanimous.
4. **Consideration of FSRSC's charge from the RTM (6/7/21):**
 - a. *Review of provided information:* None provided. Howley expects to finalize and submit for next meeting.
 - b. *Initial feedback on first draft of report:* Chair noted that this is first rough draft (*attached*) and was looking for comments on content and quantity of information. Condon and Driscoll confirmed Pawlak's error citations and provided corrections. Tuneski said he would contact former members of the defunct Board of Fire Commissioners for info on when the Board was established and when the Town started financing fire house capital projects. Condon offered his perspective as one of the co-creators of the FSRSC and its written charge. The effort was triggered by a fatal fire across the street from Jordan fire station, and citizens were demanding an accurate review of policy and performance. The report was envisioned, he said, as a "community lift" with representatives from all fire and rescue first responders who and would provide data, insights, concerns, and work together to propose strategies.
He noted that the Town established a combined department back in 2011, but implementing the change has long been delayed and the town has failed to follow through in various ways, including years of neglecting repairs to all the fire houses. He added that no one is proclaiming an end to the volunteer system, but that we need to recognize and react to the reality of a system that is foundering nationwide. Noting that previous reviews and reports were done decades ago, when the situation was very different and the volunteer system was robust, Condon urged the committee to create a fully-documented report explaining where we were, where we are, and what we need to do...and provide accurate costs for each option and explanations of why we made our final recommendations, whatever they are. He added that if the

FSRSC intends to continue its initial support of maintaining 5 stations, they should be aware that once the shovel goes into the ground at Oswegatchie, that signals a new age of town-owned firehouses and the potential end of the five-station option.

Tuneski said we need to put everything in its proper context, from where we were to where we are today and then where we should go. He added that we need high integrity and accuracy in what we ultimately present.

Atty Kepple told the committee that while he appreciated the effort put in so far, there was no need to struggle with a lengthy report and they could simply move on with a recommendation and disband. Condon and Driscoll disagreed, pointing out that the FSRSC's written charge from the RTM was to provide a thorough review and present a report that contained recommendations for action. Kepple noted that the people voted and we've had a combined department for nearly 15 years, and questioned the authority or the role of the FSRSC in charting the town's future when there will be an administration or a director who has their own plan. Condon pointed out that the problems we face now are the result of the town never following through on the initial plans and ordinances to implement necessary policies and procedures. While times and players may change, a detailed, documented, and well-publicized report would be a reference for future officials who, if they proposed a change in strategy, could be asked to explain what triggered the need or what new issue needed resolution.

Muckle stated that the science of firefighting has become much more efficient over the years, so we should not need as many responders as in the early days. Condon and Driscoll pointed out that changes in training, volume of incidents, hazardous materials, electric vehicles and greatly reduced flashover times demanded a suitable number of on-duty staff at a minimum.

- c. *Consideration of independent report reviewer:* Chair asked for updates on members' efforts to locate potential outside reviewers. Condon reported that Mystic Chief Clarkin and Old Mystic Chief Ken Richards and Assistant Chief Keith Richards are willing to review the report. He noted that their tenure in combination departments would be an asset and that while they are close enough to be considered regional colleagues, they are not so close that their input would be influenced by regular working or personal relationships. Chair asked Howley if he had reached out to colleagues in the CT Fire Chiefs Association; Howley predicted that they would probably defer, since the group tends to stay out of individual town issues.

Martin requested, and was given, the opportunity to make a statement before the meeting adjourned. Remarks included suggestion that IAFC's Blue Ribbon and Red Ribbon reports on combination fire departments would be good resources for the committee, reflections on his 3-year tenure on FSRSC, and announcement of his resignation. (*attached*)

Motion by Muckle, second by Keatley, to include Martin's statement in the minutes. Voice vote: Unanimous.

5. Next meeting: Consensus to schedule next meeting for Thursday, May 1, at 6:00 p.m. Location tbd.

6. Adjournment: Motion by Keatley; second by Muckle to adjourn at 7:20 p.m. Voice vote: Unanimous.

Submitted by
Susan Driscoll, FSRSC Secretary

encl: Pawlak public comment
Report (first half) Draft 1
Martin resignation

Fire Services Special Review Committee meeting 3-27-25

First half report talking points

-The fire commission was not formed in 2010. This needs to be corrected for the report

-The report is stating that the town will justify a volunteer as active as long as they respond to just one incident annually. In 2024 the WFD responded to 3100 incidents. If a Little League coach only showed up to one game we would not consider him an active coach and remove him from his position for neglecting his role, yet we are trying to justify a single response as acceptable in emergency services?

