

TOWN OF RIDGEFIELD
RIDGEFIELD FIRE COMMISSION

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Wednesday, March 4, 2026 • 5:00 PM – 6:28 PM

Field	Detail
Location	Town Hall, Large Conference Room, 400 Main Street, Ridgefield, CT 06877
Date	Wednesday, March 4, 2026
Time Called to Order	5:00 PM
Time Adjourned	6:28 PM
Presiding Officer	Rudy Marconi, First Selectman and Fire Commission Chair
Minutes Prepared By	Chief Rommie L. Duckworth, Ridgefield Fire Department

I. ATTENDANCE

Commissioners Present:

- Rudy Marconi, Chair (in person)
- Barbara Manners (via Zoom)
- Maureen Kozlark (in person)
- Geoffrey Morris (in person)

Commissioners Absent:

- Sean Connelly

Presenting:

- Chief Rommie L. Duckworth, Ridgefield Fire Department
- Assistant Chief Tony Cerulli, Ridgefield Fire Department

Audience Members:

- John Bonner, (resident, Bates Farm Road; lieutenant, Ridgefield Fire Department)
- Pamela Dunaway (resident, Pond Road; member, Public Safety Facilities Committee)

II. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Marconi called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

John Bonner (Resident, Bates Farm Road)

Lt. Bonner expressed that the department has the community's back, and expressed his hope that the Town will continue to have theirs. Lt. Bonner praised the leadership of Chief Duckworth and Assistant Chief Cerulli for their leadership and communications.

Pamela Dunaway (Resident, Pond Road)

Ms. Dunaway addressed the Commission in her capacity as a resident and member of the Public Safety Facilities Committee. She described riding along with the fire department to gain a firsthand understanding of fire and EMS operations. She observed that firefighters filled every minute of their day between emergency calls with training, equipment maintenance, departmental improvement projects, and shared meals that reflect a strong team culture. She stated that she was impressed by the performance and commitment of the firefighters, and that the experience meaningfully informed her perspective as a committee member.

IV. AGENDA ITEMS

1. Staffing and Personnel Updates

New Hires

Four new hires are completing in-house credentialing and are expected to be assigned to shift within 30 to 90 days, likely sooner. The department conducts in-house credentialing that confirms both demonstrated competency and individual confidence before deployment, ensuring personnel are prepared to perform effectively on shift in full capacity.

Standard Operating Procedures

Chief Duckworth updated the Commission on the ongoing SOP development effort. The department has established a centralized, web-based SOP system ensuring that only the current version of each procedure is accessible. Firefighters are required to read, acknowledge, and provide anonymous feedback on each SOP. Three new SOPs were adopted at the March 4 staff meeting, including a personnel accountability system using apparatus-based tag boards for incident tracking and unit integrity at emergency scenes.

Mission, Vision & Values

Chief Duckworth presented the Ridgefield Fire Department Mission, Vision & Values document, previously distributed to Commissioners. The document was developed collaboratively with department officers, has been informally adopted by the department, and is intended to anchor all SOPs, policies, and operational decisions. Commissioners expressed support for the document. Discussion addressed the appropriate formal adoption mechanism. Commissioners expressed a preference to await Commissioner Connelly's participation before holding a formal vote; however, given the quarterly meeting schedule, an alternative path was identified. (See Section V: Action Items.)

2. Training and Professional Development

Assistant Chief Cerulli is coordinating all ongoing training, balancing the needs of new recruits completing credentialing, recent hires building proficiency on additional apparatus, and full-shift training across all four shifts. Key initiatives underway include:

- Boehringer Ingelheim (BI) familiarization: Driving tours of the BI campus have been completed for newer members to establish familiarity with access points and site layout. Beginning in May, the department will conduct in-depth tours of individual BI buildings on a monthly basis through October, in coordination with Danbury Fire Department, who responds jointly to that site.

- Combined confined space drill: Scheduled for October 2026 at BI, conducted jointly with Danbury Fire and BI's in-house emergency response team, with an abbreviated session for volunteer members.
- Live fire training: Scheduled for fall 2026 at Danbury Fire's new training facility on Plum Trees Road. This will be the department's first use of that facility.

