



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

Over the past twenty plus years, members of the fire department and members of departments and emergency services organizations across the region, have been facing a significant issue – declining volunteer membership; and the accompanying decline in honest capabilities.

Throughout these number of years, various fire service leaders across the region have identified the decline in volunteer members as a significant issue that, at some point in the “future”, will create severe problems for departments, and the communities they serve.

Though the overall decrease in volunteer staffing has been slow, with individual departments transitioning through “peaks and valleys” relative to staffing levels, we have collectively come to realize an extremely dramatic decrease, not only in staffing, but also actual numbers of members responding to requests for service, at any given time.

Over these last twenty years, throughout the volunteer fire service in general, departments have hoped for an increased number of volunteer members and made legitimate attempts to attract, recruit, and retain members, while at the same time, continually attempting to “do more with less”; meaning we attempt to perform the same duties we have in the past and meet the responsibilities of today’s fire service, with fewer and fewer responders. Now, today, we are no longer able to function and operate this way.

In August 2016, due to a marked decline in the volunteer fire service’s operational capabilities, the members of the Putney Fire Department began to closely examine the issues surrounding our own staffing decline, the reasons for the decline and lack of adequate recovery, what the issues mean for us (and the community) presently and moving forward, and ways we may improve the situation.

At the outset of our internal examination, the Fire Chief established several very specific and concise “rules of engagement”: a) The project we were about to undertake was to be completely honest, open, and thoroughly transparent; b) Blame is not a factor – there are to be no attempts to place blame upon any member or members – past or present; c) All members of the department are to have input, and that input will be valued; d) There are no hidden agendas



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

involved; e) Everything the fire department has done, and is doing presently, will be open for review during this process

An internal committee was formed, made up of six department members, and the Fire Chief. At our initial committee meeting, after all being in agreement that this department is realistically near complete failure, and discussing a number of very broad issues, we collectively decided to compile the information necessary in order to create an accurate "picture" of the department, our operations, and our capabilities 20 years ago, 10 years ago, and presently. The committee also endorsed the Fire Chief being the person responsible for collecting and presenting all of the information. Several key pieces of information were identified by the committee as being appropriate and most beneficial for discussion, comparison, and presentation: a) The overall state of the department; b) Request for service volume; c) Staffing levels; d) Municipal demographics; e) Department demographics; f) Types of requests for service; g) Apparatus response times; h) Operational aspects of the department; i) Member training and education; and j) The honest capabilities of the fire department

The committee initially reviewed information from twenty years ago (1997), with the following findings and understandings:

### A – State of the Department:

A few committee members were deeply involved with the department at that time; Via their recollections and review of available records and documentation, the department was generally in a good place

### B – Department Demographics:

Most generally, department members were very dedicated, dependable, and willing and able to sacrifice a great deal; Member's families not only allowed the members to make sacrifices, but they were also willing to sacrifice themselves for the department [ • Family time • Holidays • Work • Weekends • Evenings • Long duration of time for incidents]; Members were generally available for incident responses and department related events, without exception; Members were known to be highly self-motivated and were able and willing to commit to everything involved with being a member of the fire department; Member's attitudes were very focused upon what they could do for the department and the community, as opposed to being focused upon their personal gains or, "What's in it for me"; Members possessed a significant level of ambition and natural



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

“drive”; Members did not possess a sense of entitlement; Members understood and appreciated responsibility and accountability, and were appreciative of being held accountable; Members held a relatively high degree of respect for each other and appreciated each other’s capabilities and limitations; Members were relatively unaffected by, and their capabilities were very rarely hindered by general life issues; Members were very rarely affected by response related circumstances [ • Psychological • PTSD • Self-guilt • Stress]; All members and their families understood and accepted the fire department was the priority, above all else; Alcohol was openly stored and consumed within the fire house; The fire house was openly unlocked and accessible 24/7/365, and was frequently left open and unattended; The average age of our members was 35 years, with an accompanying high level of experience; Amongst the members, there was a very limited degree of gossip, and members did not engage in judging each other

