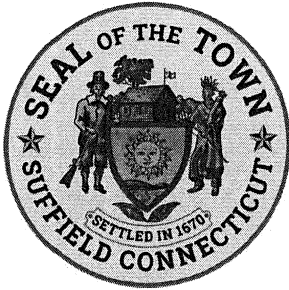


# TOWN OF SUFFIELD

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## Meeting Minutes Fire Commission Special Meeting

**Meeting Date:** February 17, 2026

**Time:** 6:30 p.m.

**Location:** Station #2, 9 Ratley Rd, West Suffield, CT 06093

**In Attendance:** Interim Chair Moll, Commissioner Bucior, Commissioner Christian, Commissioner O'Hurley, Commissioner Prusi, Commissioner Thibedeau, Commissioner Vindigni, Chief Cunningham, Recording Secretary Shannon Foley

### **Call to Order and Roll Call**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Interim Chair Moll.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

### **Public Comment**

**Ginny Bromage, 576 N Main St** – Voiced support for Nate Perusi as Chairman.

**John Shelanskas, 178 S Grand St** – A 43-year member who expressed concern about the future of the Volunteers and paid staff within the department, voicing disappointment in Commissioners Christian and O'Hurley, urging change.

**Elizabeth McCourt, 138 S Grand St** – Expressed concern regarding adherence to Current Special Act 89 and the Fire Commission Bylaws, stating they conflict with the Town Charter and Robert's Rules of Order.

**Sandra Janik, 380 Prospect St** – Addressed the Chairman vacancy pursuant to Special Act 89, the Fire Commission Bylaws, and Robert's Rules of Order.

**Annie Hornish, 864 Thrall Ave** – Voiced support for Nate Perusi as Chairman and expressed concern regarding the Town Attorney's legal opinion on the Chairman position and its current operation.

**Melissa Silva, 203 Ratley Rd** – Expressed the importance of the Chairman position on the Commission and the need for accountability in the selection process.

**Kristin Keane, 820 Copper Hill Rd** – Presented a petition on behalf of 75 town citizens in support of Nate Perusi for the position of Chairman.

### **Correspondence**

**Don Miner, 1855 Mapleton Ave** – Requested future meetings of the Fire Commission be held on zoom.

### **Discussion and approval of the minutes from the January 13 Regular Meeting of the Fire Commission**

Commissioner Prusi motioned to accept the January 13, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Vindigni seconded the motion. The motion passed, 4 in favor (Prusi, O'Hurley, Thibedeau and Vindigni) and 2 opposed (Bucior and Christian).

### **Election of Fire Commission Chair**

First Selectman Interim Chair Moll began the Election of Chairperson.

### Nominations for the position of Chairman

Commissioner Bucior nominated Paul Christian for the position of Chairman. Commissioner O'Hurley seconded.

Commissioner Vindigni nominated Nathan Prusi for the position of Chairman. Commissioner Thibedeau seconded.

Vote of Paul Christian for the position of Chairman

Vote: 3 in favor (Bucior, Christian and O'Hurley) and 3 opposed (Prusi, Thibedeau and Vindigni).

Vote of Nathan Prusi for the position of Chairman

Vote: 3 in favor (Prusi, Thibedeau and Vindigni) and 3 opposed (Bucior, Christian and O'Hurley).

Commissioner Bucior re nominated Paul Christian for the position of Chairman. Commissioner O'Hurley seconded.

Commissioner Vindigni re nominated Nathan Prusi for the position of Chairman. Commissioner Thibedeau seconded.

Commissioner Vindigni referenced meeting minutes from 2020 in which Commissioner O'Hurley objected to Commissioner Christian's election as Chairman of the Fire Commission. Commissioner Vindigni questioned Commissioner O'Hurley's change in position and alignment with the opposing party and urged him to support Commissioner Prusi for the position of Chairman.

Commissioner O'Hurley had no comment.

Vote of Paul Christian for the position of Chairman

Vote: 3 in favor (Bucior, Christian and O'Hurley) and 3 opposed (Prusi, Thibedeau and Vindigni).

Vote of Nathan Prusi for the position of Chairman

Vote: 3 in favor (Prusi, Thibedeau and Vindigni) and 3 opposed (Bucior, Christian and O'Hurley).

Interim Chair Moll encouraged the Commission to work toward building consensus in order to move forward and strongly urged the Commissioners to reach a conclusion.

Commissioner Prusi nominated First Selectman Colin Moll for the position of Interim Chairman. Commissioner Bucior seconded.

Vote of First Selectman Colin Moll for the position of Interim Chairman

Vote: 5 in favor (Bucior, Christian, O'Hurley, Prusi and Thibedeau) and 1 opposed (Vindigni).

#### **Discussion and approval of the FY 26/27 Fire Commission Budget**

Interim Chair Moll and Chief Cunningham presented the FY 26/27 Fire Commission Budget to the Commission.

Chief Cunningham shared he scheduled to present before the Board of Finance in the upcoming weeks. Chief Cunningham gave an overall explanation of the contents of the proposed budget.

Interim Chair Moll further explained the FY 26/27 Fire Commission Budget to the Commission. The \$30,000 decrease in the proposed budget due to the hiring of new firefighters at lower contractual step levels, resulting in reduced wage costs in accordance with the union contract.

Interim Chair Moll also noted the addition of one part-time firefighter position, in addition to the two part-time firefighter positions added last year. As a result, there will now be only two to three shifts per week staffed by a single firefighter.

