

**TOWN OF DURHAM**  
P.O. Box 428  
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**PUBLIC HEARING**  
**SEPTEMBER 10, 2007**  
**MINUTES**

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A Public Hearing was held in the Julian B. Thayer Auditorium at Coginchaug Regional High School on Monday, September 10, 2007. First Selectman James W. McLaughlin called the hearing to order at 8:00 p.m. Approximately 100 people were in attendance. J. McLaughlin welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming to hear the Final Report of the Emergency Services Facilities Committee and to offer their comments.

After leading the assembly in the pledge of allegiance to the flag, J. McLaughlin introduced the members of the Emergency Services Facilities Committee who were in attendance: Chairman Steve Spooner, Vice Chairman Tom Palmieri, Frank DeFelice, Steve Levy, Harry Hall, Duncan Milne, Frank Behrens, and Richard Parmelee. J. McLaughlin reported that in addition to issuing a public notice for tonight's hearing letters were sent to property owners on Cherry Lane to advise them of the hearing. He then turned the hearing over to S. Spooner.

S. Spooner noted that two members of the committee, Scott Wright and Dave Foley, were unable to be at tonight's hearing. He reported that the Board of Selectmen created a good mix of Republicans and Democrats when appointing members to the ESF Committee, and noted that all of the members worked together in a non-partisan way to perform the needs analysis and to develop their recommendations. Using a PowerPoint presentation, S. Spooner and other members of the committee reviewed the work done by the committee and explained the recommendations they have proposed. Everyone in attendance was offered a paper copy of the presentation and a copy of the committee's report.

S. Spooner explained that the committee was established on March 12, 2007 and was given the following charge by the Board of Selectmen: "The committee is to consider the short and long term needs of the Fire Company, the Ambulance Corps, the Resident State Trooper, the Emergency Management Department, and Town government storage, and to assess the utility of the town-owned land, and propose a plan to make use of the property and buildings to meet those needs."

Next, S. Spooner reported the recommendations of the committee as follows:

- It is the recommendation of this committee that the Board of Selectmen establish an Emergency Services Complex on the property of 37, 41, and 51 Main St, and utilize the current DVAC facility for town storage, or any use as determined by the Board of Selectmen.
- The committee also recommends that the town move to merge the 37, 41, and 51 Main St. properties onto a single parcel as soon as practical. S. Spooner explained that what this means is they are recommending that the town get rid of the current property lines. He added that the committee ignored the property lines when planning the future use of these buildings.
- Additionally, the committee recommends considering a secondary access to the Emergency Services Complex and adding a separate, free standing live burn training facility at a location deemed appropriate. S. Spooner emphasized that the committee's recommendation is for the Board of Selectmen to consider establishing a secondary access due to heavy traffic volumes on Main Street (Route 17) during peak periods including the weekend of the Durham Fair. He noted that Higganum Road and Cherry Lane were discussed as possible options.

S. Spooner then turned the podium over to Harry Hall, DVFC Fire Chief. H. Hall reviewed in detail the short and long term deficiencies of the current Fire House, including inadequate storage space, office space, conference space, training space, and bunk space, as well as lack of a vehicle exhaust removal system, lack of washing and drying facilities for turn out gear, lack of a decontamination area for personnel and/or gear, and several other deficiencies. H. Hall went on to explain that one of the most significant long term deficiencies is lack of a live burn training facility. He explained that regular scheduled training is required for all firefighters, and DVFC members currently must go out of town for this training using facilities available in neighboring towns. He noted that this puts the town at risk because when DVFC members are out of town for training purposes the response time to a fire in Durham can be lengthened considerably. He emphasized that while the committee recommends that a live burn training facility be established in town, the location does not matter; it does not have to be on Main Street.

S. Spooner then turned the podium over to Steve Levy, Emergency Management Director. S. Levy commented how appropriate it was that tonight's hearing was being held on the eve of the sixth anniversary of the events of 9/11/2001. He explained the purpose and role of the Emergency Management Department (EMD) and described the current Emergency Operations Center (EOC) currently located on the fairgrounds. He said that while our EOC is wonderful, it would better meet the town's long term needs if it were located within or near other town emergency facilities. He noted that our EOC was established with the help of state and federal grant money.

