

**EMERGENCY SERVICES EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
TOWN OF WILLINGTON  
TOWN OFFICE BUILDING  
August 20, 2019**

Members present: Peter Tanaka; Board of Finance, From Willington Fire Department #1 (WFD#1): Alex Moore; Chief, 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, Bobby Knight; Assistant Chief and Tom Smith; Member (Alternate). Members Absent: Ron Gantick; President (WFD#1) and James Knight; President (WHFD Alternate).

Others Present: First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski and Derrick Wiecenski.

The special meeting of the Emergency Services Efficiency Committee was called to order at 6:28 p.m. by First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that the first order of business listed is to elect a Chairman of this committee; however, alternates should be seated as Ron Gantick is a regular member of this committee but is absent.

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

**Vote: All yes.**

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that the next item of business is to elect a Chairman of this committee.

**Chief Moore moved to elect Peter Tanaka as Chairman, seconded by Mike Makuch.**

**Vote: 6 yes (Moore, Millix, Cobb, Snyder, B. Knight and Makuch), 0 no and 1 abstention (Tanaka).**

Chairman Tanaka thanked everyone and stated that he would like to set the meeting dates before they move on to goals and the charge of the committee. A discussion was had on which day of the week and how often they should meet and that they should have reports from these meetings for the Selectman's meetings.

**Chief Moore moved to meet the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of every month at 6:30 p.m., seconded by Mike Makuch.**

Tom Smith stated that as an alternate, he knows he can't vote unless he is seated, but he asked if he can participate in discussions if not seated. Tyler Millix stated that yes; unseated alternates can participate in the discussions of the meetings.

**Vote: All yes.**

A location for the meetings will be forthcoming as to which room may be available at the time of the particular meeting.

Chairman Tanaka stated that the next item on the agenda is discussion of goals and charges and it is an open topic. He feels that one of the first things as far as efficiency is concerned is communication. He

thinks this committee is a starting place. He's not sure if more communication is needed between the fire departments. He believes discussing some form of communication should be on the list. He would also like to see some form of working towards a common spending instead of competing for resources, so that if equipment is needed some place and both departments wanted the same piece of equipment that perhaps the other department could get something to compliment that piece of equipment instead of both departments having the same piece of equipment.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski suggested that a good place for this committee to start is why everyone is here, which was communication from both departments on discussion of possible consolidation. Perhaps that could be the core of what they discuss. Chairman Tanaka stated that is a topic that they should explore and keep their minds wide open on it.

Tyler Millix stated that the charge of the Emergency Services Efficiency Committee from 2012 was "to explore feasibility and cost implications and make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen (BOS) and Board of Finance (BOF) regarding the structure of emergency services for the Town of Willington with recommendations due by December 31, 2011". His opinion is that he doesn't have any objection as to what the First Selectwoman said, but if this is a reactivation of the Emergency Services Efficiency Committee that is the actual charge of that committee. Mike Makuch stated that charge kind of says the same thing except it doesn't focus on the communication piece Chairman Tanaka started with. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that the two fire departments came to the BOS specifically suggesting discussions about merging and consolidation. The name was originally very convoluted that talked specifically about consolidating and then it changed into how they could run more efficiently and what kind of savings they could have with the two departments. She thinks that initially it was two-fold and then narrowed down to one path, but she would like to see something more specific as the communication that was directed was for the purpose of sitting down at the table this time. Tyler Millix stated that what Chairman Tanaka and First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated are two very distinct different things. Mike Makuch stated that what he said was intended to be in agreement that basically that charge was sort of combining what First Selectwoman Wiecenski had said and what Chairman Tanaka had said except it didn't specify the communication part, but regardless it is working together which could be in the form of consolidation. Tyler Millix asked if the leadership of both of the departments agree that the goal of the group should be to explore the feasibility and make recommendations regarding consolidation of the two organizations. Chief Moore agreed and Chief Snyder stated that was part of it but not the sole charge. Chairman Tanaka stated that if they can find those efficiencies and it is decided that consolidation is not the most efficient way to get those efficiencies, but they can still move forward that should be something that should be explored. He doesn't believe they should narrow their focus that much. First Selectwoman Wiecenski went back to the communication that was originally presented which was specific on wanting to come to the table to talk about "potential merger or consolidation" (not her words).