Interim Chair Moll further outlined a \$10,000 increase in the Equipment and Vehicle Maintenance line items due to inflationary costs, as well as \$9,000 allocated to the Furniture and Fixtures line item for costs associated with the First Responders Fitness Center at Station 4. A new Recruitment and Retention line item in the amount of \$5,000 was also added. Despite the overall \$30,000 decrease in the budget, he emphasized that no services or items were eliminated; the reduction reflects contractual wage adjustments only.

Commissioner Vindigni questioned the projected costs for the First Responders Fitness Center at Station 4. Chief Cunningham explained that the overall cost is anticipated to increase.

Commissioner Vindigni asked whether any other departments had been approached to contribute toward the costs. Interim Chair Moll explained that the expenses are currently being paid from one budget; however, the Public Works Department covered the majority of the upgrade costs, including the showers and flooring.

Commissioner Vindigni inquired who would be responsible for cleaning the Fitness Center. Chief Cunningham responded that cleaning would be the responsibility of all users of the facility, in addition to the firefighters' routine day-to-day station cleaning. Interim Chair Moll added that the intent is to foster camaraderie among departments and noted that, if necessary, the Town's cleaning contract could address any custodial concerns.

Commissioner Vindigni further questioned the future use of the newly added Recruitment and Retention line item. Chief Cunningham explained that the funds would be used to advertise and support recruitment efforts for Volunteer Firefighters. Commissioner Vindigni then asked who is leading these recruitment efforts, and Chief Cunningham responded that Lieutenant Thomas McCabe is responsible.

Commissioner Vindigni questioned the \$15,000 legal fees line item that had been presented at last month's meeting but was absent from the current budget. Chief Cunningham explained that the line item has since been removed from the budget.

Commissioner Vindigni questioned the recruitment timeline for the vacant part time and full time Firefighter positions. Chief Cunningham explained the process going forward.

Commissioner Vindigni asked if CPAT is still required and further questioned the fire academy tuition costs. Chief Cunningham confirmed it still was. Chief Cunningham explained that the CT Fire Academy tuition is \$8,285.00.

Commissioner Vindigni requested a breakdown of volunteer membership. Chief Cunningham reported that there are 12 volunteers in total. One serving in a support role, one currently in Firefighter I training, and one in the application process. He further noted there are seven cadets.

Chief Cunningham also reported there are eight career full time firefighters, including the Chief, one Lieutenant, six Firefighters, with one current vacancy and two part-time Firefighters.

Commissioner Prusi questioned whether the departments recruiting our Firefighters could be held liable for reimbursing the Town, rather than the employee. Chief Cunningham responded that he has considered holding informal discussions with the Chiefs of these departments.

Interim Chair Moll added that the Town cannot continue covering the cost of sending new recruits through the academy and emphasized that it is Chief Cunningham's responsibility to retain staff. Chief Cunningham noted that losing new recruits is not sustainable and explained that his plan is to approach the Connecticut Fire Chiefs Association to explore the possibility of establishing an agreement.

Commissioner O'Hurley noted that recruit classes often include volunteer Firefighters who pay their own way through the Connecticut Fire Academy and suggested that this could be an opportunity for Chief Cunningham to approach them. Chief Cunningham shared that six Firefighters have independently attended the Connecticut Fire Academy and expressed hope that they will apply.

Commissioner Thibedeau questioned the -5.8% change under the Payroll and Benefits line items. Interim Chair Moll explained that the decrease reflects cost-saving measures implemented in other negotiated contracts. Commissioner Thibedeau asked whether the part-time Firefighters are considered union members since on the Budget proposal sheet it indicated they were. Interim Chair Moll responded that the part-time Firefighters are non-union. Commissioner Thibedeau further inquired about the \$1,000 training reimbursement referenced in the union contract and the specific line item from which it is funded. Chief Cunningham explained that the \$1,000 training reimbursement is included in the Training line item.

Commissioner Thibedeau questioned whether the clerical staff and recording secretary positions were combined referencing the issued Budget Sheet. Interim Chair Moll confirmed that the roles have been consolidated into a single position and that the associated funding has been moved to the Human Resources budget.

Commissioner Thibedeau expressed support for the new Recruitment and Retention line item, noting her hope that it will be used to help retain current personnel and build upon the existing team. Chief Cunningham added that he plans to seek additional Recruitment and Retention funds from the Connecticut Fire Chiefs Association and intends to apply for this grant. Chief Cunningham stated he's reached out to current volunteers for ideas.

Interim Chair Moll recommended creating a sub-committee within the Fire Commission for Recruitment and Retention. Commissioner Vindigni volunteered to serve on said committee.

Commissioner Vindigni questioned when the current union contract is set to expire. Interim Chair Moll responded that the contract expires on June 30, 2027.

Commissioner Prusi motioned to accept the budget as presented. Commissioner O'Hurley seconded. All in favor, 6-0.

**Discussion on future Executive Session items for the next regular meeting**

Interim Chair Moll referenced Commissioner Prusi's request for an Executive Session to continue the prior discussion with the SVAA and shared a memo from Police Chief James Canon.

Commissioner Prusi expressed support for continuing the discussion with representatives from the Police Department and SVAA present at the Executive Session.

Commissioner Christian opposed any further Executive Session on this matter with other departments.

Commissioner Prusi emphasized that additional information from the other departments is necessary to reach a decision. Commissioner Vindigni agreed, noting that their input is critical for the Fire Commission to make an informed decision.

Commissioner O'Hurley stated that an Executive Session is needed to discuss the matter privately.

Interim Chair Moll proposed scheduling an Executive Session and indicated that he would follow up individually.

**Adjournment**

Commissioner Christian made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:19 p.m. Commissioner Bucior seconded the motion. Vote: 6-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously

Respectfully submitted,  
Shannon Foley  
Recording Secretary

Amanda Thibedeau  
Fire Commission Secretary