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TOWN CLERK

**Fire Services Review Special Committee
Minutes—Special Meeting December 13, 2022**

Members Present: Robert Tuneski (BoF), Richard Muckle (RTM), Greg Attanasio (RTM), Susan Driscoll (RTM/PP&S), Rob Brule (BoS), Steven Sinagra (Emergency Management), Mark Greczkowski (WAS), Todd Patton (Chief, Goshen FC), Tom Martin (Captain, WFS)

Members Absent: Michael Howley (Director, Fire Services)

1. **Call to order:** Chair Tuneski called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.
2. **Public comment:** Oswegatchie Company Chief Chris Pafias stated that he had heard a suggestion that the town go to only four departments and he was very much against that because several studies came to the same conclusion, that we need five firehouses and Oswegatchie is in a good location. He pointed out that recently there was a new leak in the bunkroom but he couldn't get a contractor to fix it because the roof is not safe, so they finally used Jordan's ladder truck to make the repairs themselves.
Wayne Gilpin, a volunteer firefighter for more than 40 years, spoke in detail about the condition of the OSW firehouse, the town's most recent building project, and the need for the town to move now to replace the OSW firehouse. (*see attached*)
3. **Approval of previous minutes:** Motion by Muckle, second by Attanasio, to approve November 15, 2022, minutes as presented. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.
4. **Consideration of FSRSC's charge from the RTM (6/7/21):** Discussion focused on the areas noted in agenda:
 - A. **Charge and deliverables format:** Chair Tuneski asked Driscoll to read aloud the committee's charge that is provided on every agenda. Chair noted that the committee has focused on gathering information on staffing, infrastructure, and communications issues that will drive the recommendation on a long-term strategic plan and that Oswegatchie firehouse status was within our purview. Driscoll agreed that the OSW firehouse is in a serious state of disrepair, as are other firehouses, but noted that there have been no capital requests in the budget for OSW repairs over the past several years, the FSRSC was told last April that emergency roof repairs were needed but, despite the fact that there is surplus money available, no appropriations request has come forth in nine months. The committee has agreed that staffing projections should drive all five firehouse recommendations and while we are not at that point yet, there are options available to the First Selectman now to address the safety hazards at OSW rather than risk further damage or harm to paid staff and volunteers during the year or two that it will take for a Building Committee to design and replace the firehouse.

Motion by Muckle, second by Brule, to add action on the OSW firehouse to New Business.

Vote: 4-1 (No-Driscoll)

Motion passed.

Chair Tuneski asked for input from RTM members of the committee on how the FSRSC final recommendation should be presented to best garner attention from the RTM and Board of Finance—e.g., on-paper and/or in-person presentations, format and content/backup of the report. Attanasio stated that the report of final recommendations should be as long as we need to explain current status and projected needs, critical improvements and priorities. Chair Tuneski envisioned a distillation of information gathered in past and future discussions, an executive summary of recommendations in focus areas, with backup data such as projected development and response times. He asked about the need for interim reports on issues such as the OSW firehouse, noting that staffing affects the design and there are related issues such as service agreements and property transfers that are out of the committee's control.

B. Additional staffing information: Brule stated that we need more paid staff and we're losing ground; people don't realize that the job isn't just the occasional fire to deal with, firefighters also respond to accidents and provide backup on rescue calls. He noted that we got word that we didn't get approved for a SAFER grant, but will still put the three new hires in the FY24 budget and is looking to bring staffing up to 5 a shift. He added that the town is required by law to provide certain levels of service and coverage and that progress is "a jog, not a sprint."

Chair wants to see the phasing of growth by firehouse, by year for our next meeting and promised Howley an email listing all the new information requests. Brule asked about the impact or options of moving part-timers around to help where understaffed. Martin explained that not everyone who can respond has proper certification (e.g., for interior firefighting as opposed to outside support) at all types of incidents, and suggested that the final staffing report should address the certification needs and challenges. Following up on a question from November meeting about staffing guidelines, Martin shared an excerpt from an NFPA self-assessment manual that provides metrics for staffing and response times according to town's population density. [see attached] He said Waterford fits in the "suburban area" demand zone, which recommends 10 responders within 10 minutes 80% of the time, and that individual towns can determine how often they review performance and needs.

Driscoll asked for an update on how Emergency Management is faring after three retirements in three months. Sinagra reported that they are using the training coordinator to cover shifts, but there is only one dispatcher with more than two years' experience and they are straining to keep up with increased calls since the new residential complexes were built. He's added social media to his recruiting efforts mix and got triple the usual response—but finding qualified dispatchers remains a challenge. Sinagra also noted that adding more dispatchers would help with stress and overtime, but could also improve our ISO rating. Brule reported that we're now posting jobs on Indeed's specialty pages. Chair Tuneski asked Sinagra to bring a 5- or 10-year Emergency Management staffing plan for the next meeting; Attanasio requested data on the impact of development in the past 12 months on number of calls to Dispatch.

