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Fire Services Review Special Committee

Minutes—Special Meeting April 22, 2024

Members Present: Robert Tuneski (BoF); Susan Driscoll (RTM); Matthew Keatley (RTM); Mike Howley (Director, Fire Services); Steven Sinagra (Director, Emergency Management); Tom Martin (Captain, WFS)

Members Absent: Mark Greczkowski (WAS Director of Operations); Rob Brule (BoS); Todd Patton (Chief, Goshen Fire Co.); [RTM Public Protection & Safety Committee appointment tbd]

1. **Call to order:** Chair Tuneski called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.
2. **Public comment:** None.
3. **Minutes—March 18, 2024:** Motion by Keatley, second by Tuneski, to approve March 18, 2024, minutes as presented. Voice vote: Yes-Tuneski, Driscoll Abstain-Keatley Motion passed.
4. **Consideration of FSRSC's charge from the RTM (6/7/21):** Discussion on the Staffing and Fleet Management Plans Director Howley distributed at March meeting. He pointed out changes since the 2015 data, where 25-30 individuals were considered volunteers for Fire Services, but about 95% of them were only doing calls as Waterford Ambulance Service staff—and he has stopped authorizing volunteer incentive payments for WAS rescue calls.

Howley noted that the drop in volunteer firefighters is a nationwide issue that has resulted in the loss of our farm system and while we have apparatus at all five stations, we don't have people. There are about 12 longtime volunteers—most of them with Goshen—but they are aging out and the volunteer incentive program doesn't seem to have had much of an impact. Active volunteers in the other companies are in single digits; OSW has around three, including paid part-timers.

He stated that historical data shows that staffing should have been addressed ten years ago, and stop-gaps such as pulling 3 of the 4 Fire Marshalls into the fire services created difficulty keeping up with mandated inspections. Chair Tuneski suggested we work with the Planning Director to determine recent and expected developments' impact on call volume and staffing needs. Howley will prepare a cost analysis of what volunteers cost versus adding paid staff. He added that he and Chiefs in neighboring towns have instituted a new policy: Mutual aid in the form of one uncertified individual driving up in town apparatus is no longer authorized and will not be accepted.

In response to Tuneski's question about certification of our full-time firefighters, Howley reported that all of them are certified FF1 and EMTs, so they can—and do—respond to both fire and rescue calls, but with our starting wage rate the second lowest in the state, recruitment efforts in a very competitive market are hampered. He added that certifications to qualify volunteers to actually participate in fire-fighting efforts require several hundred hours of study—and that huge commitment is what drove the recent revision of the volunteer incentive program to include payments for completion of certification courses. No discernable changes in the first quarterly VIP report, but Howley will bring an updated version to next meeting, with three years of records and more details, such as how many individuals, how many calls, status (e.g., certified, fire police or fire fighter).

Director Sinagra gave quick update on Emergency Management staffing. We've finally hired a 10th dispatcher, giving us full staff for the first time since 1997. Two are currently in training; he noted that EM is facing same challenges as Fire to find certified applicants. Once training is complete, and now that scheduling issues have been ironed out with the union, he anticipates that we should see a reduction in overtime costs this year.
5. **Next meeting:** Consensus to tentatively schedule next meeting for Wednesday, May 29, at 5:30p.m.
6. **Adjournment:** Motion by Keatley; second by Driscoll to adjourn at 7:24 p.m. Voice vote: Unanimous.

Submitted by
Susan Driscoll, FSRSC Secretary