

In 2019 we answered 120 calls, with 5 missed calls for a 96% completion rate. (As of this report.) For comparison, in 2018 we answered 107 calls, with 6 missed calls, for a 95% completion rate. This is comparable to the performance of departments that have single-response full-time coverage, with mutual aid to cover second-call needs. This amazing performance has only been possible because of the dedication and hard work of our volunteers, and the support they receive from friends, employers, and most importantly their families. I want to take this moment to say thank you.

Despite the effort and sacrifice of our members, and the improvements we've made, the volunteer fire service model is clearly coming to an end. This is a sad truth, but not one that is newly revealed. For over fifteen years, under every Chief that Cavendish has had in my time with the department, there has been too much to do and too little time to do it. Some prior chiefs have left things undone, some have worked so hard as to burn themselves out, but neither of these options are viable long-term into the future. We must address the fact that there are fewer and fewer people asked to do more and more. This is a state of systematic collapse. If the fire service were a patient, it would be in an advanced state of shock on its way to death. This is not merely a problem in Cavendish, or even Vermont, but rather it is a nation wide crisis. Nationally, over the past ten years the number of emergency calls has more than doubled while being answered by less-than half as many people. The specific local factors of second home ownership rates, aging population base, and commuting for work have only exacerbated the problem in our community.

Without replacement, every time someone leaves the fire service everyone else must do that much more. This is true for departments as well. I am grateful to Proctorsville Fire Department that we continue to be automatically dispatched with them for all fire and motor vehicle emergencies in their district and ours. I know that if Cavendish Fire were shut down completely, they would probably bear the weight of our district's additional calls, furthering the demands on them. This year it would have meant an additional 66 calls to their already busy year, with even less help for all of the other calls we responded to with them. The time for simply merging departments as the solution for the challenges we face was two decades ago. Now we must forge new solutions to go along with mergers. I believe this means beginning a transition to having people paid to ensure sufficient coverage, with an eye towards a regionalization of the fire service. Essentially following the path that Emergency Medical Services have been on for some time now. Although this transition will increase financial costs it will have several benefits.

The first benefit is that it will ensure immediate local EMS response to all calls in our coverage area. This can mean the difference between life and death. One example where we've already seen this was at a call we received this Spring for an elderly patient with difficulty breathing up past Tarbell Hill. Upon arrival we found the patient in severe respiratory distress and contacted Medical Control for authorization to have one of our EMTs administer oxygen. Because of misdirection from GPS navigation, Ludlow Ambulance took over 30 minutes to arrive on scene. Although we only had a limited amount of oxygen, (We only had this oxygen because an EMT had brought his jump bag from another rescue squad. We now regularly carry much more oxygen.) It was

sufficient to augment the patient's breathing and they were kept out of cardiac arrest until the ambulance arrived.

Secondly because the Cavendish Fire station is centrally located in our town, keeping it operational will maintain the 5 mile radius we currently have for insurance purposes. If that changes, property owners outside the hydranted areas can expect a doubling of insurance rates for properties beyond 5 miles (by road) away from a fire station. This 5 mile radius will become an even more important consideration if regionalization discussions take place and there are vying possibilities for centralized locations.

Thirdly the health of our firefighters will improve by moving to a shift-based schedule because it will allow "down" time to alleviate stress and avoid burnout. There are two types of psychological stress injury: critical and chronic. Critical stress derives from singular situations that due to their severity resonate in an unhealthy manner with responders. Chronic stress derives from repeated exposure to psychologically stressful events. First responders are often interacting with people on the worst day of their life. The current practice of always being in a constant state of preparation is unhealthy because it does not allow time to process stress. Studies have shown that time off and regular sleep are essential to coping with stress in a healthy manner. The statistics are bleak for the negative effects stress currently has on the first responder community, with some data showing higher per-capita rates than military veterans for heart disease (which is significantly stress related), PTSD, and suicide.

I believe a transition to a paid department is necessary, but it will require a more active management from the public through the Prudential Board. I will continue to work with the Board in determining what would be best, but to be clear, I am not interested in filling any of those roles. My family and current full-time vocation take priority position for time. I am only able to do what I'm currently doing for the Fire Department because of the support of my family and employer to continue. They both believe in the mandate to, "work for the prosperity of the community where you live." (Jeremiah 29:7) I am willing to remain in my current roll of 1st Assistant Chief until the necessary new Chief wishes to replace me or until I can no longer give the time to serve as acting Chief. If there is anyone interested in volunteering for any work that needs to be done please come to me and take responsibility for completing it. Or if there is someone who wishes to take the Department in a different direction please speak with the Prudential Board. I'd welcome the chance to limit what I'm doing and follow another's leadership. Until then, I will continue in the tradition of the Fire Service to do the best we can with the current situation, and plan improvements for the future.

Respectfully Submitted,

Abraham Gross

Acting Chief, Cavendish Volunteer Fire Department