



TOWN OF WELLS

Wells, Maine



Meeting Minutes- FD & EMS Merger

Date: February 10, 2025

Time: 3:00 PM

Location: Littlefield Meeting Room, Wells Town Hall

Next Meeting: March 10, 3 PM, Wells Town Hall

Present:

- Jim Smith, Wells Select Board Member
- Mike Pardue, Wells Town Manager
- Brian Toomey, WEMS Board Chair
- Don Gonynor, WEMS Board Vice Chair
- Steve Merrill, WEMS Director
- Brian Watkins, WEMS Deputy Director / Paramedic
- Gus Dunham, WEMS Per Diem / Basic EMT
- Jonathan Gay, Wells Fire Department Assistant Chief & Paramedic
- Tyler Belanger, Wells Fire Department FF/EMT-A and President, IAFF Local 4652
- Eric Beaulieu, Wells Fire Department FF/ Paramedic
- Rebekah Kelley, Wells Public Information Officer

4. Distributed Documents

The following documents were distributed:

- WEMS March 2025 schedule
- Community Visioning Handbook
- WEMS total run breakdown by month/year
- Town of Wells Emergency Vehicles Return Agreement
- Agreement between the Town of Wells and Wells Emergency Medical Services for Ambulance Services in the Town of Wells
- WEMS & WFD Merger Exploration Overview for review and distribution to personnel

1. Communication Avenues/ Messaging

Goal: *Prioritize openness and transparency in the merger process.*

a. Internal Communication:

1. Ensure information reaches all levels, from leadership to personnel.
2. Distribute regular internal briefings on the group's progress. Department leaders will

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distribute memos and minutes, drafted by Rebekah, to personnel.

b. **External Communication:**

1. **Public Messaging:** Clearly communicate the reasons behind the merger, including its background, objectives, and potential impact on the community.
2. **Use of Website & Social Media:** Create a dedicated website page with updates.
3. **Press Releases:** Issue formal statements when major milestones are reached.
4. Establish methods for gathering public and internal feedback.

c. **Action Items:**

1. Consider a shared email address that can be used to accept feedback and public questions.
2. Create a home on the website for updates and information.
3. Consider hosting a community forum/Q&A session.

2. **Vision Discussion-**

a. A **Vision Statement** will be refined and presented for review and approval at the next meeting.

1. The Vision Statement should take a broad, strategic approach to guide long-term goals.
2. It should emphasize:
 1. Sustaining superior medical services
 2. Enhancing efficiency and cost-effectiveness
 3. Developing opportunities for continuous improvement

b. **Multi-Pronged Approach:**

1. Establish WEMS as its own entity under the Town as an initial step.
2. Continue evaluating a full merger in the future.
3. The long-term goal should be structured for community benefits, financial efficiency, and employee sustainability.

c. **Discussion Points:**

1. Maintain high-quality service, governance, and morale.
2. Ensure continued EMS service for residents and visitors.
3. Establish accountability to the Town while maintaining operational efficiency.
4. Brian Toomey: A two-step approach allows for evaluation before full integration. This gradual approach allows for flexibility.
5. Assistant Chief Gay: Staffing challenges favor a blended model, which will be the ultimate goal.
6. Firefighter Beaulieu: Town governance is one step toward full integration. This two-step approach should be seen as a transition, not a delay.
7. Steve Merrill: Immediate blending could complicate operations. Agrees with the two step approach.
8. Don Gonynor: The two step approach would be the easiest transition.

d. **Timeline & Implementation Discussion**

1. Target: Present a recommendation to the Board of Selectman by December

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2. A full merger may require a public vote – legal review needed.
3. Facilities and infrastructure need further assessment.

3. Strategic Planning & Assignments

- a. Each focus area will evaluate two potential approaches:
 1. Immediate Full Merger
 2. Phased Integration Over Time
- b. Each focus area will conduct a SWOT Analysis to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of each approach.

Focus Area Sub-Groups & Members:

- **Communications:** Selectman Roche, Mike Pardue, Rebekah Kelley
- **Financials:** Brian Toomey, Jodie Sanborn, Selectman Smith
- **Personnel:** Don Gonynor, Eric Beaulieu, Gus Dunham, Tyler Belanger
- **Facilities:** Assistant Chief Gay, Don Gonynor, Steve Merrill, Tyler Belanger, Selectman Roche, Brian Watkins, Chief Dupuis
- **Equipment/Technology:** Steve Merrill, Sgt. Chris Baez, Selectman Roche, Eric Beaulieu
- **Regulatory Item:** Assistant Chief Gay, Brian Watkins, Steve Merrill
- **Legal:** Mike Pardue, Natalie Burns, Leah Rachin, Selectman Smith
- **Labor Relations:** Mike Pardue, Tyler Belanger, Assistant Chief Gay, Chief Dupuis

Key Takeaways & Next Steps

- **Feasibility:** The earliest possible transition to a Town Department is September.
- **Legal Review:** Determine whether the merger requires an ordinance or a public vote.
- **Financial & Staffing Considerations:** Ensure service levels remain high while evaluating employee benefits and cost implications.
- **Next Meeting:** March 10, 3 PM, Town Hall