### C – Staffing Levels:

The department was comprised of 27 total members, with a “core group” of 8 members (34%) who literally participated in the overwhelming majority of department activities and responses; 8 other members were very regular in their participation and response, which equated to 16 members being relied upon very heavily; 7 junior members were involved with the department, and 4 members participated very rarely; Aside from the juniors, members were certified firefighters and/or emergency medical responders; An average of 10.5 members responded per incident

### D – Requests for Service:

The department responded to 141 requests for service, including [ • EMS • MVC’s • Vehicle fires • Chimney fires • Structural fires • Brush fires • Storm related • Haz-Mat • CO/smoke detector activations • AFA’s • Mutual aid responses • Land search/off-road rescues • Public assists • Electrical hazards]

### E – Apparatus Response Times:

Overall, response times – (Time of call) to (Time of response) to (Time of arrival) – were consistently rapid; Multi-apparatus responses were consistently achievable with apparatus appropriately staffed the majority of the time; Timely responses and proper disposition of incidents were never dependent upon the presence of specific members



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

### F – Member Education & Training:

Education and training were taken very seriously; Official Firefighter Level I courses and certification had just become the “new thing” and all fire department members were obtaining their certifications; PFD was the first volunteer department in the state to have all members certified, even though this was not a requirement; Overall, there were less education and training “requirements”, with less number of hours required for initial training and education, as well as for continuing education; Department members were relentless in their individual and collective pursuit of educational and training opportunities and programs, conducted within or outside of the department; Compared with today, there was less that members were required to know

### G – Department Operational Aspects:

Most generally and for the vast majority of times (regardless of time of day or day of week), members were readily available for incident responses and department related events; The department maintained an exceptional reputation throughout the mutual-aid system [ • Dependability • Adaptability • Willingness to perform • Level of performance • Willingness to provide aid/service • Level of training/education • Amount and reliability of equipment • Aggressiveness of members • Number of members during responses • Rapid response times]; With a significant degree of member response consistency and dependability, incidents were always mitigated in a professional manner and with an appropriate number of members and apparatus, with each apparatus properly staffed

### H – Municipal Demographics:

Historically, the community had been/was very supportive of the fire department; Municipal funding was regularly somewhat controversial, as the costs associated with operating a professional and worthy fire department were quite high, and the department was in need of new and updated equipment and apparatus; Political views varied dramatically, depending upon the visions and agendas of the Town Manager and Selectboards; Consistent with the rest of Windham County, population of Putney aging; High school aged population generally active within the fire department, with their involvement predominantly driven by their need to obtain community service hours for graduation – typically their participation dwindled once they achieved their required hours; The



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

overwhelming majority of the population was self-sufficient and not necessarily dependent upon others, or dependent upon emergency services; The majority of the population was financially stable with both adults of the family just beginning to be forced to work; There was a very limited mental health population identified within the community; Homelessness within the community was non-existent; There were virtually no addiction related issues within the community; Most generally, the citizens of the community were very respectful and appreciative of the municipal emergency services

### I – Honest Capabilities of the Department:

Overall, the members individually and the department wholly were consistently capable of responding to requests for service in a very timely manner, with adequate and appropriate staffing and the appropriate apparatus, regardless of time of day or day of the week; For the typical “routine” incidents, the department was consistently able to mitigate circumstances without issue, in a professional manner; Very rarely were circumstances encountered that overwhelmed the department and required requests for mutual-aid resources

The committee then reviewed information from ten years ago (2007), with the following findings and understandings:

### A – State of the Department:

The majority of the committee members were deeply involved with the department at that time, and based upon their recollections, and review of records, incident reports, and documentation, the department was quite well off, in a broad sense; Compared to a number of surrounding departments that had been experiencing staffing problems and response difficulties, we had just come to acknowledge the same issues

### B – Department Demographics:

Overall, department members remained dedicated, however a noted variance in the level of dedication came to be, depending upon a member’s longevity within the department; The broad level of dependability of members was noted to be in a steady decline; Neither members, nor their families were as willing/able to sacrifice their time or themselves for the department [ • Family time • Family events • Work • Weekends • Holidays • Evenings • Long duration incidents