-I feel the term for our department should be changed from hybrid to combination. It is a more widely accepted and understood term in the industry regarding a department that is made up of paid and volunteer staff alike.

-Claiming that the standards for paid and volunteer staff are the "exact same" is blatantly false. There are no pre requisites to become a volunteer fire officer. They just have to be elected to the position by their peers. Some chiefs have 0 state certified fire officer training and some have not even possessed their EMT certification. There are pre requisites to be hired as a firefighter and even more so to become an acting captain and even more requirements to be a captain. Also, the physical requirements are not the same. Paid staff are required a full physical by Pequot health including blood work, spirometry, and chest x-rays. Volunteers generally go to their primary care and after the primary care write on a routine physical that they can be firefighters. The union has lobbied against this practice for years but it continues today.

-In the report it states the Waterford Fire Engine Co#1 (Jordan) was founded in 1923 but it was in fact founded in 1920.

1.0 Executive Summary /BLUF

TBD pending completion of entire report.

2. Introduction

2.1 At the June 7, 2021 meeting, under new business initiated by Representative Tim Condon (Chair of the Public Protection and Safety Standing Committee), the RTM voted to create a special committee, "Fire Services Review Special Committee". The charter of the new committee was "to review issues including performance, policies, and staffing, and present their findings / recommendations of any changes needed to enhance public safety, creating a steering document and strategic plan". Per the approved motion, the committee shall consist of five full voting members as follows:

2 RTM Members (appointed by the RTM)

1 Public Protection and Safety Committee Member (appointed by the Public Protection and Safety Committee)

1 Board of Finance Member (appointed by the Board of Finance)

1 Board of Selectmen Member (appointed by the Board of Selectmen)

And five advisory non/ voting members as follows:

Fire Services Director

Emergency Services Director

Waterford Ambulance Manager

One Volunteer Fire Chief (appointed by consensus of the 5 Waterford Fire Companies or the 5 chiefs)

One Full Time Career Fire Fighter (appointed by the consensus of the Waterford Full-time Firefighters)

The original full voting members included the following:

Richard Muckle, RTM Member (R)

Greg Attanasio, RTM Member (D)

Susan Driscoll, Public Protection and Safety Committee (D)

Robert Tuneski, Board of Finance (R)

Rob Brule, Board of Selectman (R)

The non-voting / advisory members included the following:

Michael Howley, Director of Fire Services

Steve Sinagra, Director of Emergency Management

Mark Greczkowski, Manager of Waterford Ambulance

Donald Chapman, Volunteer Fire Chief

Tom Martin, Full-time Waterford Career Firefighter

The Committee was sometimes referred to as the Ad Hoc Fire Services Committee.

The Committee held its kick-off and swearing-in meeting on XYZ. At that meeting Robert Tuneski was elected Chairman and Susan Driscoll was elected Secretary. At this meeting Director of Fire Services Howley presented each voting member with a loose-leaf binder with the following sections populated with information:

Agendas / Minutes

Charter / Ordinance – Fire Services

Waterford District Maps

Waterford Organizational Chart

Contracts / Agreements

General Information

This binder served as the basis of information provided by Director Howley, and periodically he provided additional information for the committee to review, mostly technical publications that were directly relevant to firefighting in Waterford. Other information addressed the difficulties of attracting and keeping volunteer firefighters, the issues of hybrid and fire services, and demographic comparisons to other similarly sized / populated towns. A few different revisions of Staffing Plans were provided, as was a Volunteer Recruitment Plan. Additionally various metrics measuring the level of membership and activity of the volunteer firefighters in Town firefighting service were offered.

The committee functioned by meeting and discussing topics of interest to the Fire Services. Initially some of the key topics included the status of the Oswegatchie Fire Station, communications (radio and pager), the relationship between the volunteers and

the paid firefighters, volunteer recruitment, and general staffing of Fire Services. Initially, the status of the Oswegatchie Fire Station was viewed as the highest priority as it was considered in risk of collapse in need of urgent action. Each topic was discussed over one or more meetings. Director Howley continued to provide relevant information regarding each discussion topic. This information added to that currently in the binder.

