

**EMERGENCY SERVICES EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE
TOWN OF WILLINGTON
TOWN OFFICE BUILDING
September 25, 2019**

Members present: Peter Tanaka; Board of Finance, From Willington Fire Department #1 (WFD#1): Alex Moore; Chief, Tyler Millix; Vice President, Ron Gantick; President (WFD#1), Stuart Cobb; Assistant Chief (Alternate), From Willington Hill Fire Department (WHFD): Tom Snyder; Chief, James Knight; President (Alternate) and Tom Smith (arrived at 6:48 p.m.); Member (Alternate). Members Absent: Trevor Gantick; Deputy Chief; (Alternate), Bobby Knight; Assistant Chief, Mike Makuch; Lieutenant.

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

1. Call to Order.

The meeting of the Emergency Services Efficiency Committee was called to order at 6:34 p.m. by Chairman Peter Tanaka.

2. Seating of Alternates.

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

Chief Snyder moved to seat Alternate James Knight for Mike Makuch, seconded by Chief Moore.

Vote: All yes.

Chief Snyder moved to seat Alternate Tom Smith upon his arrival for Bobby Knight, seconded by Chief Moore.

Vote: All yes.

3. Present to Speak.

No one was present to speak.

4. Approval of Minutes

Alex Moore moved to accept the minutes from the August 28, 2019 meeting, seconded by James Knight.

Vote: All yes.

Alex Moore moved to accept the minutes from the September 11, 2019 meeting, seconded by James Knight.

Vote: 4 Yes (Moore, Millix, Snyder, J. Knight), 0 No and 1 abstention (R. Gantick).

5. Call for Solutions.

Chairman Tanaka mentioned that at the last meeting they had a lot of problems come up, but no solutions came up. He asked if someone would come up with a solution to anything. Tyler Millix stated that they heard from quite a few people at the last meeting, and he has questions for WFD#1, WHFD and the First Selectwoman and was wondering when that would be appropriate. Chairman Tanaka stated he could ask his questions on agenda item 7 (Next Steps/Agenda Items). There were no solutions mentioned at this time.

6. SWOT Analysis.

Chairman Tanaka asked if there were any additions to internal strengths other than what they already have.

Chief Moore stated that he thinks one of the strengths of WFD#1 is that they are financially responsible. They work very hard making sure they come up with the best budget they can. Tyler Millix then explained how Fund 17 works for both fire departments. He stated that all of the income that comes in from the insurance/medical billing for ambulance transports all gets put into a reserve fund (Fund 17). He stated that for 19 years now the Town of Willington has not used taxpayer dollars to buy a fire truck or ambulance. All of that apparatus has come out of Fund 17. He stated in most other towns that money is kept separate from the town for various purposes. In Willington this benefits the taxpayers. He stated that there aren't many towns around that can boast that they taxpayers have not bought a fire truck or ambulance in 19 years. Chairman Tanaka asked if the payroll including benefits was less than the money that comes into Fund 17. Tyler stated it is more. Chief Snyder asked what the difference is between the income from the ambulance and the payroll. Tyler stated it is about \$300,000.00. A discussion was further had on this as well as the income from the cell phone tower that is behind WFD#1's fire house. A discussion was had on how the fire departments are funded by the Town, how the payroll is done, that the departments are separate corporations, etc.

Tyler Millix stated that both departments operate under a contractual agreement with the Town which includes the expectations and requirements of the two fire departments and the Town as well. A discussion was had on the contracts. First Selectwoman Wicinski will see that the contracts are emailed to all members.

Chairman Tanaka asked if the paid personnel are Town employees or employees of WFD#1. They are employees of WFD#1; however, the Town processes the payroll. A discussion was had on this as well as the contract for the paid personnel, unions, etc.

7. Next Steps/Agenda Items.

Chairman Tanaka asked if anyone has fixed the radio programming problems that were discussed at the last meeting. They have discussed this and are moving forward on it. Different radio vendors were discussed and Chairman Tanaka asked if there was any efficiency in using the same vendor. Stuart Cobb stated that yes they could, but explained why they don't because of different radios, frequencies, etc.