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

• Increased financial burdens • Increased life stresses]; General life related issues were beginning to affect member's ability to remain active and/or remain affiliated with the department; Additionally, employers were no longer willing/able to allow employees to leave work for the benefit of the department and the community; The degree of self-motivation of newer members was notably less than that of older seasoned members, as was the ability and willingness of those members to commit to everything involved with being a member of the department; Newer members and perspective members have more of a "What's in it for me?" attitude, and present with a strong, and sometimes overwhelming sense of entitlement; Independent responsibility and accountability were notably on the decline regarding new members, with an obvious upswing of members not appreciative of being held accountable; A noted increase was realized concerning members being affected and hindered by general life issues; Strong evidence department-wide that members are more affected by response related circumstances [ • Psychological issues • Withdrawal • Avoidance • PTSD • Self-guilt • Decreased involvement • Stress issues • Temperment changes • Less engaged • Attitude changes • Alcohol/drug dependency]; There was a definite noted decline in the fire department being the priority for members and their families; Alcohol storage and consumption within the fire house were no longer allowed; The level of general respect amongst the members was noted to be diminished, and gossip amongst and about the members was on the increase – Combined, these issues brought about a significant decline in the appreciation for each other's capabilities and limitations; Due to several theft related issues, no longer was unrestricted access to the fire house allowed; The new average age of department members had decreased to 25 years since 1997, with a parallel decline in the department's overall degree of experience

### C – Staffing Levels:

At this point, the department was comprised of 33 total members, with a "core group" of 8 members (32%), who literally participated in all of the department responses and activities; 4 other members participated on a very regular basis, which equated to 12 members being relied upon very heavily (a decline from 16 members in 1997) for all department activities, functions, and responses; 12 members rarely participated (increased from 4 in 1997); Per response, the department averaged 6 members; The department's junior membership program no longer existed due to



Putney Fire Department  
Internal Operations Report

previous events that had occurred involving junior members, and insurance provider risk management auditors advising against continuation of the program; Members were certified firefighters and/or licensed emergency medical providers

D – Requests for Service:

In 2007, the fire department responded to 427 requests for service (33% increase from 1997), including [ • EMS • MVC's • Chimney fires • Structural fires • Storm related • Brush fires • Haz-Mat • CO/smoke detector activations • AFA's • Water problems • Vehicle fires • Mutual-aid responses • Heating system/appliance fires • Land search/off-road rescue • Electrical hazards • Public assists • Sprinkler system activations • Dumpster fires • Illegal burning • LPG emergencies • Flooding emergencies]

E – Apparatus Response Times:

Response times – (Time of call) to (Time of response) to (Time of arrival) – were noted to be increasing; Multi-apparatus responses were generally achievable nights and weekends, but not during “normal working hours” during the week; The apparatus were responding with fewer members per truck; Timely responses and the proper disposition of incidents were becoming increasingly dependent upon specific members being available and involved in the response

F – Member Education & Training:

Official Firefighter Level I and Firefighter Level II courses and certification were now the “norm”, with all members obtaining and maintaining their certifications; The majority of the members had obtained basic life support and/or advanced life support emergency medical provider licensure; The department had realized (like all emergency services) a significant increase in training and education requirements for all members – Some of these requirements were officially established and governed by true authorities, while other requirements and needs were realistically recognized by members as being absolutely necessary – The time requirements associated with legitimate FF I, FF II, and EMS courses had increased significantly; It was becoming increasingly evident that members were “required” to know more than ever; Members were no longer seeking education and training opportunities to the degree they were in the past, simply because of the time requirements involved



