

**Fire Chief Study Committee
Recommendations
2/9/22**

The Fire Chief Study Committee was formed by the Shutesbury Selectboard. The Committee members are: Elaine Puleo (representing the Selectboard); Jim Walton (representing the Finance Committee; April Stein (representing the Personnel Board); Walter Tibbetts (current Fire Chief); Kristin Burgess (acting Chief of Police). Becky Torres, Town Administrator, .Exofficio . The committee met weekly starting on 11/24/21. The committee held a public forum on 1/26/22.

Summary of the Committee's Work:

Shutesbury's Fire Chief position has evolved over the past 20 years from PT to FT benefited position.

The Committee chose to explore its charge by first conducting a complete review of the current Chief's job description and his actual duties. Secondly, we gathered information from surrounding like sized towns as to the structure and compensation packages for their fire departments. Thirdly, we solicited input through individual interviews with all current members of the fire department. Lastly, we held a public forum to solicit community input.

Results of the Review of the current Chief's job description and actual duties:

- 1) The current chief's job description includes a number of "additional responsibilities" that go beyond what might be considered the normal fire chief duties. These include:
 - Emergency Management Director
 - Trainer for the department personnel
 - Complete Equipment maintenance
 - Grant writer
 - Additional Administrative duties

After full exploration, the committee decided that although these duties could potentially be done by other personnel, and often in towns of our size, these are duties that are in the purview of the fire chief. It made sense to keep them in the fire chief's job description.

- 2) The current job description does not have a residency requirement although the current chief's contract does contain a residency requirement

The committee came to the conclusion that the current job description was accurate and reflected what the town expected from its chief. Minor changes/edits were forwarded to the Personnel committee for future use.

Results of the Review of salary and department structure for most of the comparable sized towns in Franklin County using FRCOG data as well as the Chief's knowledge of any recent changes:

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 - 1) There is a mix of FT Chief; FT Chief/PT Deputy; Shared Chief with other towns
 - 2) Many towns' departments evolve because of unique situations in each community
 - 3) Department personnel who work in town increase availability
 - 4) Chief with a Deputy Chief in some towns – these have a mix of FT and PT chief & deputy

- 5) There are towns where the Chief and/or Deputy have other employment in addition to the Fire Department (some within the same town and some out of town)
- 6) When paid by stipend, chief salary is augmented by hourly OT time – often the case when it's a nonbenefited position
- 7) Some towns are able to share a chief between two towns
- 8) Several towns contract Ambulance Services together

At this time, the committee felt there was no benefit to the town to pursue a shared Fire Chief position with any other town in our region. We were concerned with the cohesiveness of the fire department team, a lack of cost saving benefits, impact on response times and the challenges of spreading the position over two different counties. It was also noted that our current salary and benefit package was appropriate at this time.

Individual meetings with current members of the Shutesbury Fire Department

See attached questionnaire with full response summary. During an evening training session, Jim Walton and acting Police Chief Burgess conducted individual interviews privately with each member of the fire department. Phone follow-up interviews were conducted with remaining members so all voices were heard.

In summary, they all responded that they currently have a knowledgeable leader who they trust and have confidence in. They appreciate the level of training they receive and find the environment nurturing and inviting. Consensus was to maintain a full time Fire Chief position. There is a need for more volunteers at this time.

Public Forum Held on January 26 at 6PM

The forum was held on Zoom with announcement via Town Announce and a community member posted it on NextDoor Shutesbury. Over the course of the 1.5 hour forum 22 noncommittee community members joined. We gave a brief overview of what the committee's charge was, what we had accomplished so far and when we expected to have this report finalized. Then, the floor was opened for questions. These were the main things we heard from that session:

- Support for maintaining a FT Fire Chief
- Suggestions that a Fire Chief and Deputy Chief could possibly split the coverage
- Questions as to how to increase the number of current volunteer Fire Fighters
- Concern that efficient emergency response be maintained
- Support of having the new Chief work with the current Chief for a smooth transition
- Consensus that attendees, including Fire Fighters, want to be involved in the hiring process
- Understanding that although it might not be possible to hire a chief that resides in town, there should be a stipulation similar to the Police Chief job with respect to residency

Fire Chief Study Committee's Recommendations:

- We should be looking to hire a full-time Strong Fire Chief as defined in MGL Chapter 48 Section 42

- As in the current Job Description the Chief is not required to live in town
- The committee is recommending the successful candidate reside no more than a 35 minute commute from town.
- The new Fire Chief should be required to join the Franklin County Fire Chief's Association
- We Strongly recommend that the new job description include having the Chief join the Western Mass Fire Chief's mentoring program
- If there are no qualified applicants for Full Time Chief, the committee recommends hiring a part time Deputy Chief and part time Chief in order to maintain coverage in town