C. OSW update: Chair Tuneski asked whether the committee could recommend a new firehouse without agreements in place. Brule reported that we are close to having new service agreements with the five volunteer companies and are working on the transfer of OSW property. He added that he wants to build a new firehouse and if a Building Committee is set up "we can move it out of here." Attanasio stated that we need to have service agreements to consider as part of the long-range plan and we need to review the status of the four other firehouses. Chair Tuneski asked Muckle (Chair of the Long-Range Fiscal Planning Committee) whether there is program funding for all five firehouse in the Town's long-range fiscal plan. Muckle reported that the LRFP committee is looking at funds for fire stations in the years after the elementary schools are paid off. Brule reminded the committee that the Town does not own the existing firehouses, adding that conversations with the five companies should include a second firehouse being built if they do not want to give their building to the Town.

D. Pagers for volunteers update: Brule reported that he had meet with the chiefs and captains, as well as with Sinagra, Greczkowski, and WPD Chief Balestracci (so he could share experience upgrading police communications. The pagers appropriation request was tabled at the Dec. Bd of Selectmen meeting so that a new capital line for pagers could be established. He anticipated that the revised request would go to BoS and Bd of Finance in early January. [Brule left the meeting due to scheduling conflict.]

E. Next steps: Chair stated that he would work on an outline format for the committee's final report and bring it to the next meeting for input. He then asked members if there were any other topics to address. Greczkowski stated that Waterford Ambulance Service had just been informed that they would now be responsible for their own communications expenses and that he would like the FSRSC to review this change and make a recommendation that the cost, which would cost thousands of dollars, not be passed to WAS. He noted that while WAS is a separate entity, the Town has always supported them in the past, so this is a big change in policy—and discussions have started on possibly putting the WAS on a different frequency than the town's staff to cut the rescue incident chatter over they system during firefighting. Greczkowski added that since WAS had no say in the service that was selected for communications, paid a fee for dispatch services, and covered the cost when they had to bring on additional personnel to provide rescue services, that WAS would like the committee to support them and recommend that the Town not shift this new communications burden. He will bring more information to the next meeting.

5. **New business:** Brief discussion on procedural process to advance a recommendation to the RTM (e.g., written report or statement, who should/needs to be there for in-person presentation). Muckle declared that the OSW situation is a state of emergency and committee needs to act right away. Chair offered to prepare a statement for review at next meeting, which would be in time to deliver to RTM before their February meeting.

Motion by Muckle, **second** by Attanasio, to issue a statement to the RTM that supports replacing the OSW firehouse.

Vote: 3-0-1 (Driscoll abstained; Brule absent) **Motion passed.**

6. **Next meeting:** Set for Jan. 10, 2023, subject to availability.

7. **Adjournment:** Motion by Muckle; second by Attanasio to adjourn at 7:35 p.m. Voice vote: Unanimous.

Submitted by

Susan Driscoll, FSRSC Secretary

encl: Gilpin Comments

NFPA Manual excerpt-staffing metrics

Wayne H. Gilpin
6 Albacore Drive
Waterford, CT 06385-2602
wgilpin53@gmail.com
860-443-6821 (H)
860-884-4301 (C)

12/13/2022

RTM Fire Service Review Committee

My name is Wayne Gilpin, residing at 6 Albacore Dr.

I have been a resident of Waterford for over 44 years. I have been involved with the fire service for over 43 years. Among my qualifications, I have been state certified as a Fire Fighter Level I, II, and III. Haz-Mat Operations, and a Fire Service Instructor. I was an EMT for 18 years with the Waterford Ambulance Service. I did all of that training on my own time. I have gotten out of bed and left more family functions for emergency calls than I care to remember. I have saved peoples' lives and unfortunately, both adults and children have been lost on my watch. I didn't do it for the money. I never got any. No hourly salary, no health insurance, no pension, no tax abatement, stipend, or per diem. Like many in this room I did it because I feel that one should give something back to their community.

At each of these meeting Chief Howley has been asked what he is doing to recruit volunteers. My question to this committee is, what is the town doing to recruit volunteers? How many people on this committee and the various town boards have toured the Oswegatchie Fire House? If I was a prospective volunteer and walked into that firehouse what would I think? If I got past the yellow tarp on the roof and saw the interior? What would greet me?

- "Temporary" supports with no fire shielding holding up the building.
- Stains on the ceilings from water leaking in.
- Mold.
- A refrigerator in the Day Room because installation in the kitchen is blocked by a post.
- Another post blocking the sink in the only working ladies' room.
- No ADA accessibility.
- No lock on the door to protect the equipment or the occupants as they sleep.

I would look around and question the health and physical safety of the occupants. Does the town give any support at all to this organization? When I learned that the building has been in this deplorable condition for 14 years, I wouldn't turn around and walk out. I would run out of that building. Would I apply to be a volunteer firefighter in this town? Would I let my child? Not a chance.