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

### G – Department Operational Aspects:

A number of significant changes had occurred within the department since 1997: a) The position of Fire Chief was transitioned to full time in 2003 b) The municipal functions of Health Officer, Emergency Management Director, and 9-1-1 Coordinator were transitioned into the fire department c) A new fire house was constructed in 2005 d) Engine 1 was replaced in 2006 e) Brush 1 was replaced in 2006 f) A significant amount of equipment was upgraded and replaced, and new equipment was added g) A municipal water system had been constructed throughout the village, which improved our firefighting capabilities tremendously; The department had realized a significant increase in requests for service, consistent with the same realization across other emergency services agencies; Specifically, the department realized and significant increase in requests for fire and EMS standby services during special events; A substantial emphasis had been placed upon overall emergency planning for the community, with specific focus also placed upon educational and industrial facilities in town; Overall, members were noted to be less available for incident responses and department related events; On a very regular basis, there was a noted lack of ability to provide multi-apparatus daytime responses due to late or no member responses; Also realizing a marked decrease in “proper” member staffing upon apparatus during daytime responses – meaning, either apparatus responded with one or two members, or members who truthfully should not be responding, were allowed to in order to “fill the seats”; The department continued to maintain an exceptional reputation throughout the mutual-aid system, as even though we were beginning to experience issues other departments had been experiencing for some time, we remained able to provide high level services; The consistency and dependability surrounding the response of members in the past, was noted to be on a steady decline

### H – Municipal Demographics:

The community remained very supportive of the department; In a positive fashion, the department had been part of a political transition resulting in a greater degree of municipal oversight of the department, and the department was being held more accountable – These transitions were not brought about by any negative issues or circumstances, but instead, as measures to properly include the fire department as a municipal department; Continued aging population; As with other emergency





## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

services organizations, we noted a dramatic decrease in the interest/participation levels of high school aged young adults; There was an identified increase in the level of dependency upon others, and emergency services, on the part of a portion of the population; There was a marked decrease concerning the financial stability of the population, with an increased number of households affected by both adults being forced to work; There was a marked increase of citizens affected by mental health issues and homelessness; Overall, a greater number of citizens were in need of support services and mechanisms; A greater portion of the population was noted to be directly and indirectly affected by addiction and dependency issues

### I – Honest Capabilities of the Department:

Like a significant number of emergency service agencies and departments throughout the region, the Putney Fire Department found itself faced with an overall decline in its service provision capabilities, namely due to an increase in requests for service, a decreased number of members regularly participating in responses and events, and an overall decrease in member availability; These same circumstances resulted in significantly more work being performed by fewer members; Similar to other departments and agencies, we collectively and consciously made operational adjustments within the department in order to address our new given circumstances and identified decrease in level of capabilities – or so we thought – Initially, we recognized we were not operating in the same manner as we had consistently done in the past (the manner we felt was appropriate and necessary) and then, we made operational modifications which essentially allowed for our continued operations to take place, but in a “less than appropriate manner” – We justified these actions, like everyone else, because we felt we had no other choice, and we did not want to say “we can’t” – Subsequently, our new forced baseline of operations became the new acceptable “norm”; These adjustments and modifications also included a significant increase in requests for assistance from other departments



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

The third phase of the committee's work consisted of an in-depth assessment of today's fire department, with the following findings and understandings:

### A – State of the Department:

In the present day, as a department (and like many, many other emergency services agencies and departments), we find ourselves struggling in many operational and service delivery perspectives; Thankfully, from an administrative perspective, the department is in a good state, due to the position of a full-time Fire Chief; From an operational and service delivery perspective, we are at a critical stage, with the overwhelming root cause being members – most specifically, the lack of members coupled with the lack of time our members physically have to dedicate to the department and the community

### B – Department Demographics:

Without question, department members are a dedicated group of individuals who do all they can for each other, for the department, and for the community – However, in today's fire department, a member's degree of dedication is judged much differently than in the past, in that, instead of being based upon their level of activity (old school), we now legitimately judge their dedication level based upon their intentions and their attempts to participate; Along with dedication, we also consider member's dependability (the honest ability of members to be able to participate, respond, and sacrifice) – The dependability of our members has been on the decline for years, and has now hit an all-time low; The overwhelming majority of members simply no longer, or do not, have the time to participate in fire department activities (emergency and non-emergency); This presents the minority core group members with the responsibility of "taking up the slack", "picking up the pieces", and absorbing the majority of the department's work load; As previously identified, member's level of dependability and participation has declined to the present degree due to the inability/unwillingness for members and their families to sacrifice their time [ • Family time • Family events • Life changes • Work requirements • Weekends • Holidays • Evenings • Long duration incidents • Increased financial burdens • Increased life stresses]; The department membership is quite diverse in a number of ways, with our current average age of 35 years (23-58) and an average of 9 years of experience (3 months-41 years); Employers remain unable/unwilling to allow department members to be excused from their work responsibilities



