

**EMERGENCY SERVICES EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
TOWN OF WILLINGTON
TOWN OFFICE BUILDING
August 28, 2019**

Members present: Peter Tanaka; Board of Finance, From Willington Fire Department #1 (WFD#1): Alex Moore; Chief, Ron Gantick; President, Tyler Millix; Vice President, Stuart Cobb; Assistant Chief (Alternate), Trevor Gantick; Deputy Chief; (Alternate), From Willington Hill Fire Department (WHFD): Tom Snyder; Chief, Mike Makuch; Lieutenant (joined the meeting at 7:01 p.m.), James Knight; President (Alternate) and Tom Smith; Member (Alternate). Members Absent: Bobby Knight; Assistant Chief (WHFD).

Others Present: First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski, Robin Knight, Randy Belair and John Pritco.

1. Call to Order.

The special meeting of the Emergency Services Efficiency Committee was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Chairman Peter Tanaka.

2. Seating of Alternates.

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

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

Vote: All yes.

Chief Snyder moved to seat Alternate Tom Smith for Mike Makuch, seconded by Ron Gantick.

Vote: All yes

3. Approval of Minutes

Chief Moore moved to approve the minutes from the August 20, 2019 meeting, seconded by James Knight.

Vote: 6 yes (Tanaka, Moore, Millix, Snyder, J. Knight & Smith) 0 no and 1 abstention (R. Gantick).

4. SWOT Analysis.

Chairman Tanaka stated that as he will be acting moderator of the SWOT Analysis, he downloaded a format that the Committee can use. He stated that the four points of the SWOT Analysis are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The strengths and weaknesses are internal to the process and the opportunities and threats are external to the process. He sees the internal as fire department issues and the external as Town issues. He stated that they are looking for what is positive and negative for both the fire departments and the Town. He stated that negative for the Town may also be things that affect the fire department to the point where it would affect the townspeople's fire service then it is a threat to the townspeople.

At this time the Committee members discussed what would be strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and the outcome was as follows:

The strengths were funded well, equipped well, strong leadership by both departments, good support from the townspeople and a unified call response.

The weaknesses were political budget leveraging, transient Town boards/commissions, sending appropriate assets, apparatus and personnel to incidents; each department doesn't know all of the other department's members, skills and training and lack of volunteers.

The opportunities were one voice, one vision, same goals, single training model and a fire commission.

The threats were losing volunteers and increased cost to taxpayers.

During this SWOT Activity when the ideas were being tossed around there was a long and lively discussion on volunteer firefighters and paid firefighters, whether volunteer firefighters would be lost if the departments consolidated, other fire departments that have both paid and volunteers, a fire commission, response time to calls, all firefighters being equal regardless of their rank and/or training, working with firefighters and not knowing their skills, townspeople not knowing what the level of knowledge the firefighters have and don't care because they just want someone to come, etc.

Chairman Tanaka stated that he feels like the discussion is just going around in a circle at this point regarding the volunteer vs. paid issue and asked to suspend it for now and reconvene it in two weeks when the Committee meets again. He would like each committee member to come to the next meeting with at least two items written down that they can add to the analysis and then they can start looking at it from there. He would also like both Chiefs to make sure that their membership knows that this meeting is open to the public and that the Committee would like to hear from them.

4. Next Steps/Agenda Items.

Chairman Tanaka stated that he would like to add public comment to the agenda as well as continuing with the SWOT Analysis.

Tom Smith requested that the committee members have a copy of the proposed ordinance for the fire commission that failed when it went to a Town vote. First Selectwoman Wiecenski will find it and get it out to everyone.

Chief Tom Snyder stated for the record what happens in this meeting stays in the meeting as far as working together and operationally. They may all disagree during the meeting on different things but it isn't personal and nothing will change as far as working together at calls.

Stuart Cobb clarified the call count for the last fiscal year was 688 house calls, 58 motor vehicle accidents and 175 fire calls for a total of 913 calls. Based on his records over the last 15 to 20 years, this was the busiest year they have ever had and May was the busiest month they have ever had.

5. Good and Welfare.

Randy Belair stated that he likes to come to meetings like this to learn as much as he can about what the issue is because ultimately it is likely to come to the Board of Finance which he is a member of. Tom Snyder asked Randy what he knew about the fire service before he got involved on the boards in town. He stated that he served on CIP and that was his first exposure to the fire departments. He said that hearing the numbers Stuart Cobb cited for that particular year and looking at the long list of requests coming from both fire departments and with the turnover of members they have every year on CIP, he agrees that you have to educate everyone about what the fire departments do because they don't know this stuff. First Selectwoman Wiecenski asked that before Randy was on a board or commission what was his familiarity with the fire departments and he stated that he was just happy that WFD#1 was less than three miles from his house so his insurance rate was down. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that is truly the voice of your average person. Randy stated that he has been to both fire houses and has had a chance to tour them and meet some of the firefighters. He agrees that the average person

doesn't have a clue what the fire departments do. Their expectation is to call 911 and someone will come, they don't think of the inner workings of how it is all done.

Mike Makuch stated that sometimes you get frustrated with what people's (members) perceptions, thoughts or reactions are and they are sometimes not based on any fact. He thinks that is an important thing for the committee members to remember and that they want to drive towards coming up with justifications, facts or whatever and take out the perceptions, but they also have to remember that there is no way to get away from that because they are dealing with human beings. First Selectwoman Wicinski stated that all this committee can do is put the facts out there, and if people believe something else to be a fact then they should bring it forward at this meeting. Tyler Millix stated that both departments will have to produce factual data to work with. Anyone attending these meetings can state what they believe to be true, but the facts will be there to prove what is true. A discussion was had on the two departments and the pride they take in each, why they are there which is to help people, etc.

Mike Makuch moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Tyler Millix.

Vote: All yes.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Eileen Smith

Eileen Smith
Recording Secretary