

Town of Oneonta Fire District  
Meeting Minutes – Regular Meeting and Public Hearing  
April 11, 2017

Attendance: Present: Michael Butler, Donald Lamana, Eugene Molinari, Johna Peachin  
Absent: Fernando Volpe

Members of the Public: Attendance sheets are on file

Mr. Butler called the regular meeting to order at 6:20 PM. The start of the meeting was delayed due to the number of people signing the attendance sheets.

Ms. Peachin made a motion to accept the February 2017 minutes. Mr. Molinari seconded the motion. Passed 4-0.  
(Note: The March meeting was cancelled due to a snowstorm.)

Treasurer's Report: (Attachment 1) The deposits and payments for February and March were reported by the Treasurer. An invoice for The Daily Star for a legal notice need approval. Ms. Peachin made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report and approve the monthly bills. Mr. Molinari seconded the motion. Passed 4-0.

Public Hearing: At 6:25 PM Mr. Butler opened the public hearing on the formation of a volunteer fire department. Mr. Butler read a prepared opening statement. (Attachment 2). He then informed the public of the ground rules for speakers. Speakers names will be called from the speaker sign in sheet. Each speaker must come to the front of the room and will be given three minutes to speak.

Ms. Peachin provided financial information and information about previous negotiations. She said that the City of Oneonta requested a price of \$1.2 million with no justification. Cost sharing should provide savings to both entities. It is the City's position that the Town of Oneonta Fire District (TOFD) is not paying its fair share. The City revenues include property taxes and sales tax from Otsego County.

Speakers and District of Residence (Town of Oneonta Fire District - TOFD; West Oneonta Fire District – WOFD; City of Oneonta – City)

Kay Rutland - TOFD: Residents have questions. The commissioners are further ahead than the people are aware. Concerned about the City's lack of negotiations. The City is not negotiating when it gives a bottom line. The fire contract is another way for the city to get money. Concerned that volunteer fire departments struggle.

Richard Breuninger - WOFD: Moved from the City to the Plains in 2010. Is concerned about ambulance service. It is difficult to get a map to see what territory West Oneonta Fire District covers. Elections are in December. There is a lack of transparency regarding the budget and territory. He is comfortable with the EMTs. He would like to know what the intention of the TOFD is.

Dorothy Scott Fielder - WOFD: She experienced a house fire in the Town of Maryland in 1992. She knows the value of fire protection. It is difficult to depend on a volunteer department. They need training. It is foolish to give up a paid department,

Mary Breuninger - WOFD: She is totally opposed to a separate fire department. She read a letter from Mr. and Mrs. Peitraface - WOFD - who voiced their opposition to a volunteer department. They have concerns about recruitment, retention, equipment, training, response time. Differences need to be resolved. It is unrealistic to form a volunteer department.

Steve McCarthy - TOFD: He has lived in the Town for 8 years. Criteria that need evaluation are improving safety, response time and capital investments to start a department will effect taxes.

Bob Wood - TOFD - (Town Supervisor): He provided some history for the fire district that was formed in 1980. He served as a commissioner and chair. There are concerns about the City charging too much. He commended the

commissioners for the work they have done. They are doing the work that commissioners are supposed to do. He clarified that the contract is for fire protection only. The ambulance contract is through the Town. He volunteered to be a mediator for contract negotiations.

Randy Budine - WOFD: The City and Town need to sit down and work together to come up with a solution or everyone loses. Both sides need to make a reasonable team effort. The goal for both parties should be to resolve the issue. He suggested a price of \$900,000.00 plus an annual COLA over five years.

Lisa Bard – TOFD: Seventeen years ago the City fire fighters saved her house. She has no disrespect for the commissioners. Town residents can petition for dissolution of the fire district as has been suggested by county representative Andrew Stammel. She hopes that it does not come to that. Town development has ruined the City's tax base. If we don't have a healthy city, we don't have a healthy Town.

Dolores Noonan – TOFD: She has resided in the Town for 45 years and has witnessed two fires. The response time to Morningside Drive was 7 minutes. At times the Pindars Corners siren can be heard for a long time. Volunteers and response time are a concern. She is against a volunteer department.

Molly Swain – WOFD: She knows the commissioners and has a great deal of respect for them. There are concerns about equipment, training, and response time. Hopefully the City will come to its senses.

Dave Rowley – WOFD: He has experience negotiating multi-million dollar contracts. He is disappointed in these negotiations. It is a two-part failure. There is an aging population so with would be difficult to staff a volunteer department. It would be a giant step backwards. He volunteered to be a mediator in the negotiations.

Doug Sluiter – WOFD: He moved to the Plains from Delaware County. He runs an independent insurance agency. His son is a volunteer in the Bovina Fire Department. It is difficult to recruit members. Many departments responded to the fire on Main Street in Delhi last summer. His son commented that the Oneonta fire fighters really know their stuff. There is a big question about the ambulance squad. Many issues still need to be addressed. The commissioners should convey information to the public using more media than just The Daily Star.

Rosalie Higgins – TOFD: She is disappointed that the report from the consultant was not discussed. There is a need to know why it was rejected. She is concerned about insurance ratings and costs. The City has a rating of 2 on a scale of 1 to 10. A volunteer department will change ratings and that will affect future development.