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

for the benefit of the department and the community – even members who are self-employed are frequently not able to respond to incidents with any sort of regularity or consistency; The level of self-motivation amongst newer members remains a challenge, however we have identified that our old school method of judging one's degree of motivation (how much the individual will take on and perform without pressuring or constantly needing to be asked) is no longer appropriate – instead, we recognize that a member's motivation level is directly tied to their availability and ability to sacrifice, and thus perform for the department; Due to a significant internal concentration upon member responsibility and accountability via education and training, members are much more appreciative of being held accountable and responsible for their actions and presentations; The effect of general life issues upon members and their capabilities continues to be noted, and is more prevalent and requires more attention today than at any time in the past; As with everyday life in general, and similar to other emergency services disciplines, we are clearly cognizant of the fact that members have been, and are likely to be affected by response related circumstances [ • PTSD • Psychological issues • Withdrawl • Avoidance • Self-guilt • Decreased involvement • Stress issues • Temperment changes • Less engaged • Decreased concentration • Attitude changes • Alcohol/drug use and dependency • Chronic ensomnia • Anxiety/depression • Family issues • Violence tendencies • Forgetfullness]; Globally, the fire department is no longer the priority for the overwhelming majority of the members (new or senior), or their families; The level of respect amongst the members has certainly improved, as has the degree and frequency of gossip amongst and about the members – These improvements have had a positive impact upon the degree of mutual respect the members have for each other's capabilities and limitations; Though members have an increased respect for each other, and each other's capabilities and limitations, there remains an underlying degree of frustration among those members who are a part of the core group, as they are the members who are involved with all of the department's responses and work load – which is a tremendous amount of responsibility and requires the devotion of a significant amount of time; All of the department members recognize and understand the issues involved and the reasons behind these issues, and as importantly, this underlying frustration is understood; As our core group members decline, our overall responsibilities increase, and our overall lack of member availability (and participation) worsens, the frustrations will continue to



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

increase, which is forecasted to lead to a decline in morale and members leaving the department

### C – Staffing Levels:

Presently, the department is comprised of 27 total members, with a core group of 5 members (18%) (including the Fire Chief), who literally and figuratively participate in all department activities and responses; Beyond the 5 core members, unlike in past years, there are no other members who respond to incidents with any degree of regularity; The department presently averages 3 members responding per incident (including the Fire Chief), and many times, there is only one responder available for response, or actually responding to an incident; Over the course of the past ten years, our overall number of members declined to an all-time low of 17, with a core at that time of 5 members; Within the past 18 months, after a significant recruitment campaign, our staffing increased to our present total of 27 members, with the same 5 core members; Members are certified fire fighters, non-certified firefighters, certified and licensed emergency medical providers, and apparatus operators; Contrary to years past, when we were constantly attempting to address member recruitment and retention, in today's volunteer emergency services, we now must consider member recruitment, member retention, and a third element, member participation – Member recruitment is extremely challenging for volunteer services today, as citizens do not have the time to donate, the general interest to participate, or the general ability to participate – Another issue today surrounds background checks, and most specifically, the number of perspective members who are eliminated due to failed background checks – Many times, the mere mention of a background check being performed causes perspective members to not follow through with the application and membership process – As for member retention, there are a number of issues which strongly affect our ability to retain members [ • Age • Health issues • Disciplinary issues • Lack/loss of interest • Frustration • Lack of ability • Lack of time • Physical issues • Psychological issues • General life changes] – As for participation, within an organization, members are certainly encouraged to participate and respond to incidents, however reality dictates the members will participate only to the degree they are able, and when they have time to; For the past twenty years, department members have been of the mind-set that the more members we have overall, the larger the



