



Town of Falmouth

Fire-EMS Department

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TO: Nathan Poore, Town Manager

FROM: Howard Rice, Jr., Fire Chief

DATE: 04/24/09

RE: Follow-up to Council / Public Questions on Pleasant Hill Fire Station

I am writing this memo to discuss additional concerns about closing Pleasant Hill Fire Station (Station 3). Assistant Chief Patey and I watched the videos from the two public hearings and have read through the various e-mails that have been received from the public and Council members relating to the Pleasant Hill Fire Station. The purpose was to identify any questions not yet answered by the Fire-EMS Department and to address some recent comments that have surfaced through e-mails and at the public hearings. We do not feel that there are any unanswered questions. The concerns at the latest public hearing centered on the emotions of losing the operating fire station and the “security blanket” that people feel the station provides.

There has been little discussion about the lack of responders at Station 3 for emergency calls. In 2008, Station 3 was called for 179 incidents.

- The truck did not leave the station 37 times
- The truck had only one firefighter 60 times
- The truck had three or less firefighters 84% of the time

A fire truck in a fire station is only one piece of the response to an emergency. The biggest piece is the emergency responders. Emergency responders need to be trained, available to respond, and most importantly, must respond to an incident to mitigate the emergency. The lack of responders at the Pleasant Hill Fire Station is a significant issue as shown by the truck responding with one firefighter more than half of the time (54%). While this is certainly an issue of concern, it is not the reason why Station 3 should close. As stated in earlier reports, this station can close because we can offer the same or better level of service with coverage from Central Station and Portland Ladder 4 and moving the night time paramedic from the Cumberland Rescue Department to Central Station. It is important to recognize the data relating to responders because there have been many statements from the public expressing concern that we will lose responders if the Town chooses to close Station 3.

Several residents at the public hearing said that the members will not continue to volunteer if Station 3 is closed. Although each member will need to speak for themselves, I have not had one member tell me that he would not remain active if the station closed, and five members have already confirmed their intent to remain with the department.

Another comment at the public hearing came from retired member David Halligan. He incorrectly stated that there are “11 or 12 highly trained firefighters” at Station 3. The roster of Engine 3 includes 16 names. Six of the individuals are inactive (responded to 0 incidents over last 2 years). Of the remaining 10, there are only three firefighters who have firefighter certification, and all three are certified at Firefighter Level II. Since July 1, 2008, the combined total incidents responded to by those 3 firefighters was 67, for an average of 22 calls each (out of 180 incidents in the time period).

I received a request from a Councilor for data on the membership of Station 3 and the number of calls each one attended last year. The following is a chart showing the current membership of Pleasant Hill Fire Station, with some columns displaying information including the number of incidents that each have attended throughout the town, and in the Pleasant Hill neighborhood. There is a column that breaks out the 2-day Ice Storm responses as well.

Name	Town of Residence	Firefighter Certifications	Incidents attended (Town wide) 07/01/08 – 3/31/09)	Incidents attended (Ice Storm on 12/13-14)	Incidents attended in Pleasant Hill neighborhood (17 total incidents)
Captain Mike Coffey	Yarmouth	Firefighter II	30	1	3
Lieutenant Bill Cochran	Portland		80	12	8
FF Matt Richard	Falmouth		120	17	9
FF Peter Scanlon	Portland		108	9	10
FF Scott Richardson	Falmouth		59	16	7
Prob FF Ken Snowdon	Falmouth		50	5	4
FF/EMT Greg Vatulas	Falmouth		40	4	2
FF/EMT Josh Perry	Portland	Firefighter II Fire Officer II Fire Instructor I	22	11	3
Prob FF Adam Winn	Falmouth		22	0	2
FF Rory McEwen	Portland	Firefighter II	15	3	0
Prob FF Jason Bruns	Portland	Inactive	0	0	0
Freeman Cleaves	Falmouth	Inactive	0	0	0
Allen Coffey	Falmouth	Inactive	0	0	0
David Halligan	Falmouth	Inactive	0	0	0
Bob McPartlan	Portland	Inactive	0	0	0
Jim Matthews	Portland	Inactive	0	0	0

