

# MEMO

West Pawlet Village Center Master Plan

Public Meeting Notes **DRAFT**

Pot Luck Dinner Meeting 4 - Firehouse & Community Events  
February 23, 2023 6:00pm - 9:00pm WPV Firehouse



## Introduction:

At the beginning of the Pot Luck Dinner, a short presentation was given to outline the background of the Village Master Plan project, goals and schedule. The presentation then reviewed some of the initial input collected from the Community Survey. The conversation then focused on ways to bring back different community events which had been lost over time, including events hosted by the Firehouse, new event ideas, and how these events might be improved. The Firehouse serves as a primary hub of the community for social events and bringing people out to meet one another. Potential improvements at the Firehouse to host them were discussed, and how these could also help meet the needs of the larger neighborhood in a mutually beneficial way. Potential for more events which also provide opportunities for the Firehouse to fundraise. A copy of the discussion slides was uploaded to the project webpage.

## Discussion Notes:

- **Pancake Breakfasts, Community Pot Luck Dinners.** COVID killed many of these events, have not come back yet. Firehouse in the process of trying to upgrade their kitchen to host food again, but have been unable to find contractors to do the work. Because it is a commercial building, law requires licensed contractors to do all the work. Contractors are very busy, hard to get a hold of, and more expensive. Funding is an issue. This has been a hold up.
  - Pancake Breakfasts won't come back until they fix their kitchen. Unknown timeframe.
  - ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Covid relief funds may be useful to help them. Town ARPA funds have already been earmarked for current funding, but there is a new round of applications. Jessica and/or Town Board may have info on when/if new funding options are available.
  - 4H would bus tables for breakfasts, help out.
  - Would like to bring Breakfasts back, and also a Supper event as well.
- **Carnival.** Firehouse used to host the annual Carnival event. It turned out to be too much work, with not enough reward. Crew would spend days setting up and coordinating, but with lackluster attendance and very little fundraising to show for it. Made it too much of a hassle to keep doing it.
  - Carnival could come back, but Firehouse isn't willing to do all the work for it. Someone else would need to step up and take charge, or help.
- **Firehouse Auction.** Did this for a few years but found that they didn't get a lot of donated items, and much of the donated items were junky. After the event they would be left holding the bag with a bunch of stuff no one wanted, and the Firehouse would have to find a way to dispose of it. Became a hassle for relatively small gain. Scrappers sometimes come and clean up some of the leftovers.
  - Pawlet FD gets a much better haul of donated items for their auction, and seems to sell it all somehow. Discontinued this event when COVID hit and don't plan to start again.
- **Monthly 50/50 Raffles.** These are successful. All of their tickets are sold already.

- **Movie Night.** Baptist Church used to host a movie night at the Firehouse, leftover proceeds of ticket sales and concessions would go to Firehouse, but not much money collected. Movie night hasn't come back since Covid, but could see a return.
  - Potential for other movie night hosts, such as Historical Society?
- **Volunteerism / Attendance.** Events at the Firehouse serve multiple purposes - community socialization, fundraising and potential recruitment. People don't seem to show up for a lot of events anymore. Attendance is down.
  - Pawlet and Vermont in general has seen an influx of many new people who have moved to the area, they are new and aren't tied to the community as much. More of a bedroom community now. Maybe new folks don't know about events or don't care, maybe just aren't interested?
  - Firehouse relies on community exposure and relationship to help recruit new members / volunteers. Has been very difficult finding new recruits. People just don't seem to want to volunteer like they used to. Average age of members is over 50, need younger members to fill in.
- **Bus Trips.** Used to host bus trips to destinations like Boston, etc. Was a lot of work organizing and is expensive to run, left very small fundraising profits. People would still complain cost of tickets were high.
  - Would not get a lot of local people signing up for bus trips, but would instead get most of the people from out of town, including Salem and Rutland, who would want to join.
  - Bus routed up through Rutland, and that is where they filled up half the bus.
- **Farmers Market.** Used to be hosted out of the Celery Compound (former Fish & Game building), then it eventually moved down to Consider Bardwell Farm.
- **Family Fun Day.** Firehouse held this event as part of their 75th Anniversary celebration. Again, was a lot of work to organize and set up. Had good turnout during the day, but by the end only had 2 people attending the Dance, and they were from out of town.
- **Casino Night.** Also hosted as part of 75th Anniversary [confirm?]. Was successful, attracted many people from far out of town, but again did not get many locals.
- **Railroad Freight Building.** VTrans has indicated that they may allow the structure to remain on State property if it could be repurposed to support the Rail Trail, such as creating a Welcome Center, rest stop, store, etc.
- **Firehouse Priorities.** Top priorities for the Firehouse right now are:
  - Finishing kitchen to host meals again.
  - Taking down dilapidated Annex building - need to find storage space to relocate items currently stored there.
  - Creating outdoor park/gathering space, perhaps with monument.
- **Woodchuck Festival.** Hosted this at Mettawee Community School, inside gymnasium in February. Would tape out 10x10 foot spots on floor for table/booth locations. Typically sold about 20 spots total, and sold some concessions. This was good.
- **Chicken BBQ.** This was probably best event, most popular. However, now everyone does it, there are BBQ events and places all around, and there is much more competition now. Harder to do.
- **Valentines Breakfast.** Again, need kitchen back in running order.
- It seems that everything is more supported now by "outside" the community, rather than local West Pawlet residents.
- **Fundraising.** Most successful fundraising efforts the Firehouse has is when they send a letter out to the whole community, asking for donations. Not an event, just outreach to residents.
  - A lot of funding comes from area companies, including across the border in Granville. Quarry owners, Telescope, other area businesses.