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

core group will be, and this larger core group will carry the department without overwhelming these members – This thought process, within this department specifically, but also as with volunteer emergency services throughout the region, has proven to no longer be accurate; As a department, we have recently explored re-establishing a junior program on two separate occasions, with the goal of attracting high-school aged young adults and engaging them in department and emergency services activities, while grooming them for full membership – Though we collectively feel such an effort would at least aid in luring productive future members for the department, the current members of the department reluctantly but clearly have indicated they simply do not have the time to devote to such a program; In years past, as with all volunteer emergency services organizations, it generally held true that weekday member availability was the “weak-link”, and weeknights and weekends were no significant concern, as members were generally available; Today, none of this is accurate to any degree, for reasons that have been documented; Specific to this department, we are very fortunate to have a positive working relationship with the municipal highway department, which allows for employees who are members of the fire department to respond to incidents during weekday hours; Although this is a great benefit during the weekdays, we remain unable to address multi-apparatus responses, and most generally remain unable to respond with an adequate number of members; Though the department has been quite successful recently in the recruitment of new members, the numbers are quite deceiving; Even with our number of members increasing, the availability and response of our members are not, and our number of “core” members is not increasing; As such, the net result is that our overall capabilities have not improved at all

### D – Requests for Service:

Currently, the fire department is answering an average of 500 requests for service annually, including [ • EMS • MVC's • Chimney fires • Structural fires • Storm related • Brush fires • Haz-Mat • Co/smoke detector activations • AFA's • Water problems • Vehicle fires • Mutual-aid responses • Heating system/appliance fires • Land search/off-road rescue • Electrical hazards • Public assists • Odor investigations • Sprinkler system activations • Dumpster fires • Illegal burning • LPG emergencies • Flooding emergencies • Mutual-aid



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

responses] – In addition to these types of incident responses, throughout the course of any given year, the fire department provides fire, rescue, and emergency medical coverage for special events; The average overall time dedicated to any given incident is forty-five minutes, with a number of incidents requiring a time commitment of many hours

### E – Apparatus Response Times:

Response times – (Time of call) to (Time of response) to (Time of arrival) – have continued to increase and are presently the longest they have ever been; Currently, it takes an average of 10-12 minutes for the initial apparatus to respond to an incident, from the time we are dispatched (at times, and more frequently, it takes 15-18 minutes for the first apparatus to respond) – From that point, if we are able to respond with a second apparatus, it takes an average of 18-20 additional minutes for that second apparatus to respond; Multi-apparatus responses are rarely achievable; Apparatus that do respond have fewer members staffing them, with the initial apparatus (even the engine) frequently responding with only one member; Apparatus responding in a timely fashion is no longer a reality or possibility, these response times will continue to increase, and the appropriate disposition of incidents is now extremely dependent upon specific members being involved with any given response; The reality of our responses is this: not only will our response times continue to increase, but there will come a time that this department will not be able to answer a call for service

### F – Member Education & Training

Over time, and especially over the past ten years, the need for members to be properly and thoroughly educated and trained has increased dramatically; Simultaneously, and as dramatically, we have experienced an increase in the number of topics, subjects, and disciplines for which members truly need to receive the appropriate level of education and training – in reality, members are required to know more today, than ever before; Today, as a department and as individual members, we are faced with the unfortunate reality that we are no longer receiving the appropriate degree of education and training; The reasons for this are numerous, but all have to do with a lack of time members have to commit and/or are willing to devote; Specifically considering those who have indicated interest in becoming a member of the department, a significant number of them withdraw from the application process once they



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

understand the time commitment required of them in order to receive their baseline education and training; Beyond the perspective members, current day members are struggling to maintain their levels of continuing education and training, and their certificates and licenses, say nothing of their inability to regularly take advantage of new opportunities; The time requirements associated with legitimate FF I, FF II, and EMS courses have reached all-time highs; In order for the department to improve our recruitment possibilities, and provide an alternative for new members regarding their initial education and training, with a lesser amount of time required, we developed internal programs designed to be delivered by our current members, and to provide a basic minimum amount of “must know” education and practical training, while achieving two specific goals – decreasing the amount of time new members are required to commit and sacrifice in order to receive an adequate amount of initial education and training, while allowing them to become active and productive members much sooner; Though these programs do not net officially recognized certificates or licenses, they produce members who have a basic knowledge to the fire service, firefighting and rescue operations, emergency medical service provision, and are able to function for the betterment of the department and the community; These programs are truly our “last ditch effort” to ease the initial burden placed upon new members concerning their initial education and training

