TOWN OF RIDGEFIELD

RIDGEFIELD FIRE COMMISSION

MINUTES

Regular Meeting

Wednesday, October 21, 2026 | 5:30 PM to 6:30 PM

Town Hall Annex, Ridgefield, Connecticut

I. ATTENDANCE

Commissioners Present: Rudy Marconi, Chair; Barbara Manners; Maureen Kozlark; Sean Connelly; and Geoffrey Morris.

Commissioners Absent: None.

Department Representatives Present: Fire Chief Rommie L. Duckworth and Assistant Chief Tony Cerulli.

II. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Rudy Marconi called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

III. AGENDA ITEMS

1. Fire Department FY2027 First Quarter Budget Report

Chief Duckworth reported that department-managed accounts were under projected expenses for the first quarter, with 20 percent of the annual budget spent against an expected pace of 23 percent.

- Salaries were under pace. Two firefighter positions have been open since August, and hiring is underway.
- Overtime was at 19 percent of budget against a 23 percent pace, reflecting slightly lower absences.
- Medical supplies were at 39 percent of budget because costly stock items replaced every few years came due this quarter.
- Training and vehicle maintenance expenses were approved but not yet billed.

2. Fire Department Shift Commander Time on Task Report

Chief Duckworth presented a study of the Shift Commander's daily responsibilities: about 30 hours of routine duties plus about 1.5 hours of emergency response in an average 24-hour shift, about 7.5 hours beyond the shift. The primary engine averages five emergency responses per shift, and the department averages about 12 calls a day, all of which are the Shift Commander's responsibility. Each emergency interrupts training, mentoring, reporting, and planning, and work is deferred every shift.

With the Shift Commander in a dedicated command role, routine work can be delegated to the Acting Officer on Engine 1 and the Lieutenant at Station 2. With the Shift Commander staffing Engine 1 in a hands-on role, delegation itself become an addition challenge. The Shift Commander is currently out of the command vehicle about 77 percent of the time.

3. Fire Department Ten-Year Historic and Ten-Year Future Emergency Call Projections

In response to Commissioner Connelly's request at the September 2 meeting, Chief Duckworth presented a ten-year history and ten-year projection of emergency calls. Calls grew from 3,337

in FY2016 to 4,340 in FY2026, an increase of 30 percent. Calls are projected at about 5,320 by FY2036, up 22 percent, or about 5,850 with development in Branchville, up 35 percent.

The primary driver is an aging population. Population is projected about 2 percent higher by FY2036 while EMS calls are projected about 23 percent higher. Residents 65 and older account for 60 percent of EMS calls. More critical calls and expanded department capabilities also mean more resources sent per call, so demand on department resources is increasing faster than call volume.

Follow-up: The Commission asked what percentage of EMS calls might be transported to alternate destinations, such as urgent care, if that were permitted. Chief Duckworth will report at a future meeting.

4. Shift Commander Staffing

Chief Duckworth and Assistant Chief Cerulli presented the proposal to keep the Shift Commander in a command role on every shift, which requires all nine assigned firefighter positions to be filled every shift. Nine firefighters are already assigned to each shift. The proposal requires no new apparatus, no new positions, and no significant contract changes.

The Chiefs reviewed five reasons, each illustrated by recent incidents, some as recent as earlier the day of the meeting: command at serious incidents as one coordinated system of career firefighters, volunteers, mutual aid, police, and Dispatch; coverage when three or more calls overlap, which occurs on more than half of all days; training and mentoring of a workforce in which about 60 percent of firefighters have five years or less of service; keeping engines in service and the Shift Commander in Town during critical medical calls; and consistent service delivery every day. Commissioner Connelly noted that training and mentoring are key not only to sustainability and succession planning but also to recruitment and retention.

The Chiefs proposed beginning January 1, 2027, with the first firefighter absence on each shift covered by overtime rather than moving the Shift Commander to Engine 1. The estimated cost is approximately $195,000 over the FY2027 overtime budget for January through June, at current pay rates with current staff. The Chiefs noted that the Ridgefield Police Department keeps its Shift Commander in a distinct command role, as do other fire departments of Ridgefield’s size and scope. Two plans for fiscal year 2028, one using overtime and one hiring four firefighters, were also presented for the upcoming budget process.

Follow-up: The First Selectperson will review the proposal figures with the Director of Finance and the Chief. A special meeting of the Fire Commission is anticipated before the December regular meeting to consider a January 1, 2027 start and the plan to include in the FY2028 budget request.

IV. MOTIONS AND VOTES

No motions were made and no votes were taken during the meeting.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Marconi adjourned the meeting at 6:30 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.