- **Volunteer Firefighters.** Long-term need is increased membership in the firehouse. Getting harder and harder to get volunteers. Members are aging out. A few members they haven't seen in two years. This isn't just a West Pawlet issue, this is happening Nationally. FD can always fundraise, but it won't do any good if there aren't people to respond to emergencies.
  - Representative Sally Achey spoke to them about this issue, discussed idea of college credits or tax relief as an incentive to get younger people to volunteer again. Should reach out to Robin Chesnut-Tangerman and keep pushing this issue.
  - Rutland Fire Department went from 50 members down to 24 in just 8 years.
  - Volunteering in general is down everywhere, even to find a baseball coach.
  - What can the Town of Pawlet do to help address this? Need to find a way to help incentivize this, perhaps tax credits / tax relief for active volunteers.
  - Difficulty is that State mandated firefighter training keeps increasing. Is up to 270+ hours of training just for the basic skills - that does not include more advanced training such as vehicle extractions, electric vehicle fires, solar panel fires, etc. This is a big burden on volunteers, takes a lot of time. Alternative is attending Vermont Fire Academy, but that is also a large commitment.
  - Need to find incentives for new volunteer firefighters.
  - [EDITOR'S SIDE NOTE: See attached article on recent Village of Round Lake NY FD incentive program, recently adopted.]
- **Firehouse Annex / Corner Property.** Firehouse plans to demolish the aging annex building at the corner of Route 153 and New Street. Hopes to restore it to lawn/grass area for outdoor events, potentially including monument.
  - Would like to have lawn area fenced off.
  - Potential design for outdoor pavilion discussed, serving both the Firehouse as well as being used for other community events, potential rentals for larger gatherings. Could include BBQ pit for roasts.
  - Option to make pavilion open in summer, closed in winter? Could host meetings there, free up space in the main building for other programming or storage.
- **Other Items.**
  - Village Master Plan should needs to reflect Town Energy Plan, in development. Frank may be able to provide preliminary input for incorporation.
  - Town / Village would benefit from pressurized water sprinkler system. Fire Department has been installing more dry hydrants to help local supply. A fire hydrant system pressurized for sprinklers would help, potentially served by hydrant system at former quarry, pump station at quarry. Could dam the southern quarry and provide pressurized gravity feed down to village.
    - Would drastically improve ISO (Insurance Services Office) rating, lower insurance costs, currently a disincentive to new businesses and local investment.
  - Fire Department would love to have hydrant system, water source at the station - but very expensive. New fire station located at/near quarry could provide pump refills, free up additional truck during calls.
    - Would want to future-proof design, in terms of size and amenities. Radiant floor slab greatly help dry equipment and hoses. Diesel pump, cant rely on electric.
    - A 500 gallon tank truck isn't enough these days. But also can't get a supertanker up some roads, especially in winter or mud season.