### G – Department Operational Aspects:

The fire department is blessed with a high quality, well maintained, and dependable fleet of apparatus, as well as a high quality state of the art cache of equipment; In 2014, in order to update an aging engine while simultaneously recognizing and respecting budgetary considerations, Engine 2 was fully refurbished and returned to service as a combined engine/heavy rescue apparatus – This allowed for our existing heavy rescue apparatus to be permanently removed from service, thereby decreasing our fleet by one apparatus – This action was in response to our declining membership and availability of our members, and our need to maintain appropriate apparatus responses to emergency incidents; Requests for service continue to increase annually, with the overall types of incidents remaining quite varied; Unfortunately, due to the volume of service requests, the lack of overall members, and the lack of time and availability of the members we do have, it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide appropriate, safe, and adequate responses to incidents;



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

Multi-apparatus responses, and our ability to respond to and mitigate multiple simultaneous incidents or a single large scale emergency are becoming increasingly difficult – and bordering on impossible; The department's ability to consistently provide a high level of service when called upon is becoming increasingly difficult, and there are now times that the high level of service our citizens have become accustomed to, is not there; As previously noted, the consistency and dependability surrounding the response of our members has been steadily declining – At this point, any consistency or dependability has all but disappeared, and as such, the consistency with which incidents are mitigated has been dramatically impacted

### H – Municipal Demographics:

As noted historically, the community remains extremely supportive of the fire department and its members; As importantly, the community also remains very appreciative of the services provided by the department; Consistent with the population of Windham County, the population of Putney continues to be an “aging population; Over a number of years, along with a significant number of other emergency services organizations, we have noted a consistent decline in the levels of interest and participation on the part of high school aged citizens – and this issue continues today; The level of dependability upon others, and emergency services, on the part of a portion of the population continues to increase; The number of citizens affected by mental health issues, poverty, homelessness, and addiction continues to increase

### I – Honest Capabilities of the Department:

For a number of years, emergency services leaders throughout the region have frequently indicated the fact that the overall number of members serving within individual departments has been declining, requests for service have been increasing, education and training requirements have become increasingly more time consuming, and at some point, departments will become completely overwhelmed – That time has finally come for the Putney Fire Department; Our overall number of members has declined for a number of different reasons, the members we do have are limited in the amount of time they are able to devote to the fire department, and those very few members who continually sacrifice their home, family, personal, and work time in order to keep the department going are rapidly approaching their limits; We have made a significant





## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

number of operational modifications and adjustments over time in order to compensate for our lack of responders, and a number of others have been vetted, but determined to be non-beneficial – That brings us to the present day, and we have no additional modification options available to us; In today's world, our overall capabilities have decreased dramatically, due solely to the lack of our biggest and most critical asset – members; Without an adequate number of properly and thoroughly educated and trained members who are motivated, capable, and reasonably active, we have virtually no continuity of operations, no consistency in provision of services, and no regularity in our operations – As such, the responding members suffer, the citizens are not receiving the level of service they deserve, and we are not achieving our mission [The essential mission of the Putney Fire Department is to operate and function as a leading emergency service agency, while providing the best possible services to the citizens of Putney. We will strive to meet the needs and expectations of the community with the timely provision of quality services, by utilizing and improving the dedication and skills of our members, as well as continually improving all of our services and operations, while functioning as a team and communicating openly and honestly with the community we proudly serve]; The corresponding decline of experience also equates to a decline in our capabilities; If the department continues on this current course, with the future being quite predictable, at some point in the near future, “the bottom is going to fall out”, and due to our lack of members responding to incidents, calls for service will go unanswered – Essentially, we will not be there when you need us; Recently, due to the lack of responders, we have been forced to decline mutual-aid response requests (this is only the beginning)



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

Throughout its history, the Putney Fire Department, and its members, have faced many, many challenges, and struggled through as many transitions in order to maintain the high quality, professional service we have always provided. At the end of each challenge and transition, the department and the members prevailed with a renewed sense of accomplishment, pride, and direction. By far, the circumstances presently facing the department and the Town of Putney with regard to the department's future service provision capabilities at this time are the most critical, and have the most at stake, as compared to any in the past.

