

TOWN OF CHESTER
SELECT BOARD
Special Meeting Minutes
October 4, 2021

PRESENT: Arne Jonynas; Lee Gustafson; Leigh Dakin; Jeff Holden; Julie Hance; Amie O'Brien

VISITORS: Shawn Cunningham; Amanda Silva; Jeff Knisley; Rick Cloud; Matt Wilson;
Nicholas Trask; Chris Plumb; Madeline Bodin; Chris Walker; David Peters; Jean
Peters; Hank B. Mauti; Ryan Hart; Fred Probst; Scott Kendall; Jeanette Haight;
Gene Pategas

Meeting was held at the Andover Town Hall.

1. CITIZEN COMMENTS/ANSWERS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

No citizens comment.

2. EDUCATIONAL/TRAINING SESSION WITH ANDOVER ON EMERGENCY SERVICES
OPERATIONS – NO ACTION WILL BE TAKEN – EDUCATIONAL ONLY

Arne Jonynas opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. Julie Hance explained the meeting is informational only, no actual numbers will be discussed. Matt Wilson and Amanda Silva attended the meeting to explain how fire and ambulance services operate. Matt Wilson read a statement he prepared for the meeting, which is attached. His statement explains what it takes to run a fire department, the mutual aid process, training aspects of being a fire fighter, IOS ratings, and more.

Jean Peters asked if response times are tracked and wondered if response times have improved recently. Matt Wilson stated yes response times are tracked, which affects the departments ISO rating. Lower ISO ratings are better, and longer response times will increase the overall rating for the department. Reports on response times can be pulled from the state system and are reviewed every 2-5 years.

When a call is toned to Chester Fire Department, mutual aid gets called out as soon as the event has been confirmed. A structure fire is upgraded by dispatch automatically alerting other departments to respond. Run cards break towns up into sections so the closest department to the scene will be toned first as mutual aid. Dispatch and maps determine the closest place to the scene for tankers to retrieve water to fight the fire. If the department finds a better, closer water source to use, they can deviate from the run

43 card. Tankers will run on a rotation continuously bringing water to the scene from any
44 identified source.
45 Hank Mauti spoke about the Town of Andover purchasing fire extinguishers and making
46 them available to their residents at a reasonable price. There might be federal funds or
47 other money available to help pay for the cost. He would like there to be fire
48 extinguisher trainings held a couple of times a year. Matt Wilson stated there are
49 companies that hold trainings with fire pits for people to practice putting out fires.
50 Chester Fire holds trainings 4 times a year at the schools for students and offers trainings
51 around Halloween. These trainings are publicized through social media and the Chester
52 Telegraph. Ryan Hart stated free smoke detectors with installation are available, which
53 72 have been installed by the Weston Fire Department so far.

54
55 The Chester Fire Department has 24 employees. Matt Wilson explained the department
56 has part time employees governed by the town manager and Select Board. Each person
57 is paid an hourly wage determined by their certification level. Pay starts as soon as the
58 tone goes out until the time they are released from the station.

59
60 Ambulance Chief Amanda Silva explained Chester Ambulance Service has 16 members
61 which are paid the same way as the Fire Department. She is the only full-time employee
62 working for the service. The crew first responds from home when a call is toned out.
63 Golden Cross, Springfield, or Ludlow get called out if Chester's ambulance is not
64 available. She explained agencies across the state are lacking EMT's.

65
66 Jean Peters stated she had a friend from Andover call for an ambulance that took well
67 over an hour to respond. If they had known it was going to take so long they would have
68 transported her by car. Amanda Silva explained people that call dispatch are supposed to
69 stay on the phone until the ambulance arrives. Dispatch should update the person on the
70 phone of the estimated arrival time of the ambulance. She will speak with dispatch as
71 she was unaware of the long wait time for Jean Peters' friend. Chester Ambulance is
72 hiring new recruits and offering training. Jeff Knisley pointed out Andover residents can
73 join the ambulance service allowing them to first respond to calls. This will help decrease
74 response times for calls that come in for Andover. Chester Ambulance contracts with
75 Springfield Hospital as they are the closets hospital to Chester. This allows for patients to
76 get the fastest attention in an emergency. The Springfield ER will make the decision
77 whether to transport patients to a different hospital.

78
79 Julie Hance explained low EMT numbers is a statewide issue with fewer people in the
80 profession. The training hour requirements set by the state make it hard for people.
81 Chester is paying people to take the EMT classes offered. Andover resident Gene Pategas
82 inquired about taking one of the EMT classes. Matt Wilson explained he would have to
83 be affiliated with a service to take fire or EMT classes. He is considering taking the class
84 starting in January. There have been about 45 EMS responses to Andover so far this
85 year. Matt Wilson encourages the town to not look at how many calls there have been

86 but to consider the number of hours spent at each one. The Fire Department and
87 Ambulance Service can be contacted with any questions.

