Chapter 5. RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

*When you call 9-1-1 for help, you expect qualified responders and equipment will respond in a timely manner* (Committee Meeting Minutes, 12.14.22).

The shortage of volunteer staffing and its challenges is the emergent aspect that led the Town Board to create this Citizens Advisory Committee and examine Fire Protection services within the Town. Staffing, together with other resources, must be considered if Fire Protection services are to remain viable and sustainable for the community.

The number of active members on both Department rosters influence the capacity of timely and effective response and may adversely impact the purposeful intentions of our governing authorities and the volunteers who serve our community.

RE: Staffing.

We know that:

* membership numbers are trending down…Figures 3-1 and 3-1A.; and,
* that recruitment numbers do not equate to retention…Figure 3-2. As indicated, in the last five (5) years, the average retention for HFFD has dropped to 2.01 years, and 2.42 years for MEND.

Figures 3-7. and 3-8. share a consistent, reliable and predictable response from both Department memberships across their five (5) call types, with the average response below the “Effective Manpower Response” recommended by NFPA and/or the Departments. In all cases, the percent of active member response to any of the call types is below 22% as calculated by the Departments. There are a number of critical tasks that must be accomplished on each call for a safe, effective response. Industry standards are guidelines that suggest the number of trained responders required for an effective response for the respective call type. In no situation does either department believe it is safe or appropriate for any member to respond on their own to any type of emergency.

Responder turn-out can be attributed to a number of factors, but training is an objective measurement in having an appropriate number of responders to emergency calls. As shown on Figures 3-5. and 3-6. not all responders are cross-trained on every functional operation or command position. Aside from functional firematic training, there are training requirements for members who wish to achieve Officer ranks. “When compared with the memberships’ training certification and the staffing standards suggested for call response, there are ‘serious concerns as to who will have the necessary knowledge to be Chief of the [HFFD] Department in ten (10) years’ ” (Meeting Minutes, 11.9.22).

As noted from Department data on Figures 3-16. and 3-17. calls for service are trending in an upward direction. Given that call volumes are rising and the number of active members continues in a downward trend, Department leadership recognizes a need to bridge their staffing gaps to fulfill community expectations. They have focused on critical incident planning and strive to attain additional staff by engaging:

* [conventional] Mutual Aid…a request for temporary assistance on a one-time basis; and,
* Mutual Assistance…planned and agreed automatic dispatch from an assisting department. The data on both of these strategies is on Figures 3-12. and 3-13.

The Departments indicate that assistance employing these means are trending upward both for the assistance they give and receive. The use of Mutual Aid and Mutual Assistance bring an increase in response times as neighboring departments face similar member shortfalls. The use of Mutual Aid and Mutual Assistance may bring varying standard operating procedures and there is an inherent expectancy factor that is not predictable as these measures rely on another department’s availability and training. Although these arrangements may increase the number of responders, they generally do not decrease the response time for arrival at the scene of the emergency.

Figure 3-10. indicates the Departments typically assisting HFFD and MEND on their calls. HFFD and MEND assist each other across their jurisdictions on calls within the Town of Mendon. Figure 3-11. indicates the shared calls per this arrangement more than doubled from 2021 to 2022.

Mutual Aid requests bring additional personnel and apparatus that integrate with the requestor’s assets. New York State “Mutual Aid” statutes define legal and liability parameters associated with this practice. Mutual Assistance is pre-arranged mutual aid and its agreement entails an automatic dispatch of the other department’s assets. As planned, deliberate requests, this arrangement is contractual and the governing authorities should review these procedures with their respective Attorney to assure administrative approval and process.

HFFD data on Figure 3-26. provides a baseline of response time using apparatus response. And, Figure 3-27. indicates Mendon’s response times are trending upward. Response time is consistently listed as a major factor in the outcomes of emergencies. The time it takes for members to assemble and deploy to an incident has a direct impact on an effective response for individuals and our community. For both Departments, decreasing membership and more reliance on assistance from other departments equates to longer response times.

Committee members representing Elected Officials noted:

*Another significant draw on manpower are EMS calls. Ambulances are taking a significant amount of time to arrive to a call,* [and] *there is the concern of how much time the call takes a volunteer away from home and things they have to do* (Meeting Minutes, 12.14.22).

As indicated on Figures 3-7. and 3-8. both Departments respond to EMS calls. NOTE: Our Charge does not specifically relate to Ambulance Service, but since both Departments respond to EMS calls, EMS concerns may be relevant as the Committee considers “Modeling” and the Town Board considers sustainable Fire Protection services.

The lack of public water supply presents a major challenge to contain and suppress fire. In order to establish a temporary water system for fire suppression, significant additional responders are required as a “tanker task force.” One (1) “Tanker Task Force” response has both HFFD and MEND with pre-arranged Mutual Assistance requests for 5-6 additional pieces of apparatus.

Staffing concerns expressed to the Mendon Town Supervisor, led the Town Board to create this Citizens Advisory Committee. The Committee’s research aimed to address the Board’s assigned Charges. As we progressed through the process, we noted similarities and disparities in the approach to administering and providing Fire Protection service within the Town’s boundary.

Fire Service Authority and Jurisdiction.

Chapter 2 identifies the three (3) general purpose local governments providing Fire Protection services within the Town of Mendon: the Village of Honeoye Falls; Mendon Fire District; and, the Town of Mendon, as the Town Board is the governing authority for Mendon Fire Protection District #1. This configuration endows fifteen (15) Elected Officials with administrative authority, five (5) representing each separate jurisdiction. Their approach varies for policy, finances and other decisions related to Fire Protection within their separate territories.

