

**EMERGENCY SERVICES EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE  
TOWN OF WILLINGTON  
TOWN OFFICE BUILDING  
October 9, 2019**

Members present: Peter Tanaka; Board of Finance, From Willington Fire Department #1 (WFD#1): Alex Moore; Chief, Ron Gantick; President (WFD#1), Trevor Gantick; Deputy Chief (Alternate), Stuart Cobb; Assistant Chief (Alternate), From Willington Hill Fire Department (WHFD): Tom Snyder; Chief, Bobby Knight; Assistant Chief, Mike Makuch; Lieutenant and Tom Smith; Member (Alternate). Members Absent: Tyler Millix; Vice President and James Knight; President (Alternate)

Others Present: First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski and several members of both fire departments.

**1. Call to Order.**

The meeting of the Emergency Services Efficiency Committee was called to order at 6:33 p.m. by Chairman Peter Tanaka.

**2. Seating of Alternates.**

Chairman Tanaka stated that the next order of business is to seat alternates.

**Chief Moore moved to seat Alternate Stuart Cobb for Tyler Millix, seconded by Mike Makuch.**

**Vote: All yes.**

**3. Present to Speak.**

No one was present to speak.

**4. Approval of Minutes**

**Chief Moore moved to accept the minutes from the September 25, 2019 meeting, seconded by Chief Snyder.**

**Vote: 4 Yes (Moore, Cobb, Gantick, Snyder), 0 No and 2 abstentions (B. Knight, Makuch).**

**5. Call for Solutions.**

Chairman Tanaka asked if anyone had any solutions. Mike Makuch stated that he had a list of solutions he would like to share with the Committee and they are as follows (not in any order and he isn't advocating for any of them):

1. Change nothing about the current configuration.
2. Separating the fire department and ambulance into two separate services.
3. A single combination fire and ambulance department.
4. One department with two separate divisions (paid and volunteer divisions).
5. Paid Administrator.
6. Fire Commission.

Chairman Tanaka asked if anyone had anything to add to that list and Chief Moore stated that his list consisted of Mike's numbers 3, 4 and 6.

**6. Formalizing Communication**

Chairman Tanaka stated that they need to formalize the communication between the two departments. He stated that there are no two people that you can go to and hold accountable, and when you don't have someone accountable, no one is accountable. Chief Moore stated that if there is no communication, that is on him. It starts at the top and if communication isn't going on then the people at the top need to be held responsible for that. A discussion was had on communication, how each Chief manages their firefighters, each other's firefighters regarding their training and what they can do at a scene, how that has evolved over the years with now responding to all calls regardless of the district, two different radio

systems, etc. It was agreed that they need to look at Mike Makuch's list to do what has just been discussed.

## **7. Questions Regarding Long Range Planning**

Mike Makuch stated in short that they have spent two months sharing opinions and facts which is important but they can't make these big decisions that have such a potential impact on just the opinions and some facts, they also have to look at what data is available, full facts and study them which he has advocated for since they set the original mission which is that they start studying stuff that is available before they get to the solutions. Mike then discussed what he thinks they need to talk about. Mike thinks that they should be looking at need analysis and not solution analysis. Tom Smith weighed in stating that he gets what Mike is saying and he respects him greatly, but he thinks all the people at the table have had enough years and experience to really have a handle on what the needs are. Mike Makuch stated that they don't, however, agree on the needs and they should be able to which is why they need the facts. Tom Smith asked Mike Makuch if he wanted to do a plan for the Town of Willington, and Mike stated that if they are talking about a big transition, he wants to plan that transition. Tom Smith stated that he thinks it would be better to narrow down a focus rather than going through 12 months of what Mike is talking about. Chief Moore stated that he believes they need to look at the facts, but also narrow down the facts they are looking for. Tom Smith stated that there are couple of objects that are almost unmovable that they can study and look at the facts all they want, but these things still aren't going to change (the big ones that they have talked about). A discussion went back and forth between Mike Makuch and Tom Smith regarding their different outlooks on what the committee should be doing next.

Chairman Tanaka asked Mike Makuch if he could give him a brief definition and his visions between a paid administrator and fire commission, what each one means and how they differ. Mike stated that he sees a paid administrator would be the one person inserted between the Town and the department to communicate and make decisions between the two. He doesn't know what that structure looks like, but they are given a job description or parameters (it could also be combined with other jobs i.e. Fire Marshal, Emergency Manager, etc.). A big part of their job would be to pull together whatever resources belong to fighting fires, EMS, etc. and fund and administer them. The difference between that and a fire commission is that the fire commission is essentially a political organization created through elections or appointments that is doing a similar role. First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated that there is no cost for the fire commission and a lot of cost for the paid fire administrator.