Over time and at the request of an RTM member at one of their meetings, the committee was asked to also address fire apparatus fleet management and general infrastructure. And policies were discussed sporadically over the tenure of the committee.

Others, including the Emergency Services Director provided relevant information on communications. Most information from the balance of the advisory members was verbal through the meetings.

There was also a fair amount of public discussion, primarily on the status and condition of the Oswegatchie Fire Station.

New information brought to the committee including public comment was captured in detailed meeting minutes. The meeting minutes were also good sources of relevant information.

It is noteworthy to highlight that there was a recent compilation of fire services studies entitled "Fire Service Study, 2018" which is a collection of Fire Services related information dating back to 1995 including *Task Force 95 Study*, and *Fire Service Study, 2001*. This compendium is a very valuable and relevant reference, and covering Waterford's Fire Services history.

The process then, that the committee followed in generating this report and the findings / recommendations herein was one of deliberate discussion and debate on the topics of interest, and solicitation and capture 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. No independent research by members of the committee has been used.

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 report were presented at the February 3rd, 2023 RTM Meeting by the chairman, at which time, as a result of the findings, the RTM unanimously voted to create the Oswegatchie Fire Station Building Committee.

Following the issue of the interim report, the Committee experienced a brief hiatus, as focus of some of the members shifted to other important Town responsibilities, including the newly established Oswegatchie Building Committee. After the hiatus, the meeting resumed with a change in membership:

Rich Muckle changed from an RTM representative to Board of Selectman representative
Greg Anastascio departed and became Selectman

Susan Driscoll changed from Public Protection and Safety Committee representative to RTM representative

Matt Keatley was appointed as the RTM representative replacing Richard Muckle

And the Public Protection and Safety Committee representative was left unfilled until August 14, 2024, when the Public Protection and Public Safety Standing Committee filled it with Tim Condon, Chairman of the Public Protection and Safety Committee.

In the summer of 2024, Director Howley retired from his position. Around the time of his retirement the committee had received 99% of the information it had requested, and was in position to begin data analysis and report development. A brief second hiatus was taken pending the hiring of a new Director of Fire Services, who it was thought could then provide the remaining bit of information requested and providing a final update to yearly collected information. The hiatus lasted several months and resumed March 6th, 2025. That meeting began the crafting of the final report, as well as updating previously provided information. coincided with and was partially responsible for the second hiatus of the committee.

3.0 Fire Services History

Fire services pre-date the incorporation of the local fire departments, which occurred in the 1920-1940'. Prior to having fire stations from which services were deployed, the Town.... Need more input here

In 2010, the Board of Fire Commissioners was formed, in accordance with a Town charter revision. It 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 Marshalls office and the Town Communications Center.

The Town is divided into 5 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 individual signed legal agreement with the Town stipulating that they will provide fire services in exchange of an annual funding appropriation from the Town. Each fire department was required to prepare and submit a budget to the Board of Fire Commissioners, who then would tabulate it with inputs from the other fire departments, the Fire Marshalls 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.

Fire Services Costs over the Past 20 years

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

The Board of Fire Commissioners was replaced by a flatter, more centralized management structure, featuring a 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 Town paid official. This change in organization placed accountability back to the Director and ultimately the First Selectman of the Town. It also centralized the budget creation and

allocation process. The current Director of Fire Services position is responsible for all things fire service-related including:

- Policy development and management
- Equipment procurement and maintenance
- Hiring of paid firefighters
- Training of personnel and maintenance of standards
- Maintenance of the firefighting infrastructure
- Staffing
- Volunteer recruitment and retention
- Emergency Communications
- Fire Marshalls Office
- Budget development and long-range planning

In addition to creating a leaner more accountable fire services organization, it also consolidated data collection and management. It formalized and centralized record retention. This information including examples like response type and frequency, volunteer participation, training, expenditures, fleet maintenance, capital planning, equipment inventories, etc. were collected and tabulated for management review and use; as opposed to being mined periodically from the sourced department or the Commission. The formal collection and tracking of these streams of data contributed to a greater ability to evaluate current fire services performance and forecast future needs. This step in fire services management structure was the single most impactful step taken by the Town in recent history regarding Fire Services. It was essential in unifying policy and practice. This change also invited the use of data-driven decisions, supplanting previous decision making that depended on Board consensus for recommendations. Arguably, depending upon the distillation from 5 members on the Board could have been more subjective.

