

Cotuit Fire Department

Fire Commissioner's Meeting
April 16, 2026 @ 5:30pm
Freedom Hall and via Zoom

Present at Freedom Hall: Chair Conley, Commissioner Zais, Chief Brown

Via Zoom: Commissioner Ross

Absent: Deputy Clark

Public Comment

- Patty Daley, via Zoom, introduced herself as a note taker for the Cotuit-Santuit Civic Association.
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Previous meeting minutes

MOTION: To approve February 10, 2026, minutes.

Motion made by: Commissioner Ross Seconded by: Commissioner Zais

Motion passed by unanimous vote.

MOTION: To approve March 10, 2026, minutes.

Motion made by: Commissioner Ross Seconded by: Commissioner Zais

Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Fire Chief Report:

March 2026 had a total of 80 responses:

- 1 Fire
- 36 EMS incidents
- 1 Station walk-in
- 7 Alarm investigations
- 11 Public service responses
- 3 Reassurance calls
- 9 Community risk reduction
- 1 Rescue
- 1 Motor vehicle crash
- 10 Hazardous conditions

Mutual Aid:

- Provided Mutual Aid three (3) times
- Received Mutual Aid six (6) times
- YTD call volume is up +22% over 2025

The Fire Chief highlighted several notable incidents during the reporting period, including a traumatic extrication that received positive feedback from Cape Cod Hospital, a chainsaw-related injury during post-storm cleanup for which crews received a formal commendation, and a multi-patient motor vehicle crash requiring mutual aid and extrication; he also referenced several significant incidents occurring after the reporting period that will be reflected in April statistics, including a crane collapse,

a two-alarm brush fire near the town line, and simultaneous structure fire responses requiring coordinated mutual aid.

Administration Update

The Chief reported that he and the Deputy Chief continued to support the negotiating committee. A VFIS risk assessment was completed in coordination with the District's insurance provider, and the results were provided to the Board for review. The assessment identified several areas requiring additional policy development, including motor vehicle operations, training protocols, and policies related to intern or junior member participation. The Chief indicated that these recommendations would be addressed through the proposed Policy Builder project, which would be discussed further under New Business. The Chief also noted that discussions regarding the potential expansion of the shared ambulance agreement were ongoing and would be taken up under New Business.

Technology Update

The Chief reported that he and Deputy Chief Clark participated in WebEOC training in coordination with all five fire districts and the Barnstable Police Department, noting that the Town's emergency management function is overseen by the Police Chief. He explained that WebEOC is a statewide platform used to enhance situational awareness and facilitate resource requests during large-scale incidents. Although the Town had not previously been actively utilizing the system, the need for training was identified following the recent blizzard, and the training was conducted to improve interagency coordination. The Chief clarified that while the session was training-based, it represented the implementation of a technology not previously in use by the Town. He further noted that the system is primarily utilized at the chief officer level to input and manage resource requests, which may originate from field personnel and are then escalated through the system to the state. The training was reported to be well received.

Personnel and Training Activities

The Chief reported that the Department received multiple commendations and letters of appreciation. These included recognition from Cape Cod Hospital related to the chainsaw incident, a letter from the Town of Eastham regarding an ice rescue response, and acknowledgment from the Barnstable County Sheriff's Office for assistance during storm-related events. Additional civilian thank-you notes were received, and the Department's charitable efforts through the firefighters' union were also recognized.

Apparatus and Equipment

The Chief reported that Engine 2 has been returned to full service for Fiscal Year 2026 following approximately \$25,000 in repairs, noting that the 32-year-old vehicle required sourcing difficult-to-find and refurbished parts, particularly for the pump. He stated that the apparatus is currently operating well and can remain in service in the near term, with eventual replacement to be addressed through the capital improvement plan. With Engine 2 back in service, repairs to Engine 1 are being coordinated through the Town's insurance provider after it was struck by a plow during the winter storm while blocking a roadway. The damage, while primarily cosmetic, was described as extensive, affecting the driver's side body and mounted equipment. Engine 1 remains in frontline service and is expected to be out of service for approximately two weeks once repairs are scheduled. The Chief also reported that the Department's boat is expected to return to the water by May 1; however, dock access remains uncertain due to a recent change in property ownership, and coordination with the new owners is ongoing.

PUBLIC COMMENT (Following Fire Chief's Report)

A resident, Jason Shererson, asked about the increase in call volume, noting a reported increase compared to the prior year. The Chief explained that while the Department has experienced a steady year-over-year increase of approximately 7%, the higher volume early in the year was largely attributable to storm-related activity, including approximately 77 calls within a 48-hour period. Mr. Shererson also inquired about the cost of repairs to Engine 1, and the Chief confirmed that those costs are being handled through the Town's insurance provider and will be covered following completion of the claims process.

Facilities

The Chief reported that there were no standalone updates under Facilities, noting that relevant items were addressed within other reports, including the renovation project update.

Sub-Committee Reports

Commissioner Zais and Deputy Clark Website Sub-Committee

It was reported that the Department's website is nearing completion and is expected to transition from staging to a live public site within the next few weeks, pending final coordination with Barcel IT. It was noted that the transition could potentially occur prior to the next meeting, and that several updates have been made in the interim.

Commissioner Zais - Policy Advisory Committee

It was reported that John Havel is currently serving in the role of chair and is working to transcribe outstanding minutes and coordinate the transition of the chair position to another committee member, which will occur at an upcoming meeting.