3. Apparatus and Equipment

All front-line apparatus are currently in service. Chief Duckworth noted that response profile protocols are being streamlined in coordination with dispatch, including updated dispatch sequencing for major incident categories to ensure the appropriate complement of apparatus is committed immediately upon dispatch.

Portable Radio Programming

Newly purchased tri-band portable radios have not been placed in service due to incorrect channel programming in the original template. On March 2, 2026, the department convened a coordination meeting with the Fairfield County and Westchester County radio coordinators to develop a corrected, comprehensive channel template. The department is developing in-house programming capability and is pursuing a two-track solution: deploying approved channels immediately while pursuing expedited state DESPP approval for additional state-system channels. It was noted that any radio incorporating a state channel requires DESPP approval, and that a significant approval backlog currently affects departments statewide. (See Section V: Action Items.)

4. Dispatch

Protocol Development and Training

The Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) course was completed for a cohort of police officers and dispatchers. Dispatch protocols for major incident response, including immediate dispatch priority and streamlined radio procedures, are being formalized in writing following collaborative development with fire officers and Communications Supervisor Tom Ramsdell. A dispatch variance reporting system is in active use to document, track, and address protocol deviations at both the individual and systemic levels.

Dispatcher Training Simulator

The department has identified an AI-based dispatch training simulator that generates realistic scenario calls using local addresses and voice recognition, captures dispatcher responses, and provides immediate protocol-based performance feedback. This system will allow dispatchers to build procedural proficiency through repetition and provide an objective basis for performance accountability. The vendor is developing a radio simulation component.

Radio Console Replacement

The radio console replacement project is proceeding. A third console position is being added at the communications center, funded from the original \$28,000 project balance. Chief Duckworth noted that backup radio capability at Fire Headquarters requires restoration as part of the project scope and is being coordinated with Communications Supervisor Ramsdell. Additionally, the department is expanding use of the Zello radio-over-internet platform to provide communications redundancy and extend capability to police and highway departments.

5. Emergency Responses

2025 Annual Call Volume

The department recorded 4,597 emergency incidents in 2025, a record high. Chief Duckworth noted that a portion of recent year-over-year increases reflects improved recording discipline rather than solely organic call volume growth; an estimated 300 calls annually were previously going unrecorded. All incidents are now recorded. However, actual call volume continues to increase incrementally, consistent with population growth and expanded use of emergency services. Future growth is anticipated to increase as is the activity of medical calls and the Fire Department resources needed to address them.

February 2026 Blizzard Response

The department implemented upstaffing in advance of the February 2026 blizzard. Operational capabilities were strengthened throughout the event, with successful emergency responses executed through the storm and into the recovery period. Chief Duckworth noted that a dedicated command presence during weather events is a key operational consideration.

Operational Capacity Analysis

Chief Duckworth reviewed the Ridgefield Fire Department Operational Capacity Analysis (February 2026), a data report prepared for the Commission covering the period November 1, 2024 through December 1, 2025. Key findings presented included:

- EMS time on task: The median time an ambulance is committed per EMS call is 51.8 minutes, driven primarily by transport distance to Danbury and Norwalk Hospitals. Nearly one in three EMS calls commits an ambulance for more than one hour.
- Daytime vs. nighttime demand: Approximately 73% of call volume occurs between 0800 and 2000 hours. However, the most severe incidents, such as structure fires, major trauma, and critical medical emergencies, disproportionately occur overnight. The department's own data showed three of four confirmed structure fires during the study period occurred between 2000 and 0800 hours, consistent with national NFPA and USFA patterns.
- Concurrent call frequency: Three or more simultaneous incidents occurred on 51% of all days during the study period. Multiple overlapping calls are a routine feature of daily operations, not an exception.
- Mutual aid: In January 2026, neighboring departments provided ambulance mutual aid to Ridgefield 10 times in 31 days, approximately once every three days, driven primarily by simultaneous EMS demand. Pressures for mutual aid are increasing in all municipalities, meaning that the Town can no longer rely on immediate mutual aid as it once did.
- 15-year growth projections: Overall call volume is projected to grow from approximately 4,345 annually today to approximately 5,166 by 2040, driven primarily by EMS demand as the population grows and ages in place. Of particular significance is the projected growth in call acuity: critical EMS calls requiring multiple apparatus and six to eight personnel are projected to increase from approximately 32 per year today to over 370 per year by 2040. Each critical call temporarily commits the majority of on-duty resources, and the resources required to deliver advanced interventions exceed those required for standard ALS response. Chief Duckworth used the analogy to illustrate that the Fire Commission needs to think of these EMS calls as "all-hands" calls in the same way they think of structure fires as "all hands" calls.