Tom Smith stated that is the reason he is here is because the letter from WFD#1 to WHFD was to look into consolidation. Tom stated that they have been going around and around for years. He stated that they actually communicate the best now that they ever have and operate the best now that they ever have in his opinion. From a long perspective they are doing pretty well and they can always improve. Tom stated that the goal for him is to either merge or not. If they aren't there to put their best foot forward and try to get these two departments together once and for all, he thinks they are wasting their time. They need to jump in, do it and set a date to consolidate by. Tom said they should have one voice for fire and EMS service for the Town. What they do now works against them and they are competing. First Selectman Wiecenski stated that she agreed with Tom and is encouraged that this committee didn't come from any board or commission, it came from the leadership of the two departments to her office. She agreed with Peter Tanaka that out of that talk can come some of the things he is thinking of, but she saw as the main charge something specific around a merger or consolidation.

Tyler Millix stated that he thinks that is where they need to be, and as Tom Smith alluded to the two departments do work better now than they ever have. The communication between the two departments can always be better, but it is better than it was. He stated that it is time; no one wants to sit at another meeting that isn't going to go anywhere. He thinks from WFD#1's end, they want to take

a serious look at this and move forward and that is why they are here at the table to do that. Tyler stated that this has been going on a long time and that in 1993 the first study was actually commissioned, and the recommendation of that study is crystal clear and after that a couple of other studies were done including a survey for both departments which indicated a certain direction also.

At this time, Tyler read a statement for the record:

The subject of a merger, consolidation or whatever adjective you choose to use is not a new concept to either Fire Department or the Town. Over the years we have discussed and implemented numerous small steps in an attempt to work together more efficiently all while maintaining the clear and distinct separation of entities. Of all the efforts put forth, the only successful remaining attempt at working together is a simple fact that we respond to calls together but is it effective and can it be better. All other facets of running the Fire Departments remain separate. Administratively, financially, and operationally we remain separate and in some cases worlds apart in our methodologies and loyalties in providing the most efficient emergency service for the taxpayers and paid for by the taxpayers. It is documented that I have maintained for many years that maybe we can do better and the townspeople deserve better. The question needs to be asked; does the Town deserve better than what we are providing and can it be done more efficiently and be more cost effective? There is equal culpability between both departments concerning the status we find ourselves in. It will do no good whatsoever to simply sit here and place blame or attempt to impress each other with opinions. Every person has a right to have his or her own opinions. It must be understood that opinions not based on any evidence of fact should not be given any reasonable weight whatsoever. We need to deal with facts. In some cases, uncomfortable and embarrassing facts need to be brought to light. It is incumbent upon everyone at the table that we not get mired down in opinions, personal feelings towards one another, and what may be a general distaste and distrust of each other. We need to drill down into facts and perform an honest evaluation of what is best for the people in this Town, the ones that pay our bills and allow us to exist and more importantly trust us with their lives and property. The townspeople deserve that and no less. It is my sincere hope that an open dialogue tackling the factual issues are discussed and an honest evaluation of the current state of affairs within the two organizations actually occur. From a personal perspective, I will not be part of a group that will not study all the issues objectively and I know there are others in this room on both sides that will not stand for it either. We have an opportunity to come together to really discuss what is best for the Town and any approach that does not put the Town first will result in a seriously fractured process. What is best for each member and what is best for the department is secondary to what is best for the people that pay approximately \$700,000 a year for emergency services in this Town. Give them an honest review with solid fact based recommendations moving forward. We owe it to them.

Positive reinforcement was given to Tyler Millix's statement, and the only point Mike Makuch wanted to add to that statement was that he agrees that the townspeople are the first priority, his feeling is put just a little more thought and emphasis also on the people in their departments who perform the service because they are all the most valuable resource. Mike stated that it isn't his intention to counter Tyler's comments, he just wants to emphasize why he thinks that is valuable to the process.

More discussion was had on the charge of the committee, goals and all of the previous studies which included a vote by the townspeople to elect a board of fire commissioners which failed and there was a committee of both organizations that brought in people from other departments that have merged to gain some insight as to their experiences during their mergers. Tyler Millix feels that the survey that was done between the two organizations anonymously during that committee's tenure was the one that told the story. First Selectwoman Wicinski feels that is the place to start, they have to know where the interest lies. Tyler Millix stated that after that survey and the report was finished, they went to both departments to vote on merging (WFD#1 voted to unanimously to merge and WHFD voted not to) and

then the committee just ended. Tom Smith stated that Tyler made a good point and whatever is done in this committee has to be embraced by the committee members and sold to the departments assuming that is the direction the committee goes in it will have to be voted on by both departments. First Selectwoman Wiecenski mentioned that is why this committee was made up of those who can make the decisions in both departments. The membership has already put their faith and trust in them to lead the departments, so the leadership of the departments buying into one end result is what will help them know that the leaders have already done the hard work to get to the best result, and that is why either particular members, leaders, Chiefs and Presidents were asked to be on this committee because they already have those responsibilities. Paraphrasing Tyler Millix he stated that whatever the outcome of the committee is either yes or no to merge, if the Town doesn't like the outcome the BOS and BOF could vote to sever their contracts with the departments and cutoff their funding.