Commissioner Ross - By-Laws Committee

Commissioner Ross reported that Patty Daley led the recent By-Laws Committee efforts and was commended for her work. It was noted that the proposed changes have minimal direct impact on the Fire Department and include potential adjustments to the time of the annual district meeting, which would not take effect this year but may be considered for next year, with discussion of moving the meeting earlier in the evening. Additional discussion occurred regarding assigning responsibility for the Cotuit Elementary School property to the credential committee; however, that matter has been tabled for further consideration. It was also noted that additional materials summarizing the proposed changes would be distributed to the Board.

Renovation / Addition Report

The Board received an update on the renovation and addition project, noting significant progress. Framing has been completed for both the basement and first floor, including the first-floor day room and bunk areas, and plumbing and electrical work are underway in both levels. The apparatus bay slab has been poured, and a utility pole has been successfully relocated. It was reported that steel components for the front portion of the building are expected to be installed in the coming weeks, which will further advance visible construction progress. Installation of a tight tank for the new section is also underway. The Board discussed ongoing planning efforts related to furniture and gym equipment. Total project expenditures were reported at \$3,977,788 as of the end of March. It was noted that any considerations regarding light pollution remain part of an ongoing discussion and do not require formal Board action at this time.

OLD BUSINESS – Winter Storm Hernando After-Action Report

The Board discussed the Winter Storm Hernando After-Action Report, noting that the report had been completed but had not yet been posted publicly, as the matter had previously been tabled pending Board direction. Members revisited the question of whether to make the report available and expressed support for doing so, citing the value of the information, its status as a public record, and the importance of transparency regarding the Department's response efforts. The work completed by the Department during the storm was also acknowledged and commended.

MOTION: To post the Winter Storm After-Action Review.

Motion by: Commissioner Ross Seconded by: Commissioner Zais

Discussion: Commissioner Zais volunteered to post on the website.

Motion passed by unanimous vote.

NEW BUSINESS

Recognition Letter – Ronan Brown

The Board discussed a letter of appreciation for intern Ronan Brown in recognition of his active participation and contributions during Winter Storm Hernando. It was noted that Mr. Brown assisted with response efforts, including field operations and support activities during the storm. The Board expressed support for issuing the letter and agreed to sign and send it; no formal vote was required.

Shared Ambulance Agreement (West Barnstable)

The Board engaged in extensive discussion regarding a proposed shared ambulance agreement with West Barnstable. It was explained that West Barnstable has requested to join the existing unstaffed ambulance agreement with Cotuit and Sandwich, and that a draft agreement has been prepared, including a provision requiring a \$5,000 contribution to the host community. The Chief outlined the operational and financial benefits of expanding the agreement, including increased regional collaboration, potential eligibility for grant funding, shared maintenance support, and long-term cost-sharing for future ambulance replacement, noting that replacement costs could approach \$500,000 with extended lead times. It was further noted that Cotuit currently serves as the host community and derives operational benefits from housing the ambulance, including access for secondary calls when staffing permits.

Board members discussed the history of the agreement and the District's prior financial investment in the ambulance, as well as concerns related to maintaining priority access for Cotuit residents. Specific concerns were raised regarding the potential for the ambulance to be unavailable if multiple communities required its use simultaneously, the level of financial contribution from additional participants, and whether additional terms, such as first right of refusal or increased financial participation, should be considered. Discussion also addressed the broader value of regional collaboration and mutual aid, balanced against the District's obligation to ensure reliable service to its residents.

A motion was made to authorize the Chief to proceed with the unstaffed shared ambulance agreement as presented. Discussion continued regarding potential revisions to the agreement, including consideration of additional protections for the District. The motion did not receive a second and, as a result, no vote was taken. The matter was tabled and will be revisited at a future meeting following further evaluation and potential refinement of the agreement.

Public Comment (Shared Ambulance Agreement)

A resident, Jason Shererson, inquired about the availability of materials related to the Fire District's upcoming presentation to the Credential Committee, specifically the budget. It was clarified that the budget would be presented at the meeting but had not yet been posted. Mr. Shererson also referenced the previously discussed Winter Storm Hernando After-Action Report, and clarification was provided that the earlier discussion pertained to posting that report.

Mr. Shererson further commented that the proposed shared ambulance agreement should be reviewed by the Credential Committee, noting its role in receiving and managing District revenues. In response, it was discussed that any funds associated with the agreement would likely be held in a designated account for use specific to the ambulance, rather than treated as general revenue. It was agreed that the matter would be reviewed further for clarification.

Policy Builder Program

The Chief presented a proposal for the Policy Builder program, outlining a multi-year cost structure and emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and legally sound policy framework due to the absence of internal legal and human resources support. He noted that the initiative would improve compliance, reduce liability, and align the Department with industry best practices.

MOTION: To authorize Chief Brown to move forward with the project as proposed by Policy Builders, Inc.

Motion by: Commissioner Zais Seconded by: Commissioner Ross

Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Public Comment (Policy Builder Discussion)

A question was raised regarding whether the Department could adopt policies from other fire departments rather than developing its own. In response, it was noted that while some general policies may be adaptable, many are specific to each department's operations, staffing, and equipment. It was further discussed that the Department has utilized policies from other sources as a starting point; however, such policies require modification and legal review to ensure compliance. The Policy Builder program was described as a more efficient and comprehensive approach to developing policies tailored to the Department's needs, particularly in the absence of dedicated legal and human resources support.

Executive Session

Chair Conley stated that the Board would enter into Executive Session to discuss negotiations with IAFF Local 3642 and that the Board does not anticipate returning to open session following the conclusion of Executive Session.

The meeting adjourned to Executive Session at approximately 6:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Gina Gonsalves

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