S. Levy went on to report on the needs of the Resident State Trooper (RST) and the Fire Marshal, noting that the RST's current office space lacks privacy and parking as well as room for conferences, fingerprinting, or a possible second trooper. He also noted that the office of the RST is not in a town-owned property and the town currently pays for use of that space. He explained that the Fire Marshal currently works from the Town Hall, the Fire House, and his home office and lacks secure storage space and privacy for interviews and investigations.

S. Spooner then turned the podium over to Tom Palmieri, Vice Chair of the committee. T. Palmieri reported the recommendations of the committee in detail including how each of the town properties under discussion (37, 41, and 51 Main Street) could be used to meet the town's long-term emergency needs. He explained that 37 Main Street is the house just south of the Fire House. The committee is recommending that the existing house at 37 Main Street be renovated to provide offices for the Resident State Trooper and the Fire Marshal. He explained that by using the 37 Main Street location for these offices all of the shortfalls that exist at their current locations would be remedied.

T. Palmieri went on to report that the committee is recommending that the current Fire House at 41 Main Street be expanded by 5,000 square feet to the east (back) and by 4,000 square feet to the north. The expansion to the east would provide space to house the DVAC and the EOC, while the expansion to the north would provide additional apparatus bays. T. Palmieri identified the facility requirements that the DVFC and the DVAC have in common, for example vehicle storage, conference space, oxygen storage, decontamination areas, and locker rooms to name just a few. He pointed out the economical advantages of housing these two agencies in the same facility.

T. Palmieri reported that the committee was recommending that the house at 51 Main Street, the property just north of the Fire House, be renovated to house the Emergency Management Department. This would include dedicated office space for EMD personnel and would also provide conference space and secure storage space for Emergency Management documents and supplies such as cots, blankets, and other emergency shelter supplies. When federal mandates change, the second floor can be made ADA compliant and provide adequate space for expansion.

Following the explanation of the renovations and use of each of the properties, T. Palmieri reported that the committee has estimated that the probable construction costs come to a total estimate of \$3,280,000, itemized as follows:

Renovate and add a garage (for cruiser) to 37 Main Street	\$ 350,000
Renovate and add 9,000 sq.ft. to 41 Main Street	2,650,000
Renovate 51 Main Street	250,000
Add a live burn training facility at a location TBD	<u>30,000</u>
Total ESTIMATE	\$3,280,000

He went to explain that these estimates are not exact numbers and that they were developed without the involvement of an architect.

The podium was turned back to S. Spooner who noted that additional considerations that were made by the committee to support their recommendations included:

- An effort to support the volunteer organizations our town is fortunate to have to meet our emergency needs. The generosity of our emergency volunteers is a great financial asset to our community and we should do all that we can to provide them with facilities that meet all of their needs. By doing so, long-term gains would include improvement in training, recruitment, retention, preparedness, and emergency response.
- Members of the town's emergency services support having a shared facility to meet their common needs.
- By restoring 37 and 51 Main Street the town would be preserving the town-owned houses that are located in the Historic District while serving an important role in the provision of emergency services to our town.
- An expected improvement in our ability to recruit and retain staff for the DVFC and the DVAC and an improvement in cross agency membership and morale.

Next, S. Spooner explained where we go from here. He explained that there are four steps in the process and that we are at the beginning of step 1 tonight. He outlined the four steps as follows:

1. The Board of Selectmen will review feedback from the Public Hearing at their meeting on September 24<sup>th</sup>. Based on the feedback, the ESFC proposal is either accepted (with or without revision) or another Public Hearing is scheduled.
2. If the ESFC proposal is accepted, the Board of Selectmen will name an ESF Building Committee at a future meeting. A charge will be established for this committee.
3. The newly formed ESF Building Committee will hold regularly scheduled public meetings. Public Hearings will also be scheduled as needed to gain input from the public on design, cost, and other aspects of the plan.
4. Once the final design, cost, and funding strategy of the overall plan are determined, a Special Town Meeting will be held to vote to go to referendum.

S. Spooner noted that there would be many opportunities for public input as the process moves forward. He again emphasized the bipartisan effort of the committee and noted that the recommendation put forth will meet the town's needs for twenty years.