[\*\* END MEETING 8:15pm \*\*]

**Written comments collected via the online comment form to date copied below:**

- “I am concerned that none of the proposed intersection plans addresses the issue of a badly needed crosswalk in front of the post office” [submitted January 16]
- “Thank you for your presentation last night (1/26). Lots of food for thought. - Can Habitat for Humanity work with some village residences in revitalizing their buildings? I know they do work with revitalization projects for towns. Any plans for dialogue with town people outside of the Master Plan presentations? - Bruce's presentation for the small white building for trail - if this is for public use, is he able to get any grant money to contribute to the project? - Start "what's happening in WP Village" articles - newspapers, social media to attract people who might want to visit and invest in the town - buy property, start a business, etc. - I mentioned my restored slate side walk at 2724 Rt. 153 - could it be possible to restore the sidewalks down the hill to town? (can we convince Frank to at least clean the walkway?) The road is treacherous to even walk to P.O. - trucks and cars fly over that hill. Restored sidewalks that are slate - up to residences? - I think reconfiguring the traffic circle area as presented, and Bruce's enhancement to his little building will start to attract people to visit the town - having places for them to stop and visit - like a store, gallery, event would be great. Good to identify Pop-Up event space for craft fair, food fair, farmers market fair combined with music would be a boost. Thank you!” [submitted January 27]

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NEWS

# Round Lake, citing dedication, passes exemption

Former fire chief: Daytime calls are handled by retirees



Wendy Liberatore

Feb. 17, 2023 | Updated: Feb. 17, 2023 4:14 p.m.





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Round Lake firefighters return to the firehouse after answering a call on Friday, Feb. 17, 2023, at Round Lake Fire Department Station 1 on Curry Road in Round Lake, N.Y.

Will Waldron/Times Union

ROUND LAKE — Calling emergency responders the glue that holds the community together, the village board of trustees voted to give its firefighters and ambulance workers a 10 percent break on their village tax bill.

Mayor Gary Putnam said the board unanimously voted to pass the measure on Wednesday night after no one at a public hearing objected to the tax break. He also said he believes Round Lake is the first municipality in Saratoga County to offer the tax exemption for firefighters and EMS workers, a move inspired by a [new state law signed by Gov. Kathy Hochul](#) last December.

“A couple weeks ago ... there was a fire in the village,” Putnam recalled. “Temperature was around zero, and the firefighters were busy putting out the fire and protecting the neighboring houses, which were mere feet away from the burning house. In addition, they positioned themselves to protect our beautiful (Round Lake) Auditorium, which was only around 75 yards away. Last Saturday, they were training ice rescues on Round Lake. It is the least we can do for these dedicated folks.”

The tax exemption for firefighters and EMS workers follows a state initiative that gives municipalities, school districts, fire districts and counties a way to motivate residents to join the dwindling ranks of the fire and EMS departments. [Greene and Rensselaer counties](#) have already passed the exemptions for emergency responders. So too has the Bethlehem Central School District, which in a statement from Board of Education President Holly Dellenbaugh, noted “our volunteer first responders are terrific role models for our students. This is an opportunity to support our neighborhood volunteers and to encourage younger generations to join their ranks.”

Schenectady and Albany counties are also considering passing the tax exemption into law; the Schenectady County Legislature is holding a public hearing on the new law on March 6.

Saratoga County held a public hearing on Wednesday. In 2006, it passed a law to provide a tax exemption that must be annually approved. The new law, as specified by the state, will give lifetime exemption to anyone with at least 20 years of service in a fire or EMS department. Clifton Park is also considering the measure.

Fred Sievers, a former chief and longtime member of the Round Lake Fire Department, says the exemption is “a very, very positive thing.”

“As I’m sure you are familiar that the volunteer fire service in New York state has really suffered quite serious loss of members in the last 20 years,” Sievers said, referring to the Firefighters Association of the State of New York estimation that volunteers across the state has precipitously declined since 2000 from about 120,000 to 80,000 firefighters statewide. “It really hurts, particularly daytime response. It’s the kind of thing that will help really encourage some people to think about joining.”

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Sievers said Round Lake is “extremely fortunate” to have about 66 volunteers. But calls have doubled in the last 10 years. For one thing, he said the population has grown and he said many buildings have alarms. And if they malfunction, which sometimes happens, they are responding to false alarms, which he said have also increased.

While he is grateful for the exemption, about \$100 in annual savings, he said it doesn’t engage renters, many of whom are young, which Sievers said the fire department needs. He said the daytime calls are mostly handled by retirees.

“The retired folks are playing a significant role during the day,” he said. “That is particularly tough for us.”

At the Saratoga County Board of Supervisor’s public hearing on the tax exemption, Fred Richards of Harmony Corners Fire Department also echoed that concern. He said his department of 16 members is relying on volunteers who are 60 and older to respond to daytime calls.

William Lund of the Ballston Spa Fire Department also spoke, saying that the current proposed exemption of \$200 should go higher. He proposed exempting firefighters from the fire/EMS tax that some communities, like Clifton Park, impose.

“It’s a good start,” he told the Board of Supervisors of the proposal. “But it has to be meaningful.”

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