The specific issue we are faced with today is a significant lack of members, and the lack of member availability.

There are two specific realities we collectively recognize and understand:

- a) This department is not alone in this issue. Literally every fire and emergency medical service throughout our region is experiencing the same primary issue, which in turn yields a variety of different issues, as have been discussed
- b) The members of this department, working as a team, have thoughtfully and aggressively pursued and acted upon every conceivable option we have identified, in order to maintain a professional operation

A great deal of information has been provided within this document, providing a snap-shot of how we got here, and the circumstances we are faced with.

We feel it is important at this point to provide specific information regarding the severity of this issue (lack of members and lack of member availability) on a larger scale.

Our mutual-aid system is comprised of 76 fire departments, and encompasses towns within Southeastern New Hampshire and Southern Vermont. Across the entire system, this issue affects virtually every single department. When we look beyond the boundaries of our mutual-aid system, we find the same issues are affecting literally every fire and emergency medical department throughout Vermont, New Hampshire, and Western Massachusetts. Though predominantly affecting the volunteer or paid-on-call departments, the career departments are also being affected, but in a slightly different manner. Though the career departments have full-time staffing, due to increased volume of service requests, the members are being overwhelmed and frequently do not return for



Putney Fire Department  
Internal Operations Report

duty when called upon. Additionally, the career departments are finding themselves being called upon to respond much more frequently into other communities in order to provide assistance, or to function as the primary responders within these communities, due to the fact the home departments fail to respond.

Throughout the region, all the departments that are affected by the lack of members and the decline in member availability also indicate one other specific issue – the noted decline in the interest and involvement of high school aged young adults. For decades, volunteer and call fire departments have maintained adequate member rosters due to these young adults becoming involved and active at a young age, then transitioning into full member roles once they are of age. In today's world, those young people have neither the desire, nor the internal drive to become involved.

The issues surrounding the decline of volunteers within the volunteer fire and emergency medical fields are not new; departments have been struggling with this for decades, while at the same time, predicting the situation facing us now would come. We have all experienced the peaks and valleys associated with our numbers of members. So, what is different now? Why is the situation so critical all of a sudden?

A number of different things have occurred that have brought us to this point:

- a) With the decline over time in recruitment of young members, there are no “replacements” for our aged/retired members
- b) The increase volume of service requests has driven members out of our departments
- c) Members are not available today the way they were twenty and thirty years ago
- d) Recruitment of new members – active and capable members – is almost impossible in today's world
- e) The time commitment involved with everything we are responsible for and we do is overwhelming; and is causing existing members to leave, and perspective members to discontinue their pursuits

The situation we are faced with did not come about “all of a sudden”. This situation has been evolving over many years; and appears to have come about suddenly only because a number of progressive department leaders and department members have recognized the reality of things, and the need for



## Putney Fire Department Internal Operations Report

open and honest discussion in order to create improvement. Volunteer emergency service leaders have always been too proud to say, "We can't"; and society in general has historically been very reluctant to look beyond the traditional volunteer staffing model.

Given the circumstances and issues we are presently faced with, and clearly understanding we will be losing additional members in the near future, the availability of our members will continue to decline, our requests for service will continue to increase, and our honest capability to provide services to this great community will continue to worsen, we must collectively take the necessary steps to significantly bolster the fire department.

---

The committee members have collectively reviewed the present operational issues, and clearly understand the issues need to be prioritized and addressed in three different ways:

- 1.) Immediate needs and solutions
- 2.) Intermediate needs and solutions
- 3.) Long-term needs and solutions

The members then produced the following multi-tiered goal, which we believe will significantly aid in providing an adequate and timely initial response to every service request, while maintaining an adequate degree of member safety, allowing us to re-gain a positive degree of continuity of initial operations, and allowing for professional service delivery with each initial response:

- 1.) Maintain a maximum response time (Time of call to time of initial apparatus response) of 5-7 minutes
- 2.) Maintain a minimum of 3 members who are responsible and immediately available for the initial response to any service request - 24/7/365
- 3.) Organize and maintain an adequate member response model for multiple apparatus responses, multiple simultaneous incidents, and large scale emergencies