At this point (approximately 8:40 p.m.) S. Spooner opened the meeting to questions and comments from the public. He asked everyone who made a comment or asked a question to state their name and address for the committee. Ken Rowe commented that it would be nice to see the town-owned properties on Main Street taken care of. He applauded the work done by the committee and said he would like to see the town's emergency services located in the same place. He questioned the need for a secondary access road and asked if it might be possible to widen Main Street instead. He asked what a burn facility is.

H. Hall reiterated that the committee was recommending that a burn facility be located at a site deemed appropriate. He said he would prefer to call it a training facility because it would be used for other training in addition to live burning drills. He explained that live burn training involves the simulation of firefighting in smoke-filled areas; this is done in Middlefield in a facility behind the town garage and involves putting wet hay in a drum and setting it on fire to smoke up the room for training purposes. He explained that it is a light smoke equivalent to smoke coming from a wood burning stove and said this type of training is required to comply with OSHA training standards.

Peter Frey expressed his great admiration for our fire and ambulance volunteers. He identified himself as a certified chimney sweep but said he was speaking tonight as a citizen of Cherry Lane. He expressed concern about the addition of an access road from Cherry Lane and said it was not clear to him where the road would go. He noted that he was aware of a discussion by the committee at their meeting of April 26, 2007 when specific properties were discussed. He asked if the smoke resulting from the live burn training would be carcinogenic. He offered that Higganum Road would be a better way to access the Fire House because Cherry Lane is narrow. He asked if the access road would be one-way or two-way and asked if it would be gated. He expressed concern that even if the intention of the access road was to be used only infrequently, once it was created what would prevent it from being used more frequently than anticipated? S. Spooner responded that there was a lot of misinformation about this issue around town. He clarified that the committee has not recommended the addition of a second access road; it has recommended that a second access road be considered. J. McLaughlin noted that he attended the April 26<sup>th</sup> meeting and recalls that both Higganum Road and Cherry Lane were discussed as options for a secondary access road even though the minutes of that meeting reflect a discussion of Cherry Lane only.

Another resident of Cherry Lane expressed concern about fire fighting apparatus using the secondary access road. H. Hall responded that if a secondary access road were added it would be for first responders to get to the Fire House in their personal vehicles; it would not be used for fire trucks or other emergency equipment to exit the Fire House.

Paul Keurajian, a Main Street resident, questioned why a burn facility would be suggested for a densely populated area like Main Street. He pointed out that there is a lot of dry grass in the area that could catch fire and endanger residents. He said property owners near the Fire House already put up with more inconvenience from the DVFC than any other residents in town, and if a second access road is added these same residents would be even more inconvenienced. He asked the committee to remove the recommendation that a secondary access road be considered. He expressed concern about the town taking people's land to provide the secondary access road. S. Spooner repeated that no specific location has been recommended for the burn training facility and that the report does not recommend the addition of a second access road.

Dick Olsen, a resident of Daisy Lane, reminded everyone that the Fire Chief reported earlier that the amount of smoke at the burn training facility would be equivalent to the amount of smoke from the chimney of a wood stove.

Donia Viola of Partridge Lane commented that she was aware that the DVFC currently uses a training facility in Middletown for training purposes and said it would not help the environment by having a live burn training facility in town. She went on to say that she would like to see an environmental impact study be performed before a live burn training facility is installed anywhere in town. She said she supports the consolidation of emergency facilities but pointed out that there are drainage problems on the properties under discussion. She suggested that it might be better to raze the buildings. She said she has calculated the cost to taxpayers and has estimated that it will cost approximately \$1,100 per household if the committee's recommendations are accepted. She suggested that the committee go back to the drawing board and provide more definitive cost estimates.

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A resident of Cherry Lane asked if the houses at 37 and 51 Main Street were historic and asked if it would make more sense to tear them down and rebuild. Duncan Milne responded to this concern. He said he is Chairman of the Historic District as well as an architect. He said the committee's cost estimates include gutting and major renovations to the houses at 37 and 51 Main Street. He offered that while he could not speak for all of the members of the Historic District Commission, he did not envision that members of the HDC would be in favor of tearing the houses down because the houses have a scale that could not be reproduced if they were torn down and rebuilt. He noted that the two houses add a significant value to the historic nature of Main Street.