Chairman Tanaka asked Chief Moore if Chief Snyder came to him and asked him his opinion on WHFD buying the church property across from their fire station. The answer was no. Chairman Tanaka then asked Chief Snyder if Chief Moore came to him to discuss the addition to their fire station. Again, the answer was no. Chairman Tanaka stated that those are big issues that need formal communication. Chairman Tanaka stated that items 2 through 6 on Mike Makuch's list would solve that.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated that in the past two months, the biggest issue she has heard from the committee members and the people present to speak is paid and volunteer. She asked if that is something they could really focus on and work out that issue, do they think they could get away from item 1 (change nothing) and find some kind of combination department. She feels that this committee is just going to go around in circles if they don't address this problem. Mike Makuch feels that one department is better than a fire administrator or fire commission, and he agrees that the challenge is finding a way to structure it so it is sellable to all the people that have to agree to it and buy into it. They have to do it in a way that doesn't have a negative impact on the services they are providing with the resources they have (scare away volunteers, put more burden on the paid people and add paid people). Everyone was in agreement that item 1 (change nothing) should be taken off the list. A discussion was had on Coventry Fire Department and what they are going through with a paid Fire Administrator and separate departments.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated that they are going to end up with some combination of the rest of Mike's list so they should focus the facts on that. Chief Moore stated that even splitting it from ambulance to fire there will still be that issue where there is some separation.

Chief Moore asked both the members of the committee and the audience if it was one chain of command (one set of officers) and they operated the stations as they are today, would people leave. Jeremy

Chartier WHFD spoke up and said yes he would. When asked why, Jeremy stated that he likes working with WFD#1 and he has a lot of pride in being a WHFD member. He stated that he started in WHFD when he was just old enough to reach the switches on the trucks and that is why he is still in the Town of Willington. He stated that as separate departments when going to a call, they show up do their job and all is well. If they go to a unified department with paid and volunteer staff, history has shown to Jeremy that it doesn't work. Chief Moore stated that he is having an issue understanding what goes wrong then. Chief Moore stated that they run basically as a combination department now. He agrees that there is some split, but they go to every single call together. If that doesn't change, the only difference is who gets there first (Chief Moore or Chief Snyder) as to who is in charge of that call. Chief Snyder stated it changes because then you have paid people doing anything that needs to be done in any station, anywhere, anytime taking any piece of apparatus, doing any chore; therefore, the volunteers have their world and it's not touched by anybody they are responsible for. Chief Moore stated if that isn't changed (WFD#1 stays where they are and WHFD remains where they are) and WHFD continues to run as a completely volunteer station for responses (not administratively and officers would be joint), he wanted to know what changes. Jeremy stated that this is just his opinion, but as he said the last time he spoke here if they become one department he will depart from the department and the town. He stated as far as coming together as a paid and volunteer, history has sadly shown through other local departments that it eventually degrades into paying people to do the jobs because the volunteers eventually burn out and say they don't want to do this anymore. Chairman Tanaka asked if everything was going fine now and Jeremy stated yes, and Chairman Tanaka asked if the command changed it wouldn't go fine. Jeremy stated that if it is specifically a volunteer command he would have that discussion, but if it was a paid command absolutely not. First Selectwoman Wicewski stated that paid command is different than paid staff. Tom Smith stated that he respects what Jeremy says and Jeremy sees deficiencies, knows why they are at this point and gets all that, he wants to know what Jeremy thinks of the six solutions presented, what does he think would be acceptable. What would be a good way forward for them to solve some of these problems and address his concerns? Jeremy stated that in his opinion (and only his opinion), he doesn't like the word commission, but he likes the idea of a bi-annual meeting of the chiefs to discuss important issues regarding that are coming up like with buying equipment, etc., that way both departments get what they want and are happy. Chairman Tanaka stated that he had a similar vision to that, but instead of twice a year, they meet every two weeks or once a month. First Selectwoman Wicewski stated that there is still some sort of commission needed that says you have to meet and from that meeting needs to come some sort of product, there still has to be some sort of commission. Chief Snyder stated that he doesn't think they need someone to tell them to meet, if they agree to do it, they will do it.

Chief Moore mentioned that CIP (Capital Improvement Plan) and budget planning season are coming up and suggested that he and Chief Snyder do it together. A discussion was had doing the CIP together and what has happened when they did it in the past. First Selectwoman stated that because it is voluntary to do their CIP lists together, it works in the beginning, but they aren't being forced to do it together so when they disagree on something, no one is forcing them to do it together although the Town would like them to, that is when it splits apart. She stated that there has to be some directive. Mike Makuch stated that he has #7 to add to his solution list. It is to change the contracts between the Town and the two departments and make them contractual obligations. It saves them from having a ridiculously appointed political committee, it saves them from paying an administrator, and it puts some of the planning into an obligation. Tom Smith said it is a good solution with having possibly someone as an enforcer of the contracts. A discussion was had on the contracts and the fact that there should be someone to make sure they are followed (possibly the First Selectman) and also discussion on long term planning being put in the contract.

