

**Public Safety Subcommittee
TOWN OF SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES - ADOPTED
Thursday, August 20, 2020 at 8:00 A.M.
Zoom Meeting/Simsbury Community Television Live Stream**

Chairman Sean Askham called the Special Meeting of the Public Safety Subcommittee to order at 8:02 A.M. via Zoom Meeting/Simsbury Community Television Live Stream.

Present were: Melissa Appleby, Deputy Town Manager; James Baldis, Chief, Simsbury Volunteer Fire Department; Michael Berry, Emergency Management Director, Simsbury Fire District; Nicholas Boulter, Chief of Police; Maria Capriola, Town Manager; Mark Critz, Director of Safety & Security, BOE; Tom Fitzgerald, Management Specialist; Melissa Marquis, Emergency Preparedness Specialist, FVHD; Chris Peterson, BOS; Tom Roy, Director of Public Works; Neil Sullivan, Director of Personnel, Simsbury Schools; Eric Wellman, First Selectman

Pledge of Allegiance

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Audience

There was no public audience.

Approval of Minutes

1) July 23, 2020 Minutes

The minutes were approved as presented.

Storm Isaias Response and Recovery

Mr. Askham noted there will be a meeting with Eversource to discuss the response to Storm Isaias.

Ms. Capriola gave an overview of how the storm response and recovery was handled. Unified Command (Chief Baldis, Chief Boulter, Mike Berry, Tom Roy and Ms. Capriola) met formally at least twice per day, every day beginning the Wednesday after the storm and checking in with each other at all hours. She thanked all of them for their hard work during the storm and thanked Kevin Clemens and the Highway crew, the Fire District volunteers, and staff members in the Police Department. Information was released daily to the public regarding road closures, power outages and town services provided. The Library Program Room was opened for people to charge electronics and as a cooling facility. The Fire District set up potable water stations at all six fire stations. At the height, there were approximately 3,000 people without power. She noted it was quite disappointing that it took three to four days to make neighborhoods safe. Most power restorations occurred between four to six days after the initial outage. She noted a lack of communication and coordination from Eversource which was, at times, unacceptable and will be addressed. She commended Mr. Berry and others on staff for their persistence, advocating, and evaluation of priorities to make neighborhoods safe and getting critical infrastructure restored with power. An operations debrief will be held.

Mr. Berry reported that Simsbury was ready for the storm and was well prepared in advance of the storm. About 40% of the Town lost power. Over 100 calls were handled by the Fire Department and the Police Department each. The Highway Department was out doing what they could during the height of the storm. Contact with the Eversource town liaison was made prior to the storm. During the storm, new Eversource forms needed to be filled out and they were quickly completed by 6:00 P.M. on Tuesday. He noted the designations of closed, blocked, and one-way roads. He notified the region on WebEOC. Major state roads were blocked and closed. DOT was very responsive. A Make Safe Crew was requested from Eversource. Eversource was continually notified of the closed or blocked roads in town. He noted Eversource was only concerned with blocked roads at the time. Because state roads were closed, but not blocked, they were not considered a priority by Eversource. It was noted that the tree down near the Healthtrax building on Rt. 10, (a major access point for ambulance, fire, police, mutual aid, etc.), was not considered a priority because it was a closed road, and not a blocked road. It took 40 hours to get the first Make Safe crew on Thursday morning. When that crew finished for the day, another crew, which could have worked through the night, was requested and denied. There was discussion about residents eventually taking matters into their own hands by clearing paths under large trees and the enormous risk being taken in doing so. Mr. Berry noted a scale-down system was in place if an emergency vehicle could not get through areas.

Chief Baldis noted Eversource has special phone numbers specific to our emergency needs and that system completely failed. Mr. Berry's connection with his liaison was the only connection the Town had. It was noted the liaison to the Town during the storm was from the Eversource legal department and did not have experience with emergency management. There was no access to the regular liaison. Chief Baldis further noted the tremendous amount of danger during the outage.

Mr. Berry noted residents were very appreciative of the information they received on social media.

Chief Boulter echoed concerns and noted some positive aspects. Four to five extra officers were working during the event. He thanked the volunteers for their efforts.

It was agreed that Ms. Capriola and Mr. Berry will coordinate the small group debriefing.

Coronavirus Response

1) Farmington Valley Health District

Ms. Marquis reported a huge amount of work is being done with contact tracing and noted the power outage due to the storm had an impact on their work. They are planning a few drive-through flu clinics. About 12 Farmington Valley VNA nurses will be administering those vaccines. They are testing out the drive-through aspects of this and more staff and logistics will be required. There will be a clinic in Avon at the DPW building on September 30 and in Simsbury at the Weatogue Fire Station on October 7. They will be open to all residents in the ten towns served and will be capped at 200 each. People will be required to pre-register online and that can be done at libraries or senior centers if needed. Links to this information will be provided on the FVHD and VNA websites. Next, she spoke about progress towards a COVID vaccine, noting it will be made available to the most vulnerable first.

