

STOCKBRIDGE SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, March 9, 2023
6:30 p.m.
ZOOM MEETING - TOWN OFFICES, 50 MAIN STREET

Present:

Patrick White, Chuck Cardillo, Jamie Minacci and Mike Canales

Call to Order:

Patrick called the meeting to order for the discussion of an Intermunicipal working group for Fire Services.

Patrick recognized Sean Regnier, the chair of the Lee Select Board. Sean then opened their meeting and introduced Bob Jones and Gordon Bailey of the Board along with Lee Town Administrator Chris Brittain. Sean gave a brief summation of the proposed shared public safety building: over the last year Lee has been conducting a feasibility study to create a shared public safety building housing their Health Department, Building Department, Fire and EMS and Police Department. They are in phase three, the final design portion and not long ago they were approached by Stockbridge for combining Towns' Fire response services. An intermunicipal agreement has been drafted and they are looking at. Everything is very much in the development stage. Chris Brittain added that this came up because of the proposed location of the new facility being very close to the Stockbridge boarder on Route 102; it makes this attractive to both towns. Patrick thanked the Stockbridge Fire Department and said that they have the opportunity to examine through a working group the exploration of an intermunicipal agreement, a new delivery model for fire and emergency medical services. Patrick and Sean felt that it was time to move this discussion to the public. Patrick introduced his fellow Selectmen Chuck Cardillo who will be heading up the working group, Jamie Minacci and Town Administrator Michael Canales.

Mike said that they need to next establish a working group. Mike said that they are discussing putting together an agreement where Stockbridge will contribute toward the Public Safety Building, being discussed is 4 million toward the project and moving forward the Town of Stockbridge would contribute thirty percent of the operational cost and thirty percent of the capital cost of a department. This would include Fire and Emergency Medical Services, incorporating both town departments as best they can and see if it can be put together to develop what emergency services will look like for the next ten to twenty-five years. Answering Patrick, Chris Brittain said that the total budget on the building is preliminarily estimated in the 20 -25 million dollar range. Mike said that from there the working group would need to figure out how it all comes together from this infancy draft. Chris added that they are currently doing most of the EMS in Stockbridge; the additional contribution towards equipment and staffing would allow them to offer better service to both towns.

Currently Lee has one ambulance that can go out and this arrangement would add more staff to allow their second ambulance to respond.

Lee Fire Chief Ryan Brown said that Lee had started working on a plan to increase their full time capabilities to address their current needs. It is theorized that if this plan were to go forward, they could accelerate this and potentially have two staffed ambulances, one staffed with a full time paramedic crew and the other staffed with a staff that would also cross staff an engine. For Stockbridge this would mean there would be a staffed engine leaving the proposed site, immediately upon notification. This additional staffed engine/ ambulance would also benefit the people of Lee. As Chief Brown sees it, everyone has the opportunity to win. The ISO ratings of Stockbridge and Lee are at 6 and 5 and potentially these ratings would increase by adding a full time component. The ISO rating is what homeowners and commercial property owners' insurance rates are set against. There is a potential long term savings but there is a lot of work to be done for this agreement to function. Chief Brown added that EMS nationwide is suffering a national drought. There are not enough EMS crews to go around. The aging population requires more service and with a joint effort he believes that they can provide a higher level of service to more people with less of a contribution from each community. Stockbridge Fire Chief Vincent Garofoli added that in previous conversations that this is not the only option but what they are exploring at this time. Chief Brown said that a study was done four or five years ago commissioned by the Southern Berkshire RPC because they were beginning to identify a problem with Emergency Medical Services. While looking at ambulance service south of Lee and Lenox, the study came back with a regional fire-based EMS concept for everything south. The concept was looking at doing more together than trying to get by apart. This idea lends to a regional approach to everything. Patrick asked if this was a first step in a more regional landscape and Chief Brown said it possibly was; stating that the demands on EMS at the State and Federal level are not what they were even ten years ago. It is much more difficult to get volunteers today. Chuck said that this is something that they need to explore to the fullest. This is one of a few options to look at and they need to get all the information they can get to bring to residents. Chuck said that the goal would be to have decisions by the time Lee was ready to go with their building. Chris said they should be ready to bring their building to a special town meeting in the fall; at least winter of next year before they are ready to go out with RFPs for construction. Chuck said that Stockbridge should also have a decision by that time. Chuck said that he also believes that regional response is going to be county wide and it is a serious issue at this point in the majority of the towns.

The meeting was opened to the public for comments. The fire safety director of Fairview Hospital, right to know officer on the Southern Berkshire Emergency Management Commission, and Stockbridge fire fighter, Jon Lyons said that the ambulance study wasn't great and was being reenacted and they are working to expand it to include all of south county. He wanted to assure residents that they are not in a crisis mode; residents have coverage.

Next, the group decided to look at the make-up of the working group; a member of both Select Boards, the Town Administrators, both Fire Chiefs, at least one volunteer fire fighter from each town and a citizen at large.

Neil Haywood, Deputy Chief of Stockbridge asked how Stockbridge's stations and equipment would be integrated. Chief Brown said that at this time it was not known; it would be need to be evaluated and considered as the plan grows. Chief Garofoli spoke to the fact that volunteerism is down here and nationally. No matter what happens, the focus remains on volunteers; extra help is needed.

Jay Rhind, Stockbridge firefighter, questioned the added response times, what could be accomplished if the money was spent in Stockbridge and what will happen to the current stations. He also questioned why the approved fire engine has been put on hold. Patrick said that they were all good questions, but doing nothing is not an option. Mike said that the distance from the Stockbridge Station to the Lee waste water treatment plant is 3.7 miles. As far as the fire truck; it was approved, money was set aside contingent on application to a fire fighter grant with the Federal Government. The Town did not get the grant and the purchase was paused. Patrick added that the fire truck will be discussed at a future meeting. Chuck added that many questions will be brought up and answered as the plans move forward.

Chuck will take the lead as Selectmen on the working group. The group will have ten members. Chief Brown recommended that our local MEMA representative serve on the board. It was again noted that this is an issue that the Towns need to deal with and explore all options.

Adjournment:

With no further business, Patrick adjourned the meeting.

Please see <https://ctsbtv.org/government-channel-1303/> to view the full meeting.