Chairman Tanaka asked (finances aside) would it be of an advantage to the Town to have a Fire Administrator that could figure some long range planning, some consolidation so that everyone was using the same radio vendor, bought the same radios, the same extrication tools, hose clamps, etc. Tyler Millix explained that his experience with Fire Administrators is that it is much deeper than just those things. He stated that the Fire Administrators that have popped up lately around this area have more to do with firefighter safety and making sure all of the requirements of firefighters are met. He stated that it is more of a general oversight, but it has also relieved the agencies from having to deal with all of that and they can focus more on the operational side of firefighting instead of the administrative side. The fire administrators end up absorbing the administrative side of the organization. Further discussion was had on this, pros and cons, working things out on their own without an administrator and other ideas. Chairman Tanaka would like the members of the committee to think on that topic. Tyler Millix will send job descriptions of a Fire Administrator and a Fire Commission to Chairman Tanaka.

The two different emergency responder tracking systems that the departments use to respond to calls was discussed. Chairman Tanaka would like to move that up on the priority list of things to be done.

Tyler Millix stated that at the last meeting the Committee heard from quite a few people, and one of the things that was repeated quite a few times by some of the members of WHFD and Chief Snyder as well as stated a few times in the last few meetings is that it's the opinion of WHFD's members and Chief Snyder that the ultimate model for emergency services in Willington is that the paid staff are limited to the ambulance only. They would be strictly for the ambulance only (they don't take a fire truck to a fire or a rescue truck to an accident). He asked Chief Snyder if that methodology is what WHFD believes is right for the Town of Willington, why aren't they doing that now when there is a call in WHFD's district. Tyler wanted to know why would it be good for the ambulance only to respond if the two departments

were to merge, but why doesn't WHFD do that now if they believe that is the ultimate solution. He stated that Chief Snyder has the authority to do it now and why doesn't he. Chief Snyder stated that they came to an agreement a while back to dual respond, so dual response is the most appropriate at this point, and as he stated before it isn't operationally how they are doing things, it's the fact that when you merge the two departments and the paid and volunteer get together as one whole unit working together it doesn't work. He stated that the ambulance doesn't have to be separate, that is only a suggestion because that seems to work in other towns. He stated that the paid personnel syndrome is a problem in this County in other departments, and in the State and the Nation. He restated that it is **only a suggestion** that if they became one unit to change it to operate so the ambulance responds first to all calls, because at this point they are getting volunteers to come to the big calls. Tyler stated that it is a little bit more than a suggestion as Chief Snyder had personnel at the last meeting that said they were going to quit. Chief Snyder stated that their reasons for that were because wouldn't have a truck to go get when they know someone is paid to get it. A discussion back and forth between Tyler and Chief Snyder was had on this subject. Tyler then asked if First Selectwoman Wiecenski as First Selectwoman would she endorse any type of plan that pays the two paid people to sit down at the fire house, being paid by the taxpayers for fire and EMS services to not go to fires. A discussion was had regarding this subject and preserving volunteers among other things. At the end of the discussion, Chief Snyder stated that if WFD#1 has a better idea that will combine the two departments and not cost the Town \$1,000,000.00 as opposed to \$600,00.00-\$700,000.00 that they get now to let everyone know. Tyler stated that there seems to be this disconnect or belief that is being pushed out everywhere that WFD#1 is a 100% paid department and WHFD is a 100% volunteer department, which isn't true, they have two paid people on duty and two people do not make a department. Tyler stated that he would never agree to the ambulance going to all calls first as it diminishes the services that currently exist in town. Another discussion was had on consolidation, the paid staff, volunteers, paid staff only taking the ambulance and the increased delay of other apparatus possibly needed, response of volunteers, the national paid personnel syndrome, etc. A discussion was had on the area departments paid and volunteer staffs, the nationwide shortage on volunteers, again the volunteers in WHFD vs WFD#1, etc.

