

***APPROVED MINUTES*** of the Joint Meeting of the City Council and the Board of Fire Wardens of the City of Rye held in City Hall on February 2, 2004 at 8:00 P.M.

PRESENT:

STEVEN OTIS, Mayor  
FRANKLIN J. CHU  
ROBERT S. CYPHER  
MATTHEW FAHEY  
DUNCAN HENNES  
ROSAMOND LARR  
HOWARD G. SEITZ  
Councilmen

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT FROM THE FIRE DEPARTMENT:

Chiefs HOGBEN, COTTER, and WICKHAM  
Fire Inspector, JAMES DIANNI  
Wardens CARLUCCI and DONAHUE  
Professional Firefighters DeCARLO, ROODE and McDWYER

OTHERS ALSO PRESENT:

City Comptroller and City Engineer and several members  
of the Finance Committee

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Otis called the meeting to order and invited the Council to join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Roll Call

Mayor Otis asked the City Clerk to call the roll; a quorum was present to conduct official city business.

3. Workshop on Locust Avenue Fire Station

City Manager Paul Shew said the purpose of the meeting was to respond to questions raised by the City Council relative to the Locust Avenue Fire Station and to reach a consensus on a plan of action. He suggested there be three presentations, interspersed with questions and a discussion of next steps.

Peter Donahue, member of the Board of Fire Wardens, discussed the Open House held at the Milton Firehouse on Sunday, January 31 and the importance of volunteerism. He said it was held from 11 A.M.-3:30 P.M. was a great success drawing approximately 300 people with lots of tours and press coverage (including a future RCTV show). He felt they educated everyone well about the reasons why everything was built the way it was (OSHA and ADA requirements, Federal regulations, building for the next 50 years, etc.). He emphasized the second floor was built for the volunteers and has produced greater enthusiasm and understanding about these volunteers and how important they are; that all the furniture, etc. was purchased with funds allocated to the volunteers (the 2% tax refund because we have volunteers); and the comfortable headquarters encourage people to “hang out” so response time is better. He said there are four companies, (two at Milton and two at Locust) and the Locust volunteer companies need their space improved so they, too, can continue to grow. He said the Milton renovation has led to a rebirth of inactive member interest while also attracting new volunteers. Mr. Donahue said the number of active volunteers is now just under 100 (out of the 235 allowed) and he is confident this number will grow because of the new building, the 911 spirit, and more planned marketing. Responding to questions about how many volunteers actually respond, Mr. Donahue said many volunteers come out for major fires, but the career staff bridges the response-time gap and the fires during the day when volunteers may not be in the area.

City Comptroller Genito reviewed the financial history of the Milton Fire House. The \$2.4M estimate in March 1999 was \$300K short because of an error by the architect (Kaestle Boos Associates, Inc.). So, when the bids (which included unplanned items like adding dormers, moving the staircase inside and flood control) came in at an additional \$700K over the original estimate, the total cost of the project became \$3.4M. He pointed out that since the bids were accepted, the project has been on budget, except for the unexpected sewage pit (\$90K) and the transfer of City operating funds (\$25K) for furniture and furnishings. Building committee Chair John McDwyer said some of the delays (which were costly because of escalation costs) were because of miscommunication with the architect (who failed to “get” the needs of the firemen and failed to respond to a number of ultimatums from the City). He pointed out that work has been done on plans for Locust (which have been seen by BAR and Landmarks) so there should be some cost savings. George Pratt, Finance Committee member, commented the City is not legally bound to accept Landmark recommendations, but it has traditionally done so. He said the City must, however, follow OSHA and ADA mandates in each public building renovated more than 50%. The firemen said it would be hard to cut anything from the Locust Avenue project, especially the elevator to provide for access to the second floor space. They reiterated that the two Locust Avenue volunteer companies would not go to Milton. The Building Inspector and Corporation Counsel have already looked into ways costs can be cut and it has been done. Mr. Pratt suggested continuing the education process to debunk the “overbuilding” myth and really defining what they want before taking it to the community (this has been done; they have worked with the City Engineer and with Calgi Construction on the dollar amounts). Councilman Chu said he would insist on an efficient committee to move any approved project forward on time and on budget. The firemen said the existing building committee is just such a group and they are prepared to work hard to make people feel Locust is as perfect for the community as Milton. Councilman Hennes said he now is convinced the City needs to take care of the volunteers.

John McDwyer discussed the alternative for Locust Avenue beginning with **Option D (to have only one firehouse)**. He said the real issue is *public safety* and the response time could

double if the second firehouse was eliminated. Now they can be anywhere in the City in an average of less than 3 minutes. He pointed out that they did look at building one new firehouse (as recommended by the public safety study), but there was no central location for it. He said Port Chester has 6 firehouses; Mamaroneck has 5. The response rate would also increase because of the traffic bottlenecks that exist around schools, sports fields, and busy shopping days on Purchase. He said our *ISO rate* (Insurance Service Organization) is based on the number of firehouses and the response rate and it could rise from our current "4" rating to "5 costing taxpayers lots of money to pay the increased premiums. He said the two volunteer companies at Locust have lots of history and each company has a necessary function, and how would they feel about having their home eliminated?

**Option C (make Milton headquarters)** is unacceptable because Locust still houses two ladder trucks and two pumpers (Milton has 1 engine; 2 utility trucks, a pumper and two fireboats). To be usable at all you would still have to do the renovations because to even store one truck would require shoring up the floor. The City Engineer said the same costs would be required to do one floor as it would to do two. The current Fire Study (which is analyzing needs) is not ready, but the Firemen feel Locust should remain as Headquarters.

**Option B (do only what we now have money for – bring Locust up to Code; no addition)** would mean doing things piecemeal and ultimately lead to higher costs. For example, if you only do the roof and then make other alterations you may end up with the wrong roof; if you replace the boiler you have to replace everything from the ground up. It is also not the case that you would save OSHA regulation needs. Temporary fixes (such as getting rid of mold; providing new carpet, replacing tiles and placing plastic over the windows) have been good, but it is not enough.

This leaves **Option A (completely redoing Locust as planned, along with the addition)** as the only way to go. They have the direction from prior Councils that they should built for the next 50 years here too and adhere to all ADA and OSHA requirements. The plan provides room for future expansion and for better use of space. Providing for the volunteers is essential if you want to keep volunteer firefighters. It is estimated that a fully paid department would require 62 men and this would be very expensive.

In conclusion, the City Manager said if they had direction from the Council they would go back to Calgi and get precise figures to be formally presented to the Council who will then have to "sell" the idea to the community. Councilman Chu said it was important that the firefighters have a plan for what to do if a referendum should fail because if it does he would not be in favor of going back to the community with another, lesser plan. Especially as the new Councilmen ran on a platform of fiscal conservatism, it is important that they need to know the answers to all questions before they could know in their hearts Option A is right.

Mayor Otis urged the answers to all questions be answered, including what the costs will be if the project is delayed for five years; urged everyone to take a tour of the Locust Ave. Firehouse; and suggested the presentation to the Council be postponed until the February 25 Council Meeting.

4. Other business.

There was no other business to be discussed.

5. Adjournment

As there was no further business to discuss, Councilman Fahey made a motion, seconded by Councilman Hennes and unanimously carried, to adjourn the meeting at 10:55 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan A. Morison  
City Clerk