88
89
90 Chris Walker spoke about Andover Select Board members and residents being concerned
91 over the preliminary numbers given to the board. He is worried the cost of the new
92 Public Safety Building is being passed on to Andover residents. Julie Hance tried to clarify
93 the numbers were not preliminary and research is still being done on how to formulate a
94 cost. When first presented, she made it clear the formulas were not meant to be used to
95 figure the charges. Chris Walker stated he thinks Chester is going to overcharge Andover
96 for services and left the meeting. Arne Jonynas stated the Chester Select Board is trying
97 to find a fair and equitable way to come up with a formula.

98
99 Hank Mauti thought numbers were going to be discussed at the meeting. He stated the
100 Grand List was used in a formula for past figures. He would like both boards to work on a
101 formula together. Julie Hance said she is unaware of a formula used in the past. She
102 explained the formulas used in the numbers given to the Andover board were never
103 intended to be used because they do not make sense. She is still researching a formula
104 that is fair that will stay consistent.

105
106 3. ADJOURN

107
108 A motion was made by Leigh Dakin to adjourn. Seconded by Lee Gustafson. The meeting
109 adjourned at 7:11 p.m.

110 Amie O'Brien
111 of the Select Board

Lee Gustafson Secretary
Clerk of the Select Board **Matt**

112 **Wilson's Presentation**

113 Thank you for inviting us to this meeting to help provide education on the Fire Service in
114 General and Chester Fire Department in particular.

115 Chester Fire Department is a Paid Municipal Department. The Fire Service nationwide is
116 categorized into three categories. Paid Full Time, Paid Call and Volunteer. Chester being a
117 Municipal Paid Call Department falls under the same guidelines as a fulltime department
118 answering to and governed by Town and State Government. This means that all training and
119 call standards have to be followed at the highest levels where a volunteer department has
120 more leeway.

121 Chester Fire currently has 24 employees all trained at the minimum FF1 level with 75% holding
122 the FF1 Level Certification and Approximately 30% holding a FF2 Level Certification. Chester Fire
123 Department is an Operations Level Hazmat Department where most volunteers hold an
124 Awareness Level. Chester Fire Department is also a State Recognized Technical Rescue Team to
125 include Rope, Ice Water, Flood Water and Swiftwater Rescues.

126 Chester Fire Department currently trains a minimum of 3 times a month in Firefighting and
127 once a month in Technical Rescue. There are also many weekends that are added into this to
128 keep the Departments current certifications.

129 Chester Fire Department is a member of the Upper Valley Mutual Aid System and the
130 Connecticut Valley Mutual Aid System. Mutual Aid is determined by the type of call that comes
131 in, man power and equipment needed. For instance:

- 132 • Motor vehicle accident would be considered a General Alarm which means that mutual
133 aid is not needed and Chester has all resources needed to handle the call.
- 134 • Smoke in a building would be a 1st Alarm assignment. This means that all fire personnel
135 are required to report to the station and all Chester Fire Department Equipment is
136 deployed to the scene. Proctorsville Fire Department is toned to respond to our station
137 for coverage and first to be moved up to the scene if needed.
- 138 • Confirmed Structure Fire would be an automatic 2nd Alarm meaning that mutual aid is
139 automatically requested. The amount of mutual aid is determined by the location, size
140 and type of call.
- 141 • There are many other types of calls and these are just three examples.

142 Who comes for mutual aid and what equipment they are asked for is predetermined through
143 run cards. This all depends on what they have for equipment, how much manpower they
144 generally provide and what their training is. Our run cards are reviewed at a minimum of
145 annually.

146 For instance, a department that is not highly trained or may have issues getting manpower is
147 not a department that would be high up on our run cards. If this department is 3 miles closer
148 but only provides me with a couple people and are not trained in SCBA or other specialty needs
149 for the call, a department that provides me with a full crew which is 6-8 fully certified people
150 would be higher on the run card then the department that is closer. When it comes to this it
151 does not matter that the department that is closer can get their sooner because they do not
152 provide the resources that are needed to navigate the call.

153 Another scenario would be that we are all set for manpower but we need more water. A
154 Department from a few towns away may be called over the closer town because the closer
155 town does not have a tanker. Again, these run cards are predetermined, reviewed annually at a
156 minimum and often change depending on department status and new equipment they may
157 now have.

158 There are Other Duties of Chester Fire Department generally handled by the Fire Chief and or
159 assigned officers. The fire Chief fields weekly phone calls from insurance companies. When
160 someone is building new construction, changing their landscape or adding to their property this
161 often prompts their homeowner's insurance to interview the Fire Chief or designee. The
162 discussion includes providing equipment specs, water sources and training just to name a few.
163 Often times these calls mandate a site visit to determine water sources and response times
164 when outside a hydrant system.

165 Pre planning for certain locations that we consider high risk is also done. For instance, it is
166 brought to our attention that someone's driveway is very long and skinny. We must preplan
167 how we handle that call in the event of any emergency but most importantly Fire. Can we fit
168 our trucks up the driveway? Are we able to do a water shuttle due to the size of the driveway or
169 do we need to drop 4-inch hose on our way in.? Is the driveway too long so 4-inch hose is not
170 an option and if so, how do we overcome that in the event of a fire.