Bob Wiecenski gave a history of how the ambulance started out as a volunteer service, but then eventually went to on pay one person during the day because they weren't able to get the ambulance or fire apparatus out. He went on to say that eventually they had to add a person on at night when volunteers wouldn't show up then either (in both cases because they were overworked/burnt out running the ambulance to calls/hospitals) and that is how WFD#1 ended up with paid personnel.

After a question asked by First Selectwoman Wiecenski on how many volunteers each department has, a discussion ensued on the volunteers that respond, what their training is, what the training is that is required for the paid personnel, what training is needed to wear SCBA (self-contained breathing apparatus) and enter a structure fire, all the other requirements that are needed to do certain jobs at a scene, etc.

Tom Smith addressed the two Chiefs and asked if it is worth talking about operationally continuing the way that they are now the way it is, but somehow formulating a hierarchy where you would have a Chief or a Deputy Chief for each station, but then a Chief or administrator that could do the administration part, get the training together, make things go more smoothly in concert with the Chiefs (whatever you call them). Why can't they have it all. Why can't they do everything, he doesn't understand that. He stated someone that could clean up the things that need to be cleaned up, get things together on training and operationally and try to work things together, but continue addressing Chief Snyder and the members of WHFD concerned about the volunteerism, continue the ambulance, WFD#1 the way it is going, keep it separate, don't wreck what is working now, but fix the things that aren't working as you go higher up on the chain. He stated that maybe they could focus on how that could be done, or would it be rejected because it is too scary. Chief Snyder stated that he doesn't think that anything would be rejected; it is just a matter of if it is put together properly and presently properly and looks like it might work. Chief Snyder stated that with an administrator, you have to look at the cost and a non-bias individual which is almost impossible to find in this town. Tom Smith doesn't see a paid administrator working in this town, he thinks the idea of it is good, but the cost and chemistry of who you get wouldn't work. Tom is suggesting a volunteer administrator/Chief; he is not sure how that would be accomplished. Chairman Tanaka isn't sure they would be able to find such a person, but a board such as this Committee that they are on could iron out a lot of those problems.

Chief Moore stated that he knows that they have a goal of 14 months to decide on whether they will consolidate or not or come up with a plan. He thinks at the next meeting they need to try to decide which direction that is going to be. Chairman Tanaka will have call for solutions again on next meeting's agenda and email the SWOT analysis matrix to everyone.

Stuart Cobb mentioned that a few years ago the State Fire Academy put on a class regarding member retention that was held in Windsor. He stated that it was interesting that it was held there because that was the Town that had at one time he believes 5 volunteer fire companies operating separately, and at some point the Town decided to put them under one Fire Chief. Stuart spoke with one of the Deputy Chiefs of one of the companies and he said that it didn't accomplish what they wanted because in their minds, they were still 5 separate fire companies. They still competed for equipment, apparatus, fundraisers (them vs. us), their own trucks and their responsibilities and it wasn't one department even though they got one administrative Chief and one budget. They still are one department, but they are also still separate agencies so to speak with a Deputy Chief in charge of each department instead of a Chief.

Chairman Tanaka read off a list of things he compiled that he thinks are true regarding the two departments and the Committee can respond true or false to the list:

1. He doesn't think right now the Town of Willington can afford a full-time fully staffed paid fire department. Consensus was true.
2. Right now he thinks that many of their current volunteer firefighters are reticent to be in a paid/volunteer combination fire department. Discussion was had on this and Chairman Tanaka was invited to attend both departments' monthly meetings to see what the consensus would be on that statement. He asked both Chiefs to let him know when their next monthly meetings are so he can try and attend them.
3. Fire emergency calls are better attended because they are more "fun" (for lack of a better word) to respond to than EMS calls. Consensus was true. Chief Snyder stated there is more of a necessity at fire emergencies and it was also mentioned that not everyone wants to respond with the ambulance at 2 a.m.
4. EMS calls are what funds Fund 17. Consensus was true.
5. Fund 17 brings in less revenue than the paid personnel cost. Consensus was true.

8. Progress Steps.

9. Good and Welfare.

None.

10. Adjournment

Chief Moore moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Chief Snyder.

Vote: All yes.

This meeting was adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eileen Smith

Eileen Smith
Recording Secretary