Tom Smith asked the committee if they would like to set a goal as far as consolidating whatever form that takes. A discussion was had on when that date should be. Mike Makuch then read a charge for the committee that he had been working on which states: "to study and recommend within 14 months options for providing efficient emergency services including consolidation of the departments". Mike stated that the 14 months would get them just out of summer next year and the recommendations would be back before the start of budget season. Chairman Tanaka asked if he could put that in the form of a motion so it could be discussed.

**Mike Makuch moved that the charge of Committee be to study and recommend within 14 months options for providing efficient emergency services including consolidation of the departments, seconded by Bobby Knight.**

A discussion was had on the motion which included the 14 month deadline, efficiencies, starting by-laws, talking about consolidating and nothing getting done, consolidation itself, why consolidation hasn't happened in the past with the previous studies having pointed to consolidation, CIP and budgeting, volunteer and paid members (that being a big concern of consolidation), etc. Chairman Tanka stated that this is all good discussion but the discussion has veered from the intent of the motion.

**Vote: 6 yes (Tanaka, Moore, Cobb, Snyder, B. Knight and Makuch) and, 1 no (Millix).**

Chairman Tanaka stated that they now have a goal and will be reporting regularly to the BOS. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that now that they have set their clear charge, the next step would be to set their first goal, so that when they are preparing for their first meeting, they know what they are working towards. She stated that if there is any documentation or anything else they need from the Town in order to look at this when they come to their next meeting, have it before you start and know what you are looking for.

Tom Smith stated that the first question to be addressed should be the paid/volunteer issue. How do they figure it out and make it happen that is acceptable for everyone. Tom stated that if you don't get by this issue, consolidation isn't going to happen.

Tyler Millix suggested that they should use the SWOT Analysis approach where you have a big white board and you write strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats then start writing those things out. If everyone in the room is honest, he said it is amazing what you can glean from doing one of these exercises. A positive discussion was had on Tyler's suggestion including what they could use (white board, post it notes, easel paper).

Chairman Tanaka stated for the next meeting they should work on a SWOT Analysis, so everyone should start thinking about the topics they want for that. He thinks that as topics are brought up, it will

generate new topics. Everyone should start thinking of the goal of what they think the consolidation might look like.

A discussion was had on when to have the next meeting as next Wednesday is the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month. Chairman Tanaka stated that they should meet next Wednesday, August 28, 2019 and strike while the iron is hot.

Chairman Tanaka stated that they may need a Vice Chair as he may not be able to make every meeting. First Selectwoman Wiecenski asked as she is ex-officio, could she fill that role and everyone was in agreement of that.

Tyler Millix stated that one of the things that is crucial to a SWOT Analysis is a facilitator that is neutral. It was decided that Chairman Tanaka would be the facilitator. A discussion was had on having a room that they could take over so they could leave the notes, easel paper or white board up to use for every meeting. A discussion was had on using 25 Old Farms Road that was just acquired by WHFD, using the church. First Selectwoman Wiecenski is going to check with Planning and Zoning and make sure there aren't any zoning violations by having the meeting there as members of the public may also attend.

Tyler Millix has all of the past studies that were done on the fire departments electronically. He will send them to Chairman Tanaka who will distribute them to all members.

Chairman Tanaka stated that this committee will meet in a week, start a SWOT Analysis, the location will be announced and the meeting will start at 6:30 p.m.

A discussion was had on the paying the Recording Secretary (she will be paid by both departments) and what the pay rate should be. It was decided that they would pay the Recording Secretary the same rate as the Town Recording Secretaries (\$20.00 per hour) and she would send her bills to Stuart Cobb at WFD#1. They will be paying the video recorder \$20.00 per meeting.

Chairman Tanaka will be making the agendas, sending them to the Town Clerk and the Committee members. The Recording Secretary will send him the minutes when they are complete and he will then send them to the Town Clerk and the Committee members.

**Mike Makuch moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Chief Snyder.**

**Vote: All yes.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Eileen Smith*

Eileen Smith  
Recording Secretary