At the November 15, 2022 meeting of this committee, during public comments, it was suggested that the Oswegatchie Fire Dept. should pay to repair the building at 441 Boston Post Rd. The 1970's contract between the town and the five fire companies stipulates that the town is to maintain the buildings. It is indisputable that the town has violated that clause in the contract. While a recent structural

engineering report has been recorded, I have no doubt that a jury would find the town liable for injuries should a lawsuit be filed for health or traumatic injuries. It would be laughable for the town to claim no knowledge of pre-existing hazards.

In the nine years between 1920 and 1929 four separate private organizations build four separate firehouses in this town. In the past fourteen years the town has studied, discussed, and spent \$260K on plans to replace the Oswegatchie Fire house. And what has this town built in fourteen years? Nothing. The fire department offered to donate the land at the current location for a new town owned building in exchange for a long-term lease. I have opined on numerous occasions that the land is worth between two and three hundred thousand dollars. No one, including the abutting property owner, has ever challenged that valuation. Does the town really intend to purchase property in another location instead of accepting the fire department's offer? Regardless of cost, what other location in town has better proximity to the Oswegatchie School, Oswegatchie Point and Millstone Point neighborhoods, as well as multiple access points to I-95?

On Dec. 3, 2018 there was an article* in The Day about the public works complex replacement at 1000 Hartford Rd. BOF member Bill Sheehan was quoted, *"I would not be happy working in the environment they're working in. It needs to be fixed and it needs to be fixed now."* Mr. Sheehan continued, *"When I looked at the price, I said 'Yikes.' But the cost is only going to go up. If we wait 20 years, we'll look back and think it was a bargain."* In the same article former First Selectman Dan Steward is also quoted, *"We spent \$230 million on schools, but we have yet to spend much on our town facilities,"* noting there'd been no major renovations at the (public works) complex since the early 1990s." It has been longer than that since any renovations at OFD. Why are our personnel at 441 Boston Post Rd. less valuable and less respected than those at 1000 Hartford Rd.?

There is no need for further study or discussion. The decisions made by the previous building committee are valid. The plans are paid for. It's time to pull them out and break ground.

I request that this committee vote tonight to endorse a request by the First Selectman for the formation of a new building committee and that a copy of these comments be attached to the minutes of this meeting.

Thank you.

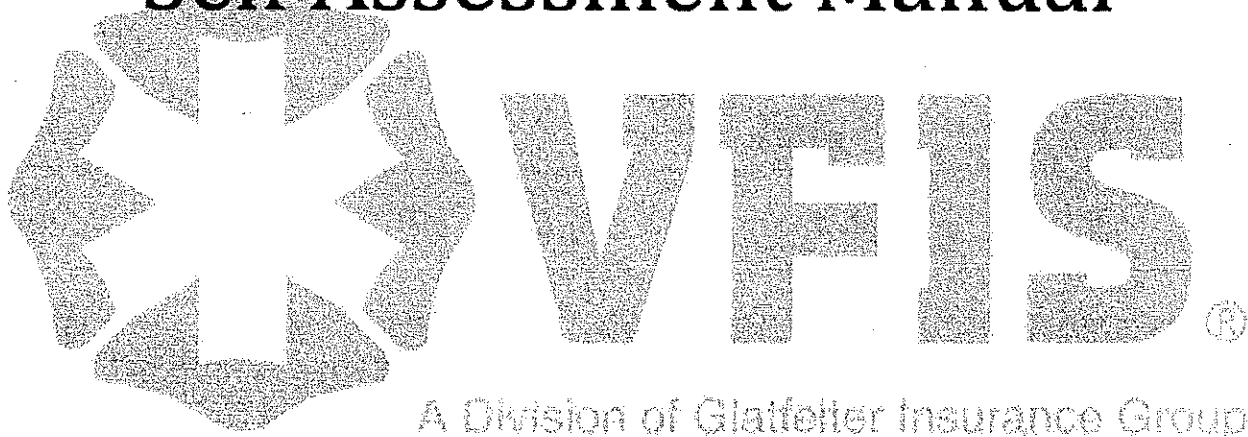
Wayne H. Gilpin

*<https://www.theday.com/local-news/20181203/waterford-rtm-approves-158-million-for-new-municipal-complex>



NFPA 1720

Self Assessment Manual



Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire
Suppression, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special
Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments
2014 Edition

Has the department defined that personnel responding to fires and other emergencies be organized into company units or response teams and shall have appropriate apparatus and equipment?

☐ Yes ☐ No Demonstrated via _____

The fire department is classified as: (4.3.2*)

	Demand Zone	Demographics	Staffing & Response Time [minutes]	Meets Objectives Percentage
☐	Urban area	>1000 population /mi ²	15/9	90%
☒	Suburban area	500-1000 people/mi ²	10/10	80%
☐	Rural area	<500 people/mi ²	6/14	80%
☐	Remote area	Travel dist. ≥ 8 mi	4	90%
☐	Special Risks	AHJ	AHJ	90%

A Division of Claretier Insurance Group

4.3.4* Where staffed stations are provided, does the department have a turnout time of 90-seconds for a fire or special operations, and a 60-second turnout time for emergency medical calls; 90% of the time?

☐ Yes ☐ No Demonstrated via _____