2) Town Manager's Office

Ms. Capriola reported there are two additional COVID testing dates, August 25 and 26, and those will take place at the Simsbury Public Library in the upper parking lot. Pre-registration is required on the Town website. She spoke about the absentee ballot process for the November election, noting an anticipated huge increase in workload for the Town Clerk's Office. A secure ballot box will be located at Town Hall. Absentee ballots will be made available on October 2. Town meetings will not be in person until further notice. She referenced Freedom of Information Act challenges and indicated meetings will continue to meet virtually for the time being. Public comments continue to be welcomed and can be emailed to the Town Clerk. Staff is reporting to work and requests for meetings are being accommodated. The Library is accepting appointments for computer, printer and scanner use. Town Hall is fully operational and staff is rotating into the building. Staff is readily available to help patrons and residents. Most Park and Recreation facilities are fully open with some modification. The transfer station is open and the swap shack remains closed. The Library is offering curbside service, typically processing over 40 pick-ups daily and up to 300 outgoing materials daily.

3) Emergency Management

Mr. Berry noted the COVID testing which will be offered at the Library. He also mentioned the flu clinic being offered by the FVHD on October 7 at the Weatogue Fire Station. He reported the PPE allotment for the region has been scaled back and will shut down soon. They continue to put out an incident action plan each week. A normal review of the emergency operations plan is being scheduled.

4) Police

Chief Boulter reported membership is healthy. They are continuing their modified medical response. He reported very few calls regarding sector rules. He noted large parties have been popping up throughout the state using social media and wanted to make people aware this is happening. There continues to be a rise in stolen vehicles. Cars are being left unlocked and keys are being left accessible. 20 vehicles to date have been stolen in town as compared to five at the same time last year, with 20 total last year. They continue to attend regional meetings on crime. Task forces throughout the region are working on the stolen car issue without much progress. This is occurring between the hours of 11:00 P.M. and 5:00 A.M. Referencing the Wildlife Ordinance, he noted they are working on a video for that and bear calls remain steady.

5) Ambulance

Ms. Stewart was not able to attend the meeting but provided an update by email. PPE distributions from the state are continuing, although it is unclear for how long. They picked up a very small allotment of N95 masks and were told they will receive more masks and gowns next week. Otherwise, they are keeping everyone healthy.

6) Fire

Chief Baldis thanked agencies for help during the storm. He noted they are fortunate to have over 90 volunteer members and reported no injuries or issues during that time. Regarding COVID, he reported status quo. They continue to social distance and wear masks and have

continued training programs. He noted all personnel changes at the Fire District level are completed. He noted the retirements of Kevin Kowalski and Ron Castelitis. Patrick Tourville is the new Fire Marshall. Mike Berry is the Emergency Management Director. Chief Baldis has assumed the Director of Administration in addition to being the Volunteer Chief for the Fire District, as well as overseeing the facilities. He spoke about the increased use of the Farmington River and noted they have begun to explore another boat launch for river access at the southern part of the river.

7) Board of Education

Mr. Sullivan noted teachers will be welcomed back on Monday and there will be a full week of professional development for them to prepare for opening. On August 31 there will be orientation for the transition grades of K, 7th and 9th. On September 1 the hybrid model begins with about 50% of students in each school attending. Half will come in Tuesdays and Wednesdays and the other half will be in on Thursdays and Fridays. By September 14 all K-2 will be back fully, and grades 3-6 back by the end of September. Whether they can transition from hybrid to full at the middle and high school levels will be decided by Columbus Day. He noted a tremendous amount of work has taken place on the public safety end of this. There is a Board of Education tonight to discuss this with the Board.

Mr. Critz added that work is being done on arrival times with Police and work on emergency management with Mr. Berry and Chief Boulter.

Mr. Peterson recommended that at the meeting someone should explain the chosen schedule as it is a bit different from other towns relative to consecutive days in school versus the broken week with the Wednesday cleaning day. Mr. Sullivan noted that will be addressed.

There was discussion about heavier-than-normal school drop-off.

8) Public Works

Mr. Roy thanked everyone on the team for the storm cleanup. He reported all staff is healthy. They continue to social distance and are working outside whenever possible. He has submitted a preliminary cost for the storm to FEMA through Amy Meriwether, noting it was around \$100K for Public Works alone. He reported they have begun temporary traffic calming measures at the intersection of Notch and West Mountain Road.

9) Social Services

Ms. Capriola provided an update from Ms. Formanek, who reported the Town continues to see an increase in the number of households experiencing food insecurity. 170 households are being served at the food distributions. Pre-COVID, they would typically serve about 80 households per month and that number has doubled. The Town relies on donations for the food distributions and she noted the continued need for those food/toiletries and financial donations. Donors can contact Social Services to make donations and there is a drop-off cart at Social Services for donations. The Senior Center staff continues to coordinate the hand-sewn mask collection and distribution. To date, 3,500 masks have been donated and 2,200 have been distributed back out into the community. She noted Charlotte Barth will be retiring after 30 years of service and

wished her well. She congratulated Dana Olson, who will be promoted and replacing Charlotte in that capacity.

10) VNA

Ms. Scheetz was not able to attend the meeting but updated the Subcommittee by email. She noted they are working on scheduling flu shot clinics and will be working with the Health District to help educate the town senior centers and social services programs on best practices and how we can do this safely while public buildings are still very limited to the public.

11) Main Street Partnership

No report

12) Other

The group will meet again on Thursday, September 17, at 8:00 A.M.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:24 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Haberlin
Commission Clerk