Bob Fulton of Skeet Club Road commended the work of the committee. He said he is a member of several volunteer organizations and he is aware of how difficult it is to recruit volunteers. He said if the recommendations of the committee are implemented it will allow the town to avoid having to pay for these services which would increase the town's annual operating budget. He suggested that everyone give the committee's proposal careful consideration.

A resident of Cherry Lane asked if consideration was given to issues like waste disposal and a helicopter pad. H. Hall responded that there is no proposal for a helicopter pad; however the property behind the Fire House would continue to be used for Life Star emergency response. He added that each property has its own septic system and pointed out that none of the properties would be used to house residents in an emergency so waste disposal is not a concern.

A resident of Oak Terrace expressed concern about the decrease in response time if the town continues to use training facilities outside of town. Several more residents of Cherry Lane expressed their strong objections to using Cherry Lane as a secondary access road and about having a live burn training facility on Main Street, citing concerns about health and safety as well as a potential decrease in their property values. A Cherry Lane resident reported that a map was sent anonymously to residents who live in close proximity to the Fire House, and the map shows specific properties that were supposedly considered by the committee in its discussions about the location of a possible secondary access road. Another Cherry Lane resident said that while he supports the addition of a burning facility he does not support using the property between his house and his sister's house for an access road.

R. Parmelee identified himself as a Public Representative on the ESF Committee and commented that in making these recommendations the committee is offering solutions to life and death issues. He commented that if it would be inconvenient to residents to have hay burning in a barrel twice a month then they should consider the consequences of an actual fire. He noted that the training requirements for emergency volunteers are considerable and urged everyone to come together as a community to give careful consideration to the committee's recommendations.

Rob Chad identified himself as a resident of Maple Avenue and a firefighter. He said if he lived on Cherry Lane he would not want additional traffic on that road. He asked if the town could ask the State for other options. He said he supports having a training facility in town so response time in an emergency is reduced. He said the location does not have to be on Main Street and noted that the live burn training takes place only once or twice a month.

Dan Murphy of Tri Mountain Road said he has seen the town grow a lot in 30 years and thanked and applauded the committee for recommending solutions to meet the needs of all of our emergency service personnel. He suggested changing the name of the live burn facility to a training facility since it more accurately reflects its purpose. He noted that if an access road were to be added it would provide secondary, not primary, access to the Fire House. He said if the cost to each household to implement the committee's recommendations is \$1,100, we should divide that number by 20 to determine the annual cost to taxpayers because the facilities would serve our needs for 20 years. He concluded his remarks by expressing his hope that the First Selectman will

accept the committee's recommendations. Another resident of Tri Mountain Road advised the town not to consider Tri Mountain Road for any part of this project.

Judy Frey from Cherry Lane commented that getting our emergency services facilities up to speed is important and asked why we are looking only at Main Street as the location. She noted that Route 17 is not going to change and it will always be congested at peak hours, especially during the fair, and offered that no one wants an access road to the Fire House in their backyard.

Jim Rossi of Higganum Road thanked the committee for their review of the 1999 report. He said he was a member of the 1999 committee that worked on this issue. He said he cannot see spending \$250,000 for offices at 51 Main Street and suggested using the current DVAC building for offices instead; he also suggested keeping the EOC on the fairgrounds. S. Levy responded that there is no source of emergency power at the fairgrounds and federal mandates prevent having the EOC located on the fairgrounds permanently. Ideally the EOC should be located near the facility that shelters residents in the event of an emergency, i.e. Strong School. He noted that on a daily basis emergency volunteers set their personal needs aside and put the public good ahead of their own needs. He commented that the map that was circulated to residents who live near the Fire House is spurious and that whoever circulated it did not have the courage to put their name on it.

A resident suggested locating the training facility at White's Farm.

A resident of Cherry Lane thanked everyone who serves as a volunteer for the benefit of our town and said she would like to see everyone get what they need. She asked if other locations have been considered and asked if a facility so close to the fairgrounds is really the best location. She said she hopes that committee members understand why there is resistance and concern about their proposal. She added that she believes the cost estimates look much too low and noted that without input from an engineer or architect the estimates may be inaccurate.

