

For the Week of February 3, 2020

Manager's Message

Aaron Frank, Town Manager

Fire Services Changes in Colchester: Future

The Colchester Selectboard has created a town-wide fire department which will begin service on July 1, 2020.

This service is planned and budgeted for a combination of professional firefighters, both volunteer and career. In recent years the fire chiefs from Colchester Center and Malletts Bay asked the Town Selectboard to add paid firefighters during weekday daytime when there is inadequate coverage to respond to structure fires. This is a dangerous situation that needs to be rectified and adding paid staff made more sense to the Selectboard under a consolidated approach.

This new department will bring together the three organizations that currently provide fire protection services: Colchester Center Volunteer Fire Company, Malletts Bay Fire Department, and Saint Michael's College Fire and Rescue. Fire protection expenses for vehicles, equipment, buildings, and volunteer stipends have been, and will continue to be, paid for with funding from property taxes. However, \$207,000 or 20% more funding will be provided to fire protection services to reduce the deficit in fire coverage during weekday daytime when there is an inadequate number of volunteers available to respond.

Between the three departments there are nearly 90 volunteers. It is the Town's hope and intention that all volunteers will remain active in the new department. The Town will continue to recruit, train, call up, and importantly, honor the volunteers, as well as past contributors who have provided seventy years of fire coverage in Colchester.

The Selectboard has held ten public meetings addressing this topic over the last seven months, six on the budget related to the changes and four solely on the changes to fire services. The Selectboard has met with the independent governments (fire districts) who currently oversee fire protection and water services in the bay and the village. The boards (prudential committees) of fire districts #2 and #3 have transferred the fire prevention assets along with the responsibilities of firefighting to the Town effective July 1, 2020. We are still negotiating an agreement with Saint Michaels Fire and Rescue but expect it to be completed in the next two weeks.

Given the progress on the agreements, the Town has hired a town-wide fire chief, Stephen Bourgeois, to take responsibility for the department on July 1, 2020. Steve

comes to the Town of Colchester with 40 years of volunteer and career fire service experience. He began his career at the Malletts Bay Fire Department as a volunteer from 1980 until 1987. He was employed for 24 years at the City of Burlington Fire Department where he rose to the position of Deputy Chief. Steve returned to the Malletts Bay Fire Department in 2011 and has served as Chief since 2015. The Town conducted a qualifications-based selection process that included applicants who responded to statewide advertisements. The evaluation team included Williston Fire Chief Ken Morton, Colchester Emergency Management Coordinator Seth Lasker, Colchester Police Chief Douglas Allen, Human Resource Director Sherry Labarge, and Town Manager Aaron Frank.

Steve Bourgeois will begin work as a Town department head on January 31, 2020. He will be working for the next five months with the chiefs, command staff, and firefighters of the three volunteer departments to ensure a smooth transition. Fire protection services will be transferred to the town-wide department on July 1, 2020, at which time Chief Bourgeois will assume the role of the first Fire Chief of the town-wide Colchester Fire Department.

The leadership of the fire departments, both in Malletts Bay and Colchester Center, have issued statements in support of the consolidation effort, and of Chief Bourgeois' appointment.

The Town respects the proud history of the Colchester Center Fire Department and the Malletts Bay Fire Department and their service to the Town for almost seventy years. The Town has grown together and now our fire services will as well. The Town is excited to be adding support to our firefighting volunteers across the town to better serve our great community as suggested by the fire chiefs of Malletts Bay and Colchester Center three years ago.

The Town of Colchester is putting its energy towards moving forward with the Malletts Bay Fire Department, Saint Michaels College Fire and Rescue and the Colchester Center Volunteer Fire Company, their leadership and members as we move forward—together--creating a single town-wide fire department.

For more about the Town Manager's Office visit <http://colchestervt.gov/manager> or call (802) 264-5509.

Upcoming Town Meetings:

- **Planning Commission:** 1st & 3rd Tuesdays of the month, 7:00pm. Next Meeting: 2/18
- **Development Review Board:** 2nd Wednesday of the month, 7:00pm. Next meeting: 2/12

- **Recreation Advisory Board:** 2nd Wednesday of the month, 7:00 am, Champlain Room, 2nd floor. Next meeting: 2/12
- **Conservation Commission:** 3rd Monday of the month, 7:00pm, at the Bayside Activity Center or per agenda. Next meeting: 2/17
- **Library Board of Trustees:** 3rd Thursday of the month, 4:30 PM at Burnham Library. Next meeting: 2/20
- **Selectboard:** 2nd & 4th Tuesday of the month, 6:30pm. Next meeting: 2/11

All meetings take place at the Colchester Town Offices, 781 Blakely Road, in the Outer Bay Conference Room on the 3^d floor unless otherwise noted.

Upcoming events:

- **Annual Town Meeting:** Monday, March 2, 2020 7:00 PM. Sign-in begins at 6:30 PM. Community Dinner at Colchester High School cafeteria 5:30 – 6:30 PM. Bring a dessert to share.

Notices:

- The Town Offices will be **closed** on Monday, February 17 in observance of Presidents' Day.



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