Along with this change came vertical organization and consistency in policies and practices.

Fire services today is more organized and in a better position to deliver services to the Waterford taxpayer.

Figure ____ compares the organizational structure of the previous and current fire services management structures.

TBD

Figure ____ Organization Charts, Board of Fire Commissioners compared to Director of Fire Services

Fire protection in the Town of Waterford was originally provided by volunteers, working out of the five stations. At one time there were xx hundred registered volunteers. The town was flush with people looking to give back and to fulfill public service. The stations thrived based upon local fund raising, and were in essence self-supporting.

Volunteers were the backbone of Fire Services until xyz, when the first part time firefighter was hired by the Town of Waterford. Over time and for a variety of reasons, the ranks of volunteers have shrunk. The reasons are mainly economic, with fewer people able to take time off from work to provide service. The drop in volunteers has resulted in the need to hire paid fire fighters as replacements to provide acceptable levels of fire service to the Town. Currently there is an active list of xx volunteers, with each responding to at least one incident. Some fire departments have a more robust level of volunteer support while others are nearly closed due to their absence.

But in general, the volunteer fire fighting corp of the past is facing extinction and the future is pointing to the need for more paid firefighters.

The Town of Waterford now has a "hybrid" 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 paid fire fighters.

Hybrid fire services 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 fire station. Among the downsides is that the additional coverage comes with increases in operational costs, and unfortunately has resulted in visible contempt between the paid and unpaid ranks, despite all firefighters

being trained to the exact same standards. The failure to get along is a potential distraction and detriment to 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 benefited enormously from depending on an all-volunteer service for a number of years. 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 complexion of fire services is the highlighted focus on performance and cost. The use of data, emergency response type, time, frequency and from which part of town, now become important in assessing risk to the Town. Are there adequate responders to address the risks? Does the Town have adequate funding to provide adequate staffing of fire services?

Not having unlimited volunteers leads to chief executive decision making based upon best available information.

Where possible, it is in the best interest of the Town to recruit and maintain a corp of volunteer firefighters to not only maintain the rich history of the town, but more importantly help manage growth in fire services costs.

The town is broken into five Fire Services Districts, as shown in Figure ____, supported by 5 fire companies:

Fire Company	Fire Company Name	Street Address	Date of Incorporation
1	Waterford Fire Engine Company	89 Rope Ferry Road	1923
2	Quaker Hill Fire Department	17 Old Colchester Road	1927
3	Goshen Fire Department	63 Goshen Road	1928
4	Oswegatchie Fire Company	441 Boston Post Road	1930
5	Cohanize Fire Company	53 Dayton Road	1942

TBD

Figure __ Map of the Town of Waterford Depicting Locations of Fire Stations and Fire Districts

PICTURE

Figure __ Cohanzie Fire Station

PICTURE

Figure __ Quaker Hill Fire Station

PICTURE

Figure __ Oswegatchie Fire Station

PICTURE

Figure __ Jordan Fire Station

PICTURE

Figure __ Goshen Fire Station

4.0 Demographic Data

The Town of Waterford was incorporated on October 8, 1801. It is a rural town 36.7 sq. miles in size, with 23 miles of coastline and a population of 19,554 +/- and is part of New London County. Waterford has grown at a steady rate since the 1970's, although State projections completed in 2016 expect Waterford's population to decline through 2040.

Despite these projections, the population continues to grow, and recent growth announcements from local businesses (for example Electric Boat) suggest that local populations including Waterford could increase. The Town's Director of Planning and Zoning notes that the population actually appears to be increasing slightly. Figures __ demonstrates the census trend, Table ____ depicts current development underway as

of March 2025. Additional commercial growth is likely with the revitalization of the Crystal Mall and the potential for the development of a data center on the Dominion property.

FIGURE

Figure ____ Population Change by Decade

TABLE

Table ____ Summary of Current Residential Building Units

The population density is 435 residents per square mile, less than state average of 648 residents per square mile, but more than New London County, 348 residents per square mile.

