

A meeting of the Mendon Citizens Advisory Committee for Town of Mendon Fire Service was held on Wednesday, December 14, 2022 at the Mendon Community Center, 167 North Main Street, Honeoye Falls, NY 14472.

PRESENT: Muffy Meisenzahl; Mendon Supervisor, John Moffitt; Chief Peter Kester (Zoom); Mike Arman (Zoom); Gerald Lonhair; Karen Jenkins (Zoom); David Smith; Robin Stewart Ha; Steve Tschiderer (Zoom); Ryan Wilsey and Anthony Militello

ABSENT: Chief Cory Trewer

OTHERS: Jackie Main; Mary Scanlon; Danny Bassette, IT support.

Minutes were taken by Bonnie Toomey

Ms. Meisenzahl opened the meeting at 7:01 p.m. Ms. Toomey led the Pledge of Allegiance.

HOUSEKEEPING

Ms. Meisenzahl pointed out the exits and restrooms and indicated the change from meeting in the lower level to the normal location was last minute.

INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Meisenzahl acknowledged others present and on Zoom.

MINUTES for the November 30, 2022 meeting were approved.

COMMITTEE ORGANIZATION

The Town Board approved additional meetings to be held at the Community Center on February 8 and 22, 2023, with the report due March 1, 2023. Ms. Meisenzahl stated all the materials for the meeting are posted at least 24 hours before the meeting and are on the Town website.

Communication

Ms. Meisenzahl met with Chief Trewer, Mr. Militello and Mr. Tschiderer on December 7, 2022 to work on the figures in Chapter 3, making sure they are correctly identified and placement corresponds with the narrative and numbered in a succession so it makes sense. They went through each figure in chapter 3, there are 40. It is the bulk of the information that will be reference through the report. The figures will be at the end of the chapter for more functional use. Another meeting is anticipated.

COMMITTEE CHARGE

Task 1 – Ms. Meisenzahl

RESOURCES – The Chapter 3 narrative has been updated with information from the Fire Departments and Jurisdiction applicable to the Fire Services. The biggest change is that the budget information will be for the 2023 budgets.

Ms. Meisenzahl stated she is close to sending out Chapter 5 – Which is the demographics piece, the target features and the natural features narratives, the tables that we have created, the Mutual Assistance/Mutual Aid and the apparatus and equipment that is assigned to the types of calls. The narrative will go out sooner, the tables will be available for the January 11th meeting.

The bulk of tonight's meeting is Resource Consideration polling. The Committee broke out into small groups with the task of gathering and organizing thoughts on Staffing, Equipment and Community Expectations for sustainable fire protection. This information will be helpful for modeling. We know Staffing is an issue. The question is how do you get more people, how many people do we need to meet NFPA and ISO benchmarks and standard recommendations, how do we stack up, what are our options and what should we consider as we look at models. One consideration to think about is who can hire and who can contract. So, once you determine what you want, we will cross reference with what is possible.

The Committee broke up into three focus groups:

Elected Officials – Mr. Moffitt, Mr. Lonthair, Mr. Wilsey

Taxpayer – Ms. Ha, Mr. Smith, Mr. Tschiderer on speaker phone

Fire – Ms. Meisenzahl, Mr. Militello and Ms. Jenkins, Mr. Arman and Chief Kester on Zoom

After the group discussions, Ms. Meisenzahl asked a representative of each group to share their thoughts on the staffing issue:

Elected Officials, Mr. Lonthair stated this group didn't feel the timing was right to talk about going to full-time or part-time (paid) but focused on the problems with staffing. The first is a qualified response twenty-four seven. He stated it is call (type) dependent which leads to the next concern which is consistency (day vs night). They noted both departments have a paid daytime administrator who respond to calls but how many firefighters go with them, it varies with the type of the call. They then talked about the number of training hours required and how that affects staffing. In today's times, people don't have the time to commit to the training that is required which ultimately affects acquiring new firefighters. Another significant draw on manpower are EMS calls. Ambulances are taking a significant amount of time to arrive to a call, there is the concern of how much time the call takes a volunteer away from home and things they have to do. Cost versus incentives were discussed in relation to retention. He stated some departments have a retirement plan, which would definitely have an impact on staffing. Mr. Smith asked if they had LOSAP (Length of Service Reward Program). Honeoye Falls Fire Department does not, Mendon Fire Department just started it. They did talk briefly about volunteer versus paid staff which is an expensive way to go and may have a strong affect.