***Notes**

- Prob FF = Probationary Firefighter (do not operate apparatus or enter hazardous scenes)
- Firefighter II = Firefighter Level I and II are the basic levels of fire certifications
- Josh Perry and Jason Bruns joined the department on 12/01/2008

Residents have questioned the reliance on the Portland Fire Department for backup in case of serious emergencies. Currently, we rely on backup from the Portland FD for serious Fire and EMS incidents. Falmouth Fire-EMS Department and Portland Fire Department respond together over 20 times per year on EMS incidents, fire incidents, and possible emergencies at the Portland International Jetport. Last Tuesday (04/14/09), Portland Ladder 4 responded to a structure fire on Gray Road with Falmouth and Cumberland Fire units. Contrary to some comments by a few members of Engine 3, including FF Scott Richardson at the 03/09/09 public hearing, union and non-union firefighters can and do work together. Problems that may have occurred 15 or 20 years ago should remain in the past. Falmouth Fire-EMS currently employs nine members of the International Association of Firefighters, as well as other union members without experiencing any issues. On Wednesday (04/22/09), we held a critique of the fire on Gray Road and invited all of our members, as well as the Cumberland and Portland crews that assisted us. Portland Fire Department sent the crew of Ladder 4, plus the Deputy Chief (on-duty Shift Commander) to the critique. This successful critique demonstrates Falmouth's commitment to working with its neighbors and encouraging constructive feedback.

In preparing this memo, it occurred to me that I have not explained how we respond to the areas of Falmouth that are the furthest distance from our Fire Stations. Residents on Hardy Road, Babbidge Road, Grist Mill Drive, and Mast Road remain the furthest from a fire station, with some houses being more than five miles from the closest fire station, Station 4 on Winn Road. In 2008, we had 19 fire incidents in the area north and west of Mountain Road. This data is comparable to the 14 incidents that occurred in the Pleasant Hill neighborhood during the same period. We have solutions for this area of town and continuously look for ways to improve our service including our efforts to enhance partnerships with Westbrook, Windham and West Cumberland. Public water supply is not provided in this area so we have worked with the town's Community Development Department to require sprinkler systems or water cisterns in new developments. We feel that our mutual aid agreements, training, and response plans help to address the challenges associated with service delivery to those residents in West Falmouth. The point worth noting is that there are similarities and differences throughout our community. The Falmouth Fire-EMS Department is aware of these similarities and differences and is committed to making sure that our residents are provided the best possible service and care.

Falmouth Fire-EMS appreciates all members and is taking active steps to maintain the high level of service that we provide to our community. We feel that we can provide this service without providing capital and operating funds to maintain the Pleasant Hill Fire Station. The best service for the whole town will be provided with a Firefighter/Paramedic at Central Station 24 hours a day. The proposal to close Station 3 saves the Town of Falmouth \$1 million over the next 20 years. That total includes \$200,000 in immediate building maintenance upgrades, \$10,000 per year for annual building improvements, \$5,000 per year for annual equipment purchases, and \$500,000 for the replacement of the current Fire Truck, scheduled in the next five years. The total savings of \$1 million over 20 years equates to average annual savings of \$50,000 per year. In addition to the staffing challenges at Station 3, the proposal is to close the station and save the town the money and, with the addition of the Firefighter/Paramedic at Central, provide better service.

The leadership of Falmouth Fire-EMS constantly evaluates the complete system of emergency services delivery for the Town of Falmouth. With over 1,500 emergency incidents per year, we analyze our operations to ensure that we provide the best response and care. The proposal to add a nighttime Firefighter/Paramedic helps our response throughout the town for both EMS and fire calls. We feel that focusing our resources at the Foreside Station, Central Station, and Winn Road Station provides adequate coverage for the 32 square miles that we protect.