I. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Fire Facility Assessment Meeting was called to order by Jim Speich at 6:00 p.m. in Company 1 fire station, 25 Darling Drive. Members present: Rob Shillington, Jim Speich, Jamie DiPace, Michael Trick and non-voting member Brandon Robertson. Also in attendance was staff member Assistant to the Town Manager, Grace Tiezzi.

II. MINUTES OF PRECEDING MEETING: December 14, 2016

Mr. Speich questioned the last paragraph on Page 3, regarding the mention of Old Farms Road. The other members did not recall what was being stated here.

Mr. Shillington made a motion to approve the December 14, 2016 Fire Facility Assessment Committee meeting minutes as written. Mr. DiPace seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

III. COMMUNICATION FROM AUDIENCE

There were no audience members in attendance.

IV. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Mr. Speich stated that after reading the capital improvement budget, the Fire Department continues to not want to respond out of Secret Lake in the future. He asked if this statement was still correct. Mr. Trick stated that this would be correct; the Fire Department’s direction has not changed.

Mr. Robertson reviewed his memo to the Committee members, dated May 31, 2017 regarding the charge of this Committee as well as analyzing the need for a new station in the northwest part of town. If the Committee members determine that a new station is needed, they will need to think through other options along with the new station. What are some of the other ways the Town can solve for providing this service, whether it is a regional solution or increasing the size of Company 4 or possibly a host of other solutions.

Mr. Robertson stated that he has reviewed the Plans of Conservation and Development for 2006 and 2016. Both documents have 4 areas where Secret Lake was identified as coming up short, including the small size of the facility; the lack of flexibility with apparatus placement; response time concerns; as well as the small size of the property which prohibits expansion. He stated that Ms. Tiezzi and Mr. Kline spent a significant amount of time on response time concerns. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the data set included response times, for all apparatus, for a five year period, from January 2012 through December 2016. The accuracy of the data set depends on dispatch noting the arrival time of the particular apparatus on the scene. She stated that the analysis also assumes that there is no differentiation between call types. Each apparatus that was looked at was presumed to be the first on the scene for each call; response times measured the period from dispatch notification to the arrival time for each apparatus. For simplicity, Ms. Tiezzi looked at the four pumper.
Ms. Tiezzi stated that the analysis uses NFPA Standard 1720, which sets out response times for volunteer fire departments; this is a benchmark for communities to develop their own response time standards. She stated that for a suburban area like Avon, the benchmark is a minimum of ten staff members to respond within ten minutes, 80 percent of the time. Currently, the fire department does not collect data pertaining to the number of staff members responding, but they were able to analyze the response times. She showed the Committee members graphs, which are included as part of these minutes, including responses by apparatus; responses in under ten minutes; responses during 1800-0600 hours; and response time 80% of the time. Mr. Trick stated that the day time responses would skew the numbers for responses by apparatus because Company 3 is the designated station that will roll throughout the day. Volunteers head to Company 3 during the day because it is a centralized location and because of its availability of staffing. He stated that the second most utilized station is this Company 1 for the same reasons. The other stations are in less populous areas and are used mostly in the evenings and on weekends. Regarding the response time in under ten minutes and during 1800-0600 hours, Ms. Tiezzi stated that the 80% benchmark was not met for both of these, which is the NFPA standard. Regarding the final graph depicting response time 80% of the time, she stated that this was standard across all four of the stations. Ms. Tiezzi stated that based on the data, it does not indicate that there is a response time issue out of Company 2 compared to the other stations.

Mr. Speich stated that in general, relative to Company 2, he was hoping that the Police Department could offer a safety statement on the roads. Mr. Robertson stated that the roads are not ideal for fire apparatus. He does not believe that the Police Department would make a determination that they are somehow unsafe; the roads are a pre-existing non-conforming use, from a zoning perspective. He stated that with the size of the trucks and the roads being what they are, as well as the speed bumps, this is just another point that speaks to the infrastructure. Mr. Trick stated that the speed limit on Secret Lake Road is 25mph with speed bumps; caution is used constantly since this is a residential area. The Committee members agreed that Secret Lake is not a safe place to have a station.

