

Emergency Management Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, August 1, 2023

Call to Order: 10 AM

EM Members Present: Chief Jason LaForest, EM Director (JL); Lucinda Vermeulen, EM Public Relations Officer (LV), Mary McGurn, EM Deputy/Clerk (MM); Select Board Chairman George McGurn (GM); Highway Superintendent Jim Noe (JN); Buildings & Grounds Superintendent Tom Reynolds (TR); Board of Health Director Juliette Haas (JH); and Council on Aging Administrator Peg Muskrat (PM). Absent: Fire Chief Joe Schneider (JS) and Water Department Operator Nat Stalker (NS).

Guests: Grant Administrator Peg McDonough (PM)

Select Board Chairman GM called the meeting to order and introduced EM's new leadership, LaForest, Vermuelen, and McGurn, before turning the meeting over to LaForest to chair.

Contact List:

- JL notified members of the new EM email address: emergman@egremont-ma.gov
- EM members will receive a Contact List with contact information for EM members and local, state, and federal EM agencies. The EM Deputy MM is compiling the Contact List; members were asked for primary and secondary contact information.

Blackboard Connect, Egremont's Emergency Alert System

- EM Public Relations Officer LV will be the point person for its use; LV expressed concern with its antiquated technology and user difficulty.
- JL reported 977 contact numbers currently registered on Blackboard; it was noted that manual entry was cumbersome.
- Additions and updates to Blackboard are performed manually
- JL to schedule a further discussion on the suitability of Blackboard Connect and a possible replacement.

External Agency Communications

- Members questioned which members should receive these alerts versus emergency-task communications from the EM Director. JN suggested the decision be based on relevancy.
- Members were reminded that the Select Board Chairman declares a town emergency and authorizes the closure of town buildings.
- JH requested future communications among members not be siloed with open communication among members first, followed by communication with the community,
- LV cautioned misinformation happens in the absence of communication with the community; it's best countered with EM's credibility among the community, per GM.

Shelters

- JL identified Mt. Everett Regional School as primary, with Simon's Rock as secondary. JL will contact the Police Chiefs in Sheffield and Great Barrington regarding who is responsible for opening up Everett and Simon's Rock in an emergency.
- Given Town Hall's new generator, discussion ensued on using it as a small-scale emergency response shelter—a plan for its use was suggested.
- JH recommended that the EM avoid labeling Town Hall as a shelter but use the term center. Town Hall is unprepared for overnight accommodations, with employees leaving Town Hall at 3 PM on weekdays.
- A use plan should consider staffing and some basic supplies.
- TR pointed out that Town Hall has no available storage; JL offered the Police Department's basement.
- The Claire Teague Senior Center in Great Barrington was mentioned as a shelter, but transportation could be an issue. GM noted that the Transportation Department was missing from the EM team and will address this with the Select Board.
- PM has a list of 25 to 30 vulnerable seniors. Discussion ensued on how best to assist them, given their discomfort with digital communication and reluctance to leave their homes. EM members will continue to address this group's needs.
- The above discussion led to a question about the availability of portable generators. TR believes the Town has two and will confirm. PM will see if grants are available for the Town to purchase portable generators.

Town Survey

- JH suggested conducting a one-question survey of residents to determine who has generators. If so, find out if they would provide shelter to a neighbor.
- GM suggested that the survey have multiple questions on resident emergency preparedness.
- The survey should be paper and digital.

Resident Communication

- TR suggested the Town's newsletter provide emergency contact information.
- MM noted the Emergency Management's web page on the Town's website; asked members to contribute content.
- JL mentioned his availability to speak at a Council of Aging Luncheon.

EM Team Communication

- JL will assess currently used communication equipment, the suitability of walkie-talkies, and newer communication tools.
- PM to look for equipment grants.

- GM noted if grants are unavailable, EM members request a line item in the Town's budget.

Additional Comments

- JH reminded members of FEMA's Incident Command Training
- Mention made of Southern Berkshire Regional Emergency Planning Committee meetings at the Great Barrington Fire Station. JL was aware of the meetings.
- LV noted the Town's May 2023 EM Plan's chain of command used different terminology from the Town's.
- PM offered the Town's MVP & HMP's goals and actions as agenda items for future EM meetings.
- Members agreed to hold monthly meetings.

Next Meeting: Friday, September 1, at 9 AM

Adjourned: 10:07 AM