The Commission engaged in discussion regarding transport distance to Danbury Hospital, the potential long-term value of a closer-proximity emergency care facility, and the resource implications of the department's advanced clinical capabilities as they come online.

6. Community Engagement

Chief Duckworth described an ongoing public education initiative developed in coordination with audience member Pamela Dunaway. The initiative produces public-facing Fire Department communications "Fast Facts" designed to help residents understand the department's integrated fire and EMS structure, the capabilities of its personnel, and the services already available to the community. Chief Duckworth noted that the department's operational model, in which every career firefighter is also a credentialed EMS provider, and every apparatus is capable of responding to any emergency, is frequently misunderstood by the public.

7. Facilities

No formal facilities agenda item was presented. Chief Duckworth noted within the Operational Capacity Analysis discussion that post-incident turnaround time, the period required to restore apparatus and personnel to service after an emergency call, represents a meaningful and growing operational commitment. He noted that purpose-designed facility features, including efficient EMS supply rooms, decontamination corridors, and SCBA service areas, can materially reduce turnaround time and are an important consideration in future facilities planning.

8. Strategic Planning

Dedicated Shift Commander Operational Assessment

Chief Duckworth reviewed the Dedicated Shift Commander Operational Assessment prepared for the Commission. The document describes the current operational configuration in which the Shift Commander frequently fills a riding position on Engine 1 — the department's most active apparatus — requiring the department's commanding officer to simultaneously manage hands-on emergency operations and command, coordination, and supervisory responsibilities. The assessment describes the benefits of a consistent operational configuration in which the Shift Commander operates from a dedicated command vehicle (Car 6), including: improved incident command safety and effectiveness; the ability to maintain an engine in service during significant ALS calls; a command-level presence when all front-line apparatus are committed; improved oversight of daily non-emergency operations; and reduced overtime costs during weather events. Commissioners noted that the document made a clear case for a structural operational distinction rather than a request for additional personnel. Commissioners suggested this topic merits a dedicated future meeting.

Meeting Frequency

Chief Duckworth raised the matter of Fire Commission meeting frequency. The Commission currently meets quarterly. Chief Duckworth expressed that more frequent engagement would allow for timely updates and more productive discussion on forward-looking issues without creating large informational backlogs. The Commission and the Chiefs will work together to consider a bimonthly meeting schedule of approximately six meetings per year, timed to avoid conflict with Board of Selectpersons meeting schedules.

V. ACTION ITEMS

Item	Action / Direction	Owner
Mission, Vision & Values — Formal Adoption	MOTION: To place the Ridgefield Fire Department Mission, Vision & Values on the Board of Selectpersons agenda for formal adoption at the March 18, 2026 meeting. Moved: Commissioner Manners. Seconded: Commissioner Kozlark. Presiding: Chair Marconi. Vote: Unanimous (4-0; Commissioner Connelly absent).	Chair Marconi / Chief Duckworth
Meeting Frequency	Chiefs' Office and Chair to confer and propose a bimonthly schedule (approximately 6 meetings per year).	Chief Duckworth / Chair Marconi
Radio — State Approval Backlog	Chair Marconi and Chief Duckworth to engage Steve Savage to advocate for expedited DESPP approval of fire radio channel programming affecting Ridgefield and other departments statewide.	Chair Marconi / Chief Duckworth
Radio Console / HQ Backup	Chief Duckworth to follow up with Communications Supervisor Ramsdell on third console installation and restoration of HQ backup radio capability within project scope.	Chief Duckworth
Dedicated Shift Commander	Topic identified for a potential dedicated future meeting.	Chair Marconi / Chief Duckworth

VI. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chair Marconi adjourned the meeting at 6:28 PM.

Minutes prepared by Chief Rommie L. Duckworth, Ridgefield Fire Department.

These minutes constitute an official public record of the Ridgefield Fire Commission and are subject to disclosure under the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act.