The whole of the Town’s geography is served by two (2) Fire Departments: HFFD and MEND. HFFD is a municipal department of the Village and serves the Village and two (2) fire protection districts under contract with the Town of Mendon and the Town of West Bloomfield. MEND serves the Mendon Fire District.

Local government authority to provide fire protection, and the current capacity to deliver service based on local needs, focused attention on our collective ability to meet community expectations.

Community Expectations

A review of comprehensive plans and studies for the Village and Town generally lack meaningful focus for this Committee. Emergency Services are considered in specific, single documents as they were contracted by the Village, Town and/or Mendon Fire District and enumerated on Figure 5-1.

Comprehensive plans reveal the community’s preference for Mendon’s rural character remains steadfast. Remarks recognize that technology has changed the way we live and that Demographic shifts evolve with time (Mendon Comprehensive Plan, Introduction).

From the Village 2014 Comprehensive Plan – “Key Relevant Recommendations” include:

• “Increase a variety of living options available to senior citizens

• “Ensure new residential development fosters interconnected street patterns

• “Ensure adequate infrastructure to accommodate new and existing commercial and industrial uses

• “Support efforts to increase amount of locally produced food available to residents

• “Focus stewardship efforts on the health of Honeoye Creek

• “Strengthen relationships with surrounding municipalities to pursue common goals” (as expressed in the Mendon Comprehensive Plan, Adopted 2.8.21, p. 8).

Among the documents on Figure 5-1. that consider Emergency Services are various models of authorities, recommendations for consolidations of services, suggestions for apparatus and equipment inventories, and considerations for financial priorities and capital improvements among others.

Given the lack of focus on Emergency Services in the Comprehensive documents and the recognition that our status quo remains intact despite recommendations offered in those documents that consider Emergency Services, the Committee focus on community expectations remains committed to the opening statement at the top of this Chapter and engaging our research to guide recommendation(s) for delivery to the Town Board.

RE: Equipment and Apparatus.

Figures 3-14. and 3-15. enumerate and define apparatus fleets for both HFFD and MEND. Figures 4-5. and 4-17. illustrate how equipment and apparatus are assigned to community needs. Committee consensus is that our equipment and apparatus inventories are appropriate for community needs identified on these two figures.

Both inventories have a predictable and practical life expectancy. Maintenance is driven by testing requirements and signs of wear from normal and usual use. Expendables are replaced as needed.

Maintenance and replacement require financial capacity. Both Departments have annual budgets determined by the Village and the Mendon Fire District for usual and necessary operations. Figure 3-39. illustrates the Capital Reserve Funds established by both authorities. Aside from these Reserve Funds, neither authority has a formal Capital Budget for apparatus replacement.

RE: Financial Capacity.

Real property tax is the major revenue source for both the Village and the Mendon Fire District. As shown on Figures 3-32., 3-33. and 3-34. the rate per thousand cost ratio is almost 2:1 for the Mendon Fire District measured with the Village and the Fire Protection District.

New York State determines the maximum indebtedness for a Village, Town and Fire District. Figure 3-36. calculates this amount for our Committee purpose only. Please note, the numbers expressed on this table are not in real time, although they are reasonable for our purpose and illustration. Figure 3-35. shows the current indebtedness for the Town and the Village, and Appendices 3-3. and 3-4. are the Bond & Payment Schedules for the Village and the Town.

Both the Village and the Fire District solicit Grants to augment appropriations. Figures 3-37. and 3-38. inventory the awards and their use for the Mendon Fire District and the Village.

The Village, the Mendon Fire District and the Mendon Fire Department have Real Property assets as shown on the inventory, Figure 3-40.

The New York State Comptroller rates “Fiscal Stress” for local governments. The 2021 Report is Appendix 3-8. Scores for both the Village and Town are ranked, “No Designation,” as aligned and evaluated using the Comptroller’s Fiscal Stress factors.

As the Committee reviewed the research data and the information available to us, we objectively observe:

* Similarities in staffing patterns – decreasing membership and retention.
* Common call types with upward trends in the number of each of the five general (5) types identified by the Departments.
* An increase in response times.
* Department movement to standardize specifications for personal, firematic equipment, e.g. air packs, allowing ease of function and facilitating resource sharing on the fire ground.
* Comparable apparatus inventories in number and function of the vehicles. Distinct apparatus, e.g. ladder truck, tanker/tender, augment each Department’s inventory for resource sharing and reduce duplication.
* The Departments adopted a “joint” approach to training – they are scheduling more joint opportunities to work together to gain familiarity among their memberships, gain confidence in each other’s abilities allowing smooth interface as they assist each other’s calls.
* More reliance on Mutual Aid and Mutual Assistance/automatic dispatch by both Departments.
* Both Departments are responding to each other’s calls on a more frequent and routine basis as demonstrated in their joint response to emergency calls within the Town which more than doubled from 2021 to 2022.
* A community needs assessment that indicates parallel Natural Features across the jurisdictions, and similar Target Features with exception mainly in the Village setting that has more “urban” features associated with infrastructure, housing stock and commercial sizing.
* The Mendon Fire District does not incur debt as does the Village in its usual approach to capital purchases.
* There is a 2:1 ratio on the cost of Fire Protection services within the Town’s border.
* Although the Property Tax Exemption available to volunteers is adopted by both the Village and the Town, other financial incentives for the volunteer memberships are disparate, e.g. LOSAP (a financial retirement plan).
* Both the Village and the Fire District employ a day-time worker with assigned administrative responsibilities.

As expressed by our research, the Committee Charge to “Identify the current capacity to deliver Fire Protection within the Town” approaches completion. We use this information to consider jurisdictional models that will assist current needs in delivering Fire Protection service and provide a realistic platform as emerging opportunities present and/or administrative requirements evolve.

1.24.23