

Tuesday, January 20, 2026 | 7:00 PM
Council Committee
Special PUBLIC SAFETY/PUBLIC WORKS - Minutes

Chair Councilor Jean-Claude Ambroise, Councilor Paul Norris and Councilor Christine Piazza

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Call to Order @ 7:00

In attendance:
Chair Ambroise
Councilor Norris
Mayor Rusk
Chief Tompkins
Kevin Price
Jeremiah Gilmour
Matt Parizo
Director of Finance Yuhas

Members of the Public:
Nick DeLia
Brian Nieman

Absent: Councilor Piazza

Quorum Declared

Chair Ambroise recognized former City Fire Chief DeLia who provided information regarding the necessity to increase staffing due to OSHA Haz Mat requirements and need of faster response time to fight fires due to new household items/furniture components being more combustible. *Document provided for the public record. Chief DeLia also noted the CoG Fire was a leader in establishing the PLUS system to provide assistance by other fire districts to ensure adequate coverage.

Chief Tompkins provided several documents to address questions brought up at our last meeting. The first document is the actual overtime cost for the last five years. This current year budget request has used an estimated \$176,000 with 5 months of the fiscal year remaining.

The second document is the estimated total cost to onboard one new firefighter of \$140,752. This cost does not include the training cost for the fire academy(\$8500) and EMT training(\$1300) which if a SAFER grant was applied and received for would need to

be paid by the municipality. Chief Tompkins noted that City of Groton Fire has not sent any firefighter hire to the fire academy. He also discussed his desire to diversify his staffing in the department.

The third document provided estimates of the potential cost of increasing to 5 firefighters per shift using overtime which was discussed at the previous meeting. This estimate would use the entire OT account and be at a deficit of \$222,720. Chair Ambroise asked Director Yuhas for the approved budget amount for FYE 26 for contingency account which is \$115,000 and none has been used so far this fiscal year. Director Yuhas noted the City of Groton would need to hold another Freemans meeting if expenses exceed the approved amount by the past Freemans meeting.

Motion to recess meeting moved by Norris, seconded by Ambroise passes 2-0
@7:25PM

Call to Order from recess @ 8:00PM

In attendance:
Chair Ambroise
Councilor Norris
Mayor Rusk
Chief Tompkins
Kevin Price
Jeremiah Gilmour
Matt Parizo

Quorum declared

Discussion continued by Chief Tompkins providing a fourth document with estimates of selling back of leave time by firefighters. If this strategy was implemented it could save daily cost in comparison to the cost to cover 1 overtime shift per day. If recommended a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) would be required. Buyback time could be from vacation, "Kelly" and personal time. All of this time expires at the end of the fiscal year and resets.

Firefighter Union Rep Kevin Price presented a call for service log for the past year which highlights when CoG Fire responded to multiple calls while already responding to calls simultaneously.

A question was asked by Firefighter Rep Gilmour of CIP funds could be used to fund OT payments to have 5 firefighters on shift instead of 4. This will require additional investigation.

Discussion began regarding the possibility of implementing fees for providing mandatory fire marshal inspections on commercial buildings and 3 family dwellings. Chief Tompkins and Mayor Rusk provided an example ordinance from a local fire district with fee structures and legal language.

Within the last 15 years the CT legislature allowed fees for fire marshals inspections. Chief Tompkins noted that Poquonnock Bridge and Old Mystic do have fire marshal fees. An estimated ½ of Connecticut municipalities charge for fire marshal inspections.

Chief Tompkins submitted the ordinance from the City of Groton building and zoning department including fees and legal language as an example to use if fire marshal fees are recommended. Chief Tompkins did state if it is the desire to begin charging fees, it should be a one time inspection fee rather than a yearly one. This is because the administrative work to file and process would be between him and the Deputy Chief. Chief Tompkins said the extra duties could require an additional employee.

Councilor Norris stated if this fee structure is approved he would like to see the revenues from fees should be put in a special revenue fund that could offset the cost of new firefighter hires.

Discussion continued on fire fees. One suggestion made would be to have this fee processing be attached to the existing building department which already processes these. Council would have to set a percentage for fire fees.

West Pleasant Valley Fire District service documentation was provided by Chief Tompkins and Mayor Rusk. The original signed agreement is still being looked for by both. The document dates back to 1962.

With the increase of housing units and business in this area consideration of increasing the cost for fire coverage can be considered by this committee.

Fairview homes which is a part of the West Pleasant Valley Fire District pays 0 for fire coverage. Consideration can be made if desired to adjust this. Discussion can continue at a future meeting. Chief Tompkins noted that if the fee was adjusted that the people and businesses currently covering the cost would likely want to see a decrease in cost if Fairview does begin to pay for service.

Discussion circled back to firefighter staffing. Safer grant has not opened up yet and due to DC shutdown many grant options have been delayed for applications. CoG could write the grant and have seminars offered by federal government to ensure application accuracy to increase acceptance.

Committee discussed how many employees should be hired. Chief Tompkins stated the best practice would be to hire in threes. That is to make sure they can cover shifts. Human Resources would have to be involved to create the job posting.

Request made by Committee to the Mayor to research the cost per firefighter to the taxpayers per household.

Motion made by Chair Ambrose:

Recommend to Council to creation of 3 new firefighter positions contingent of application and receipt of funding by SAFER grant for said positions.
2nd by Councilor Norris

Motion passes 2-0

Items for consideration for next meeting which has yet to be scheduled.

- Discussion of usage of FYE 26 OT Budget to staff CoG fire with 5 staff
- Revenue Sourcing through fire marshall fees
- Review of West Pleasant Valley Fire District cost for service coverage
- Review of Fairview Homes cost of fire service coverage
- Update of Safer Grant open applications

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Norris, 2nd by Ambroise passes 2-0

Adjournment @ 9:27