Jeremy Chartier stated that he hears a lot of the land purchase coming up and he would like to remind people that no taxpayer money has gone into the purchase of 25 Old Farms Road yet. It was purchased with private funding, so he doesn't want it used as a punching bag. Chairman Tanaka stated that he isn't using it as a punching bag. There are future plans for fire service being made by WHFD and WFD#1. These are both major purchases made by the associations and are being made in good faith for the betterment of fire service to the Town of Willington, but their plans have not been discussed with each other, and there should probably be some coordination about the planning of Willington's fire service from the 30,000 foot level so that the taxpayers are making sure they are getting their best service.

## **8. SWOT Analysis.**

Chairman Tanaka stated that for their SWOT Analysis additions is to take some of the ideas presented tonight and digest them and bring them back next time for their plot. Mike Makuch suggested drawing out a grid with the seven new possible solutions on one side and putting maybe the items from the SWOT Analysis on another side and try to create checkmarks on which ones would possibly remain.

## **9. Next Steps/Agenda Items.**

None.

## **10. Progress Steps.**

Chairman Tanaka would like to have people bring documentation to support their opinions i.e. WHFD spoke a lot about mixing paid and volunteer and he said there has to be documentation out there regarding that, what are the issues with the other towns that have been through this, documentation on how they may have fixed any of this. He has heard committee members talk about this, but there is no documentation to support it. He would like documentation to support the ideas brought up.

Josh Strickland (WFD#1) stated that he started with WFD#1 when he was 14 years old volunteering. He worked his way up to a paid staff member, still volunteered while he was a paid staff member as well. After he left as a paid staff member, he continued to volunteer. He totally understands what Jeremy Chartier is saying where he feels a sense of pride in what he's doing. He thinks that when you come from a combination paid staff/volunteer department, things do work a little different than when you have a 100% volunteer or 100% paid department. He would implore the board to visit other communities surrounding Willington that have combination departments like Tolland and Somers. Josh used to work in Somers and the volunteers are amazing there, they worked hand in hand with the paid staff and Somers has tons of volunteers. Ask how they do it, how do they work with a paid and volunteer combination. He would highly recommend that would be a good starting point if you are really focused on trying to get combined into one department, trying to make everything work together, try and have a discussion with these departments surrounding Willington to see if it is working and if it is, figure out what they did to begin with to do it. He stated that none of the departments around here started with paid staff. They would be good resources. Chairman Tanaka agreed with that. Chairman Tanaka stated that part of the return that people get for their volunteer service is a feeling of accomplishment and necessity. He stated that if you are not necessary and are told you are not necessary, there is no reason to show up. He stated that communication is 10% words and 90% body language and actions. If the paid person on the scene looks at a volunteer sideways that comes through much clearer than saying you are valuable here and you're helping out. Josh Strickland stated that it is a little bit different of an issue than with the feeling of not being needed. He has been in situations in this town where it has been himself and his paid staff partner and he has needed help and hasn't had it. He said that feeling is much worse than not feeling needed (needing help and not getting it).

Mike Makuch asked if the communication inviting area departments to attend the meetings to give their views, would be better coming from the Chairman when contacting them because if it is left up to the committee members, they may end up contacting the same people. Chairman Tanaka stated that it would be helpful if both chiefs sent him a list of contact people and he can consolidate the list and assign people to contact the people on the list. Jeremy Chartier stated that as Chairman Tanaka is a less bias person because he is not a member of either department it might better for him to contact them. Stuart Cobb suggested that the Chairman contact each of these departments and invite a representative (preferably the Chief) and come to a meeting (not all at the same meeting) and inform them of the topic.

It was decided that the next meeting would be canceled as it is the same night as the Town "Trunk or Treat", and the next meeting will be November 13, 2019. They would like the guests from the other fire departments to start coming to the next meeting.

## **11. Chairman's Minute.**

Chairman Tanaka gave his list of things that he thinks are true:

1. He thinks there needs to be a formal communication conduit between the two departments. The leadership is consistently inspiring those under their command and taking care of those people. They need the higher view (30,000 view) of planning to make sure both departments are consistent with the other's needs.
2. He thinks that firefighters directing traffic should wear safety vests. Both departments already do.

3. He has questions about mutual aid and doesn't understand it as far as getting paid for going to major incidents (train derailments, etc.). Stuart Cobb stated that not much money comes from that.

4. He was surprised that the Town has a foam trailer. Stuart Cobb stated that it belongs to the State of Connecticut, not Willington. The State maintains it, provides the foam for it and it is to cover Northeast Connecticut. WFD#1 has housed it since 2006 and once or twice a year there is a call for it.

**12. Correspondence.**

None.

**13. Good and Welfare.**

None.

**14. Adjournment.**

**Chief Moore moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Bobby Knight.**

**Vote: All yes.**

This meeting was adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eileen Smith  
Eileen Smith  
Recording Secretary