Mr. Speich questioned whether it would be prudent to build a new station to replace Company 2 or would making upgrades to Companies 1, 3 and 4 be sufficient to cover the same area. Mr. Trick stated that the most logical place for a new station, he believes, would be a location on Lovely Street, somewhere near St. Matthew’s church. This location would have good access to Route 44 as well as access to Woodmont Street, which is a high response and high frequency location that is utilized by Company 2. He stated that expanding Company 4 would be a good alternative, although responders living in Secret Lake would have to go over to Lovely Street and through Chevas Road, which would make response times delayed. There would also be longer response times for getting the apparatus out.

Mr. DiPace stated that it would be easy for this Committee to say that we want a new station in a certain location and where the money would be best spent. He stated that he has an opinion regarding what he believes would be best, but that might not be the right option for Avon. He suggested possibly bringing in someone to gather the information and make that determination. Mr. Speich stated that he is unsure if the Committee would need an expert to make that determination. Mr. Trick stated that addressing the condition and the other stations is a separate point. The point is that they need to get the fire trucks out of Secret Lake, Company 2, and retain a facility in that geographic area since it services the north and western portions of the community. He stated that a location on Lovely Street would be far superior because of the road network as well as being located on a State road, which is also beneficial.

Mr. Robertson stated that a preliminary assessment needs to be done, which is what this Committee is doing, for the potential need for a new station; to better understand what the Plan of Conservation and Development depicts; to look at response times; and to think about this in the overall context along with other solutions. One of the solutions is looking at a regional idea. If this Committee feels that, having
considered other solutions to the problem, the best solution is needing a new building, that recommendation would go to the Town Council and they would then have the option of appointing a build committee, who would formally develop a preliminary Statement of Needs in conjunct with an architect firm to help with the design for a new structure. This Committee is preliminary; members should identify the needs and come up with solutions for that need.

Mr. Speich stated that another option would be the idea of a regional solution. Mr. Trick stated that he has had conversation with Fire Chief Baldis from Simsbury as well as Craig Robbins, the Fire Chief of Canton. These Towns are in tough conditions as well. He stated that daytime responders are getting more difficult for both departments. He will be meeting with them to see how these three Towns can mutually support each other. Although he feels that this is a good concept, they cannot ask other Towns to help support Avon when they are having trouble supporting themselves. Mr. Trick questioned what the modeling shows and if there can be any changes made. He would like to know what the response times would be if a new station was located in the vicinity of St. Matthew’s. He would also look at speed limits, traffic loads and those kinds of parameters for that area. Ms. Tiezzi stated that they do have the response time data that Tom and Gina Kline have done, although Gina does not have access to this software anymore to make changes or add parameters; the Town Engineering Department may have this capability with the GIS software. Mr. Trick stated that it would be helpful to have the data for capital improvements from a few years ago. He questioned how much different the data would be today and if those numbers are valid enough for this study. Ultimately, if a fire station was located on Lovely Street, he questioned if it would provide proper service for the Town. He stated that since they agree a new station is needed, his sentiments would be that the Secret Lake station could be turned into a local community point, or even as a support station, although it is very limited as what could be housed there.

Ms. Tiezzi stated that Gina’s analysis was from the AVFD’s FY 15/16 capital budget presentation. It notes that the estimated response times assume the average speed of 30 mph on local streets and 40mph on State roads, although it does not necessarily account for the 25 mph speed limit on Secret Lake Road. She passed around copies of two slides from Gina’s presentation, which are attached and made a part of these minutes, one which indicates the response in Secret Lake, Company 2, in its current location and the other slide indicates what would happen if the station was relocated to the area of Lovely Street. Mr. Trick stated that after looking at the two slides, there is a larger geographical area that is served within the same threshold of time; the coverage is approximately a 10% increase in the response area.

Mr. Robertson stated that they need to look at a parcel map to see what the best location might be. Mr. Speich stated that up toward Craigmore Circle is a possibility as well as near St. Matthew’s church.

Seeing that Secret Lake is not a main station, Mr. Robertson questioned what the result would be if the Secret Lake station was closed and there were no other improvement to the system. He questioned what the incremental change in service would be. Mr. DiPace stated that he does not feel that this is a risk the Town would be willing to take. Regarding the financial impact, Mr. Robertson questioned what would the money spent on a new station or improvements to other stations “buy” the Town; what new and improved services would the community receive.