Taxpayer, Mr. Smith stated their approach was to look through the lens of the tax payer. The expectations of when you call for help (9-1-1), is that qualified responders and equipment will

respond in a timely manner. They noted that it is also expected to meet industry standards, as lay people we expect without knowing what goes into it. They didn't necessarily have any suggestions on staffing. In regards to equipment, the trust is in the people the District or Fire Department have in place to be knowledgeable to have the wherewithal to have everything up to speed.

Fire, Mr. Militello stated that clearly the people problem is the crux of any issues causing the fire service to fall short of the service that is expected. He acknowledged that when a call is placed to 9-1-1, there is the expectation for a qualified first responder to show up, he added that after thousand of fire calls it might not be an emergency to him but it is to the caller. They touched on a lot and it is hard to narrow the focus down to suggest changes. They did talk about a couple different ways to provide staffing. Whether it is a hundred percent volunteer fire department, part-time or full-time, the standards and the expectations do not change. He said Ms. Meisenzahl mentioned taking the options and taking them through the criteria to evaluate if they improve response times, quality of training and what is the cost impact. They also discussed incentives for volunteers, which there has been some movement with the partial tax exemption. Consolidation of resources was discussed as far as what does that do to effect standards, response times, cost of service, the amount of administration and manpower is put toward making these departments successful in the future.

Mr. Smith asked if consolidating two districts changes anything when you now have more area to cover. He asked what do you gain from combining. Mr. Wilsey added that the call volume increases too. Mr. Militello responded that it does not change the response but the benefits are in administration of the environment. You go from two training programs to one and one of the biggest failures in both departments is a standardized, easily delivered training program. In addition to responding to the calls for service, a line officer has to train everyone and that involves many hours. In conclusion, he believes there is a benefit to consolidation, it won't affect staffing to a great degree but it is still part of the puzzle.

Ms. Meisenzahl asked the Committee if there is a benefit to looking at equipment. Mr. Wilsey stated the equipment is not an issue. Others agreed. Ms. Meisenzahl stated that when comparing with the target and natural features we will see if the equipment is appropriate for the risk and if the trained staff is there to operate it.

There were no additional comments from those on Zoom, they agreed with Mr. Militello's responses.

Ms. Meisenzahl stated that she feels the Committee is in a place to start building some direction to what will bring some benefit and a realistic approach to that piece. There was interest in getting into modeling voiced. Mr. Smith went on to describe placing two models (complete volunteer vs complete paid) and working towards the middle of what would work. The subject of "paid on call" was discussed. Mr. Wilsey stated it is a grey area, no documentation of it being done in New York State. He said it is huge outside of the state. In this situation, a volunteer would be paid for responding to a call. Mr. Wilsey added that you don't get paid on performance

and that the amount paid is the grey area. There was more discussion on the pros and cons of a combination (volunteer and paid) department.

Ms. Ha stated, as a new corporate member of the Honeoye Falls Fire Department, she doesn't feel the Department has done a good job making the public aware that they need help. Ms. Meisenzahl stated that the Fire Departments do a good job with what they have, but there is a shortfall, it is not sustainable. Ms. Ha said those are conversations that need to happen in the Fire Halls. She asked if there is a standardized training program available. Ms. Meisenzahl replied standardized training is dictated by New York State. There was discussion on training standards and what is available. Mr. Smith added that the staffing issue also correlates to a safety issue. Mr. Militello added that consistency is a problem with both departments. Ms. Meisenzahl said they will put together a cross-reference sheet where we can take a look at some of the issues and where they overlap.

Ms. Meisenzahl addressed Mr. Tschiderer asking him to let her know when the graphic models he and Mr. Militello were working on were ready. He responded that he would do so. Ms. Meisenzahl added that they may need a couple more off-line meetings to verify that the narrative and graphics align correctly.

No one on Zoom had comments, and there was no Public Comment.

The next meeting is January 11, 2023.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 pm.