Another resident of Cherry Lane said that everyone wants to do the right thing. She asked how many firefighters we currently have and where they are trained now. H. Hall responded that we currently have 54 firefighters with varying levels of expertise. He said each local fire department is required to provide training to its members twice a year and we currently use facilities in other towns. In response to a question on hazmat training H. Hall responded that our personnel are currently trained at an awareness level only. The resident said that it sounds like they are suggesting creating a smokehouse, not a real training facility. She asked the committee to step up their recommendations by not harming the community, and she suggested the following: 1) add to their proposal a recommendation that any live burn facility be located in an area that exceeds a specific distance from residential areas and revise their recommendations to provide a good training facility that offers more than burning hay in a can; 2) amend their proposal to specifically state that any secondary access road cannot be used by fire trucks; and 3) have residents from Cherry Lane serve on the Building Committee. She said she agrees with the resident who suggested that the current DVAC building be used for the state trooper. She asked if the cost estimates included equipment or services such as internet access; H. Hall responded that the estimates are for building renovations only.

Another resident of Cherry Lane expressed her concern about the secondary access road and questioned why the suggestion of a secondary access road was part of the committee's report since it was not identified as a deficiency in the committee's findings. She asked if the committee considered adding another fire house in another location in town, possibly in the south part of town. She also asked if there was additional homeland security state or federal money available to help offset the town's costs. S. Levy responded that the grant money that was used to develop our EOC is now going to regional authorities; he added that some training equipment may qualify for federal grant money. He noted that the town's new Financial Director, Mary Jane Malavasi, has extensive

experience in writing grant requests and should be able to help with this. F. DeFelice commented that when the 1999 committee discussed the possibility of adding a secondary access road they discussed the possibility of purchasing the property that would be needed for it.

Jason Lonergan commented that 75%-80% of all fire emergencies occur with 1 to 1 ½ miles from the existing Fire House. He explained that the costs to add another Fire House would be very high because we would have to purchase two new vehicles for the second location.

Several residents of Cherry Lane commented that they did not receive a letter about tonight's hearing. One of those who said he did not receive a letter said the committee did a great job but asked that there be no access road on Cherry Lane.

Mary Ryan of Mica Hill Road said the town already owns the land that would be used under the current proposal and if we do not use this property our costs will be much higher because we would have to purchase the land.

S. Levy summarized the various comments and questions offered this evening by observing that it appears that there are two major stumbling blocks to accepting the committee's proposal, and they are 1) the addition of a secondary access road and 2) the addition of a live burn training facility. He asked those in attendance if—hypothetically only—the consideration of a secondary access road was eliminated from the report they would support the addition of a live burn training facility. It appeared that there was unanimous agreement that this was the case.

First Selectman J. McLaughlin concluded the hearing with his expression of appreciation to the Emergency Services Facilities Committee. He said we owe a great deal of gratitude to this committee who carefully studied the needs of our emergency service agencies and produced a high quality report with recommendations to meet all of their future needs. He said he would like to make several points before adjourning tonight's hearing:

1. The Committee did not base its findings or recommendations on the 1999 report; they did their own research and developed recommendations that happen to agree with many of the earlier committee's findings.
2. The town owns property adjacent to the Fire House that is currently not being used. The charge to this committee was to optimize the use of that property while meeting the long term needs of our emergency services personnel; they were not charged with looking at alternative locations for the facility.
3. The possibility of adding a secondary access road was discussed nine years ago but it did not come to pass. The suggestion of considering a secondary access road by this committee is not the first time this issue has been discussed as an option. The DVFC and the DVAC work together with a greater degree of cooperation than ever before, and we should not allow the word "consider" in the committee's report to prevent the forward momentum of this project.
4. The map that was distributed to residents who live near the Fire House was not developed by this committee; the only maps drawn up by this committee are the ones that were provided here and that are on display here this evening.
5. We just spent \$34 million to improve our schools. The emergency services facility will cost only a percentage of that and will provide safety and emergency services that will benefit the entire town. He concluded his remarks by stating that he would like to see this project move to the next step and turn it over to a Building Committee to move this project forward.

### **Adjournment**

The Public Hearing adjourned at 10:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Alice Tucker