I. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Fire Facility Assessment Meeting was called to order by Jim Speich at 6:01 p.m. in the Selectmen’s Chambers, Avon Town Hall, 60 West Main Street. 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: June 5, 2017

Mr. Trick made a motion to approve the June 5, 2017 minutes as written. Mr. Shillington seconded the motion which was unanimously approved.

III. COMMUNICATION FROM AUDIENCE

No audience.

IV. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Mr. Speich stated that he believes the subcommittee is at a point where they could possibly draft a report for the Town Council for review at their next meeting. This report would let the Council know in what direction the subcommittee feels this project should go based upon the information gathered. Although Mr. Speich stated that he is sure that the Town Council will have questions for the subcommittee, he believes this will be a good starting point in helping them move forward.

Regarding the options that the subcommittee has already discussed, Mr. Speich stated that those options include: the status quo; a new station on Lovely Street, north of Roaring Brook; complete upgrades to the existing stations; develop a regional solution; close Company #2; and install a butler building. Looking at these options, he stated that he would like to flush out three of these: the status quo, a new station on Lovely Street, north of Roaring Brook; and closing Company #2. The other option of upgrading the existing stations does not help with response times. Regarding developing regional solutions, Mr. Trick had discussed at the last meeting, that surrounding towns are in no better shape than Avon.

Mr. Trick stated that Canton is upgrading their response plans needing even more help from Avon on the eastern side of Canton. Simsbury is developing a plan of “6 minutes of silence”, which means if there is no response in that timeframe, the call will become a mutual aid response call. He stated that Avon is already a big part of helping Weatogue and the western portion of Simsbury. The UCONN medical center fire department has stated that Avon cannot count on them unless it is for a major accident or for the initial stages of a hazmat incident. The Town of Farmington is in a little bit of a better position, although they still have limited staff there as well.

Regarding the option of installing a butler building, Mr. Trick stated that Butler Industries makes a lot of buildings aesthetically pleasing, although their cost estimates are between $3-6 million for a building. He feels that the costs could stay around the $3 million mark if they use prefabricated materials or a steel structure. Mr.
Speich stated that a “butler building” was initially envisioned as a place to park a truck. Mr. Trick stated that it would need to be heated as well as much more.

Mr. Speich stated that several reasons were discussed regarding the status quo option. One reason was that the building does not fit the current apparatus. Other reasons are the narrow roads and streets; the speed bumps; and the density of population increasing in Secret Lake. He questioned if there are any other issues to take into consideration. Mr. Trick stated that they have custom built apparatus in there now. They continually need to get new springs on the truck. Although the speed humps have softened, the apparatus will need to be replaced soon with another custom built truck. Mr. DiPace stated that they have not discussed rebuilding on the site. Mr. Trick stated that in order to facilitate a new building, setback variances would be needed. They would still be stuck with the same response area; bigger and better, he feels, is not the total solution.

Mr. Speich stated that for safety reasons, the subcommittee feels that they should not go in and out of the Secret Lake area and the firehouse cannot fit trucks other than those that are custom made. He stated that the overriding issue in this location is the response times. Mr. Trick stated that the other consideration is where to put the two apparatus. He stated that they currently have a housing issue with apparatus; every bay is full. He stated that they could consider reducing the fleet, although then they would need to discuss what that would do to response times, etc. Mr. Speich stated that upgrading the other stations would be needed if the Town wanted to keep the apparatus.

Mr. Robertson suggested that the subcommittee talk to the Town Council’s liaison for Secret Lake to see what her take is on these issues. In summary, he stated that in terms of the overall framework, there is a consensus that Company 2 is not in the optimal location; the area it is in has a high density; and the streets are narrow and have speed humps. Also, the physical location and state of the building is antiquated and the bays are not large enough for the apparatus and equipment needs to be custom built. He stated that the two options would be: to do nothing, although it seems that the subcommittee feels that this is not acceptable because if Company 2 closes, there is too much of a gap. In terms of a regional solution, Avon cannot expect to have the surrounding towns help since they are in the same position. Mr. Robertson stated that, he believes, the subcommittee feels that the option to expand an existing facility in order to pick up some of the slack does not help because of the physical distance which is what the response times are a function of. The butler system would need to have HVAC in the building as well as creature comforts that are necessary; the Planning and Zoning Commissions may run into design issues as well. He stated that the more traditional solution would be finding a location on Lovely Street and building a more traditional fire house. He feels like this is where the subcommittee is and he stated that this does satisfy the Council’s directive; the Town Council has asked this subcommittee to analyze the need as outlined in the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) for a new fire station in the northwest area of Town. The Town Council also asks that should a need be identified, the subcommittee determine how the construction of a new fire station would solve for the need and for them to provide at least two alternative options that solves for the need in addition to a new station, and to present these findings as well. He stated that it would be best to identify the alternatives prior to going back to the Town Council.

Mr. Speich stated that one alternative could be to look at the Company 2 property, although there are several issues that have been stated regarding this option, but it possibly could solve part of the problem. Mr. Trick stated it would need to be designed for their largest apparatus and for even bigger apparatus in the future. Mr. Speich stated that the station has already been upgraded. He feels that the building would need to be taken down and rebuilt to what is needed; the requirements for that building would need to be determined. Mr. Trick stated that the design standards are subject to building code and design considerations. He feels that some of the NFPA recommended features would not be able to be designed because of the size of the lot. He stated that snow is also a concern. Mr. Speich stated that tearing down the existing building and reconstruct something on
the existing land would save money on the cost of purchasing land; they would only need to pay for the new building.

Mr. DiPace stated another alternative would be to create a true regional fire dispatch district. This would mean that the closest fire truck is dispatched and would respond even if that means that it has to go through one or two towns to get to the scene. A regional system automatically becomes an automatic aid system, where everyone covers everyone. Mr. Trick stated that this is, in essence, a borderless community. Mr. DiPace stated that this type of regionalization is happening for fire, police and EMS in Tolland and Litchfield counties as well as other regions with much success. Mr. Speich stated that this could be an alternative, although more discussion would be needed to understand if this would be a valid option or not.

In summary, Mr. Robertson stated that, in terms of alternatives, the subcommittee has discussed tearing down and rebuilding on the existing site of Company 2; a regional solution, initially a regional dispatch for fire. Mr. Speich stated that with the second alternative, there would be no response from Company 2.

Mr. Robertson stated that he and Ms. Tiezzi will write up a background memo and prepare a resolution for the subcommittee to review at their next meeting. The resolution will state that, going back to the response time charts, the numerous comments, as well as the thought process that has been worked through, the recommendation of this subcommittee is to pursue a new build. Alternatives would be a Secret Lake tear down and rebuild as well as a regional solution. He stated that for both alternatives, there would be preliminary pros and cons. Mr. Robertson stated that when the subcommittee’s draft goes to the Town Council, they will be able to see that thought has been given to alternatives. He stated that all of this ties in nicely with the groundwork laid out in the Plan of Conservation and Development.

V. DISCUSS FUTURE MEETING DATE/SCHEDULE

After a short discussion, it was decided that the next meeting of the Fire Facility Assessment Committee would be held on September 28, 2017 at 6:00 pm at Company 1.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speich made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:45 p.m. Mr. Shillington seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,

James E. Speich
Chairman