More resident workers commute out of Town for employment than the number of employees who travel to Waterford for work.

The number of workers commuting into Town and share of residents working in Town has decreased since 2010.

Waterford is nestled between Montville to the North, East Lyme to the west, and New London to the east. The former two are like Waterford demographically, while New London is a large (by relative standards) city.

Rec'd 3/27/25

Town of Waterford

Fire Services Review Committee

Attn: Susan Driscoll, Recording Secretary

3/27/2025

April of this year will be three years that I can say I have had the privilege and honor to have been appointed to the Fire Service Review Committee. It has been my pleasure to work alongside those whom I have, during this tenure.

That said, with this letter, it is my intent to resign from the position.

Please allow me to address my thoughts and concerns to you, as well as factors that have been a concern of mine that have led me to my decision.

It is in my opinion that Mr. Tuneski, has done an injustice to the Fire Services Review Committee. This committee was established in June of 2021 by the Representative Town Meeting (RTM). The first meeting did not happen until April 2022, which is almost a year later, and then there was another gap from July 2024 until March of this year. The first order of business from Mr. Tuneski was to determine whether the town of Waterford needed to continue to maintain a five fire station model. Once the recommendation was made to continue to utilize 5 fire stations moving forward the next order of business was the committee needed to recommend replacing the current Oswegatchie Fire Station with a new town-owned building.

It is my opinion, as Captain of the Waterford Fire Department, with over 30 years of experience in the field of firefighting, that this was a frivolous move. It was done without necessary data and documentation to support the five station model, including a response data analysis regarding the five station model. Now that we have several stations with 24/7 personnel, it is pertinent to have this researched so effective and appropriate considerations are implemented for the safety of our town.

Of note, I personally have requested to meet with Mr. Tuneski on numerous occasions in past years, which never came to fruition; however, it is a known fact that he had allocated time to meet with five fire chiefs in town, outside of the committee, but never once has met with the career firefighters to have a similar discussion.

In addition, a discussion among the committee members at one of the meetings, of which I was not present, about Waterford having a decline in volunteer firefighters, Chief Todd Patton blatantly blamed the career firefighters in the department as to be the reason for the lack of retaining volunteer firefighters. Had I been able to attend this meeting, I would have been able to speak to this matter and bring attention to what I believe the problem is. With Chief Patton's

remarks and accusations against the “career firefighters,” I have very good reason to believe he is being influenced.

Again, my opinion.

Another issue that has brought me to my decision to resign is the current lack of leadership for the fire service in Waterford. Chief Howley resigned his position in June of 2024 and to date we still have not found a replacement for his position. The first selectman, Rob Brule, appointed Fire Marshal Steve Dubicki, in the interim. Unfortunately, Mr. Dubicki could not keep up with the demands of both positions he held; *Fire Marshall and Director of Fire Services*.

Consequently, Chief Howley was asked to come back on a part time basis, and while he retained this part time position, this is only a temporary “fix.” This “temporary fix” does not work; the department needs a full time Director of Fire Services that can manage and function at a high capacity given the town of Waterford’s fire department, and the public service needs. An example of why this is important to the department, is quarterly town-wide fire officer meetings. Because of the void in the position needed as Director, we have not had a meeting since June 2024, which is a major component to interagency communications and operations to protect the town.

Finally, an issue that has been known for years and has been brought forward by the union numerous times... There are different standards held within career, part-time, and volunteer employees. *And some of these variations and standards are a direct violation of state and federal laws.* Osha approved medical screenings for **all** staff that wear respirators, age requirements, and meeting OSHA requirements should be mandatory for all employees / volunteers for the safety of not only the staff, but for the safety of the town as well

I encourage this committee to read a report written by the International Fire Chiefs Association titled “A Call For Action The Blue Ribbon Report Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service.”

On page 16 of the report it states “A combination system will not work when it is based on prejudice or when either group of firefighters, volunteer or career functions in a minority role and is perceived subservient to the other.”

With the above highlighted issues mentioned, the possibility of having this report being controlled by persons outside of the committee, and the liability of having my name attached to the final report from which someone may get hurt, I have decided to hereby resign effective March 28, 2025 from the Fire Service Review Committee.

Respectfully Submitted,

Thomas M. Martin
Captain, Waterford Fire Department