Art and Lori Gales – City: He relocated from Long Island where there are 30 men in a fire company. A pumper truck costs \$500,000 and an aerial ladder costs \$1 million. Equipment, fire house and training would be costly. They should negotiate a better contract.

Ruth Harlem - TOFD: She echoes the concerns that have been brought up. There is an aging population. Funding may be available for shared services. Can anyone put a price on safety? The City of Oneonta needs us so negotiations need to resume.

Harold Ashe – Milford FD: He owns a business in the East End, which is 22 minutes from West Oneonta. It is 7 minutes from the City Fire Department. Most businesses in the East End are mom and pop shops.

Luisa Montanti – City: She is a city resident but represents the Southside Mall. She asked that the commissioners do the right thing. Everyone is struggling. It is not an easy task to reduce taxes. She thanked the commissioners for the work they are doing. New ways to generate revenue must be found. She believes that the commissioners will not fail the public. She asked that we don't lose sight of what is important.

Brian Goodspeed – WOFD: He asked how many in the room were homeowners. The TOFD is paying \$1 million to the City. If the TOFD invested \$1 million in a truck, we would now own a truck. This would help Oneonta grow instead of paying to rent a service.

Michelle Catan – TOFD: The commissioners were elected to do what the residents would like them to do. What the residents say speaks volumes. Due diligence needs to be done. The City has given three options so the commissioners should go back to the table.

Charlotte Georgia – WOFD: Concerned that ambulance service would decrease.

Karyl Sage – TOFD: Vote no to a volunteer department. Hold elections at a different date. Ambulance fees go to the general fund not to the fire department account.

Virginia Lee – TOFD: She is employed by the City as an accountant. There is a shared sales tax agreement with Otsego County. The formula for fire protection takes into consideration the ambulance revenues. The contract has existed since the 1970s. The comprehensive plan questionnaire asked if residents were satisfied with fire service. It did not ask if they wanted it replaced with a volunteer department. It is not true that the City was not willing to negotiate. That the offer was all or nothing is not true. She told the commissioners that being an elected official comes with responsibilities. If they are not up to the task, they should resign and the commission should be dissolved.

Ellen Blaisdell – TOFD: Opposes a volunteer department. She asked for a show of hands of those who oppose a volunteer department.

Anne Marie Hosnedl – City: Owns property in both the City and Town. The fire department is worth its weight in gold. Ambulance and fire are together. She opposes a volunteer department. She would like the Town to see how ridiculous the proposal is. The City is not unreasonable.

Joyce Powell: Times have changed. Special training and equipment are required to handle chemicals. There is a need to come together for fire protection to serve everyone.

Bruce Downie – TOFD: Thanked the commissioners for the hard work that they do. The consensus is to negotiate for a fair, equitable contract.

Patricia Jacobs, Council Member – TOFD: 85% are in favor of fire protection. A volunteer department does not have a place in a town this size. There is no substitute for a speedy response. She is not willing to put family or property at risk. Transparency and input are important. They have a right and a duty to negotiate a fair price. Must work for the greater good and should take up Mr. Wood's offer to mediate.

Eileen Hill – TOFD: She has lived in the Town for 20 years and appreciates the City department. She is willing to pay for the service. She was not aware that the fire district existed and never received a notice of an election. Governor Cuomo is encouraging fewer government entities. The district should be turned over to the Town Council.

Katie Barnes – TOFD: She is playing the devil's advocate. Change is difficult. Young people do not stay due to high taxes. Transparency is the key. We should know what we are paying for. The ambulance drives the fire department. Residents must ask questions. Young people have difficulty buying homes and paying taxes. The population is becoming elderly. The City is handing the Town a bill and justification is needed for the costs.

Mr. Butler stated that it is misleading that the Board is 100% for a volunteer department. They are exploring options and feedback is necessary. He appreciates the time and comments that people have given. He will contact the City to resume negotiations. The commissioners understand the training requirements. They all respect the City fire fighters.

After the speakers list was completed, there was an opportunity for anyone else to speak.

Kathy Rutland: Both sides need to negotiate. The Commissioners are doing their job.

Randy Budine: This is crucial. Everyone must work together. Nothing should come off the table until negotiations are complete. Controlling costs should be a goal.

Tom Armao: Knows about negotiations and values a paid department. Everything has a cost. Too much time, energy and rancor has been spent on this issue. Economic development is a concern. He appreciates the work of the commissioners.

Written comments (Attachment 3) were received. The comments have been added to the record.

Mr. Butler closed the public hearing at 7:50 PM.

#### Committee Reports:

##### Task Force:

Ms. Peachin reported that the Task Force met. She will reply to the City with numbers and a counter argument.

##### New Business:

The commissioners discussed making a donation to Elm Park Methodist Church for the use of the sanctuary for the public hearing and the use of a room for monthly meetings. They considered \$50.00 per month.

Mr. Molinari made a motion to donate \$300.00 to Elm Park Methodist Church for the use of the building based on a donation of \$50 per month with a payment made every six months.

Ms. Peachin seconded the motion. Passed 4-0.

Ms Peachin made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Molinari seconded the motion. Approved 4-0.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM

Respectively submitted,

Erica N. LaBuz  
Secretary