171 Pre planning is not just limited to fires. Where do we land a helicopter, how do we get crews in
172 if roads are blocked, where are high risk areas, are their hazards/explosives nearby, are
173 seasonal homes being maintained in the winter for access and so on.

174 Communications is under constant review. What works, what doesn't and how can we make it
175 better. What sort of backups do we have if a system goes down. Are we being dispatched by
176 the best Center for our area at the best cost we can get.

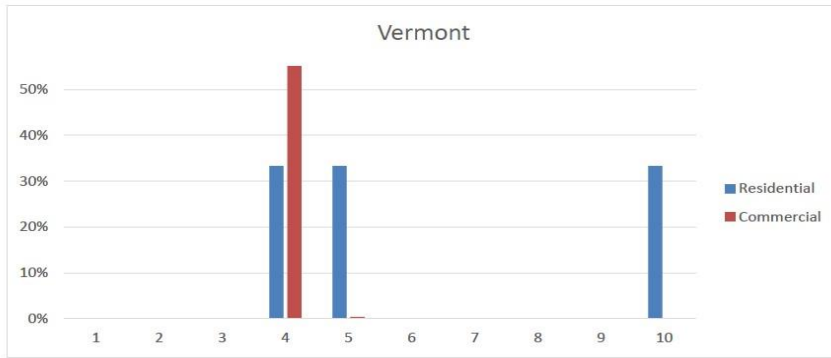
177 All calls generate a report and all reporting is mandated at the State and Federal Level. All
178 reports are entered into NFIRS system (National Fire Incident Reporting System). Even a call
179 that we are canceled on while enroute must be reported into this system. If the report is done
180 correctly meaning all categories are filled in would take about 30 minutes. Calls such as
181 structure fires are well over an hour to enter. This reporting is very important to be done
182 correctly as it reflects on grants and State and Federal Funding that the town may be eligible
183 for.

184 The towns ISO Fire Protection Rating (Insurance Service Office) is determined by the below
185 criteria and is how the town residents Homeowners insurance is determined. Chester Fire
186 Department is a 5/5X which is above average for the State of VT. This is rated on a 1-10 scale
187 with 1 being the best and 10 being the worst. The VT Average is 7 and approximately 10-15
188 years ago Chester Fire was an 8. These scores are determined with a very large criteria and
189 Chester Scored a 51.88 out of 105.5 giving us the 5/5X rating This number will greatly improve
190 again in our next audit with our new water system that was installed. Chester Fire Departments
191 above average rating is from our rebuild of training, services provided and high level of
192 communications ability. Out of 146 Departments in the state there are only 31 with a rating
193 better then Chester Fire Department.

194 **According to the ISO's Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS), there are**
195 **four main criteria to a fire rating score:**

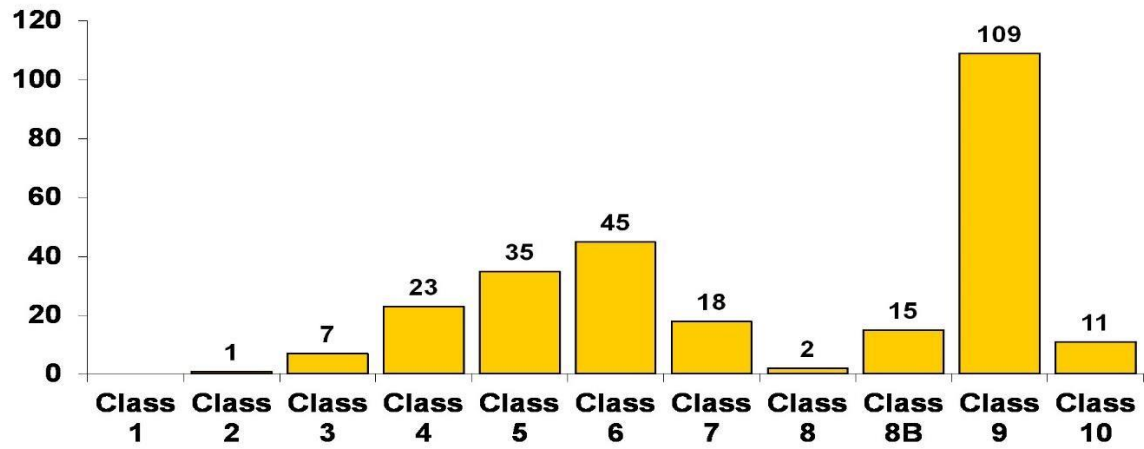
- 196 • 50% comes from the quality of your local fire department including staffing levels,
197 training and proximity of the firehouse.
- 198 • 40% comes from availability of water supply, including the prevalence of fire
199 hydrants and how much water is available for putting out fires.
- 200 • 10% comes from the quality of the area's emergency communications systems (911).

201



State Average		
	Score	Class
Commercial	66.53	4
Residential	44.59	7

Vermont



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