Mr. Trick stated that the least talked about issue, but a very important one, is recruitment, retention and the morale of the volunteers. Part of this is having a station close to where the volunteers live. He stated that if volunteers were asked to drive to other companies, he believes that they would not respond as often as they currently do. He also believes that if they only had to drive to Craigmore Circle from where they live in Secret Lake, he believes that they would respond more often as well. If the Town gives the volunteer fire department a new station that is up to date in terms of health and safety standards that would go a long way and could also possibly get more recruitment. This is something that cannot be
measured, although it is tangible to the point that these other factors weigh heavily on decision making. He stated that a friendly environment is the best way to recruit and retain volunteers.

Mr. Trick stated that if Company 2 was closed and nothing was built in its place, there would be a big hole in that geographic area. He stated that they need self-supporting mechanisms in aiding the other stations, but also the geographic support that is needed when they have limited access, like during a storm event. Mr. Speich stated that being on a main road, like Lovely Street, is good from safety and access standpoints.

Regarding the response area, Mr. Trick stated that they have valid data from Gina’s presentation, even though it is 2 years old. Mr. Speich questioned if they could determine the value of closing Company 2. Ms. Tiezzi stated that Gina’s presentation included the estimated response times for all stations as they currently are, as well as data to show Company 2 being excluded from the scenario altogether. She stated that there is also data in terms of if Company 2 were to be relocated to Lovely Street near Bridgewater.

Mr. Robertson stated that the Committee needs to show three scenarios, including the status quo; a new station on Lovely Street; and the discontinuation of the station in Secret Lake. Mr. Robertson stated that he would like the AVFD and the Engineering Department to get together to validate the work that has been done. Ms. Tiezzi stated that the response time data set is from 2012-2016 and the rest of the information is from 2010-2012. She questioned if this would make a significant difference. Mr. Trick stated that historically over time, things have pretty much remained the same, although there is a slight difference because of storms. He stated that they have been very close to a threshold over the past couple of years in terms of responses; the numbers have been relatively stable.

In terms of regional options, Mr. Robertson stated that the Town Council has asked that if this Committee determined that a new building was necessary, that they also identify at least two other options that would solve the need, recognizing that the other options may not solve the need to the same extent as a new building would. Mr. Trick stated that in terms of the internal changes of Company 4, that station is small and has design limitations. He stated that if a bay was added to the left of the station, they would need to relocate the generator and would need to build it on fill or on a concrete structure. If an expansion was added to the north side of the building, there would not be enough room on that plot of land, although they could construct it on back of the building; this would mean a directional change for any apparatus that was parked in the rear. All of these options are a substantial amount of money. He stated that Company 3 is landlocked, although there is a lot across the street that could be utilized for parking.

Regarding Company 2 becoming a butler building, Mr. Speich stated that the idea is that a truck could be stored there. Mr. Robertson stated that he was thinking in terms of a garage. Mr. Trick stated that a butler building would need an auxiliary building that would need a bathroom, shower as well as a place for gear storage. With that in mind, spare equipment would also need to be housed. Mr. Trick believes many people in Avon would want to see a new building in their community, possibly on Lovely Street.

Mr. Robertson questioned how many volunteer firefighters currently live in Secret Lake. Mr. Trick stated approximately 12 that are active volunteers although 8 volunteers that consistently respond.

Mr. Robertson stated that they will look at all of the data and give it to the Engineering Department. He thanked the Committee members for the good discussion tonight. In summary, he stated that the direction, he believes, that this Committee is going, is that Secret Lake, Company 2, is antiquated; the location is not good; and that the Town needs to find something else. He stated that it sounds like the Committee members are also having trouble with other suitable options. If the Committee members
cannot meet the Council’s charge of at least two options besides a new building that would solve the need, he would want them to be able to demonstrate why they could not.

Mr. Robertson stated that he does not want too much time to go by before this Committee meets again. He will get the information together so they can hopefully meet again within the next few weeks. He believes one or two more meetings will be needed prior to getting a recommendation to the Town Council, hopefully by late summer or early fall.

V. DISCUSS FUTURE MEETING DATE/SCHEDULE

Mr. Trick stated that Monday nights at this time would work best for him.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speich made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:27 p.m. Mr. Trick seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted:
Chairman James Speich