

CITY OF NORWALK
FIRE DEPARTMENT



BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

MAYOR HARRY W. RILLING
COMMISSIONER/PASTOR OSCAR DESTRUGE
COMMISSIONER RABBI ITA PASKIND
COMMISSIONER HOWARD DIXON
COMMISSIONER STEVE FERGUSON

**FIRE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 16, 2025 – 3:00 P.M.
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

ATTENDEES: Mayor Harry Rilling, Commissioner Oscar Destruge,
Commissioner Howard Dixon, Commissioner Steve Ferguson,
Commissioner Ita Paskind.

STAFF: Edward McCabe (Assistant Fire Chief of Operations), Mark Conte
(Assistant Fire Chief of Operations), Troy Donohue (Fire
Marshal), Joseph Coppola (Deputy Chief, Training Division).

OTHERS: Diane Cece

I. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Fire Commission was called to order at 3:01 p.m. on Tuesday, September 16, 2025, by Mayor Harry Rilling via Zoom virtual meeting.

II. ROLL CALL

Mayor Rill called the roll as listed above. A quorum was present.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting: Tuesday, August 19, 2025

****COMMISSIONER FERGUSON MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 19, 2025 REGULAR MEETING.**

****THE MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (COMMISSIONER DESTRUGE).**

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Diane Cece highlighted a public hearing on September 17, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in Hartford before the General Assembly's Department of Administrative Services Codes and Standards Committee on the 2026 State Building and Fire Codes, with public comment closing October 11, 2025.

Ms. Cece raised concerns about a proposal to expand single-stair egress in multifamily buildings up to six stories, citing risks to occupants needing to escape via windows and challenges for firefighters ascending the same staircase during emergencies, describing it as a potential tragedy. Mayor Harry Rilling thanked Ms. Cece and deferred to Fire Marshal Donahue. Fire Marshal Donahue confirmed the Norwalk Fire Marshal's Office and Chief's Office had submitted concerns to the state regarding single means of egress in multi-story buildings up to and beyond six floors, including opposition to using a truck company for a second means of egress, and that the matter is proceeding.

V. REPORTS

A. FIRE CHIEF'S REPORT

1. Budget Report

Assistant Fire Chief McCabe reported that two months into the fiscal year, salaries spending stands at 13.88 percent, under budget by 2.79 percent, and overtime at 15.6 percent, under budget by 1.07 percent. No personnel are out on injury, and total sick time is trending down approximately 24 percent from the previous year.

Mayor Rilling thanked Assistant Fire Chief McCabe for responsible budget management.

B. ASSISTANT FIRE CHIEF OF ADMINISTRATION

1. Buildings

a. Station 1 Apparatus Floor Replacement — Progress Report

Assistant Fire Chief Conte reported progress on the Station 1 apparatus floor replacement, noting discovery of electrical issues in the floor and structural problems requiring an additional \$90,000 in funding via special appropriation, which passed unanimously at the Board of Estimate and Taxation the previous night and is proceeding to Planning and Zoning. Work continues using contingency funds, with the slab nearly complete and the floor expected to finish in a few weeks, followed by electrical redo due to rotted conduits through the slab, water issues from non-functional drains over years, and addition of insulation under the original slab to meet current

code. All items were itemized and explained during the Board of Estimate and Taxation discussion. Commissioner Ferguson inquired about the process and confirmation of notations in the appropriation, which Assistant Fire Chief Conte affirmed.

b. Station 4 Building Renovation — Progress Report

Assistant Fire Chief Conte reported a kickoff meeting with the architect scheduled for Thursday, with more details to follow next month.

c. Citywide Overhead Door Replacement — Progress Report

Assistant Fire Chief Conte reported the project is nearly complete, with Station 1 doors to follow after the floor work, awaiting one more door, and nearly every door in each city firehouse replaced.

C. ASSISTANT FIRE CHIEF OF OPERATIONS

1. Calls in August 2025

Assistant Fire Chief McCabe reported 729 incidents in August, averaging 23.5 per day, including 17 fires with 2 building fires, 41 rescues, 445 EMS calls, 20 hazardous conditions, 20 service calls, 131 fire alarms, and 55 good intent calls.

2. Summary Calls Year to Date

Assistant Fire Chief McCabe reported 5,625 incidents year to date in 2025, with a total of 9,019 company responses, slightly up from 2024.

3. Fire Apparatus

a. New Fireboat Dedication and Launching

Assistant Fire Chief McCabe reported that the new fireboat, MU229, was officially commissioned on September 4, 2025, in a ceremony at fire headquarters and christened the Harry W. Rilling in honor of Mayor Harry Rilling's 12 years of support. The vessel was placed in the water at Vets Park today, with crews beginning training, including ongoing sessions during the meeting. Assistant Fire Chief McCabe thanked Mayor Rilling.

Mayor Rilling expressed surprise and humility, appreciating the Fire Department's service to Norwalk.

4. Operations

a. Update on Station Captains

Assistant Fire Chief McCabe reported that the three new station captains have begun assignments, each meeting with their three lieutenants to assign roles including facilities oversight, training, pre-planning, and apparatus/equipment maintenance, with weekly reports submitted and in-person progress meetings planned in coming weeks, noting the program is off to a good start.

b. Mutual Aid Tanker SOP and Drill

Assistant Fire Chief McCabe reported that Norwalk will host a mutual aid drill on Saturday, October 11, 2025, incorporating tankers from Stamford, Darien, New Canaan, and Wilton to

familiarize agencies and command staff with new equipment and procedures for supplying water in low-water districts, as a fully operational run integrating all program elements.

5. Notable Incidents

a. Structure fire August 29th, 62 Osborne Ave

Assistant Fire Chief McCabe reported a structure fire at 62 Osborne Avenue on August 29, 2025, at 5:42 p.m., with the first engine encountering smoke; residents had evacuated; Engine 3 stretched a hose line to the rear and advanced inside to extinguish fire in an unfinished bathroom wall with extension into the ceiling, assisted by Truck 2 in ventilating smoke; no injuries reported.

b. Structure fire August 29th, 28 Point Rd

Assistant Fire Chief McCabe reported a structure fire at 28 Point Road on August 29, 2025, at 11:42 a.m., with Engine 5 first on scene finding furniture, a rug, and wood flooring burning in front of the fireplace; extinguished with a pressurized water can; Truck 2 checked for extension with none found; house ventilated and metered before reoccupancy; no injuries reported.

D. FIRE MARSHAL'S REPORT

1. Summary of Activities

Fire Marshal Donahue reported a total of 231 property inspections in August, including 3 mega multi-sites for 271 units; three fire and life safety public education events, including support for the Norwalk Police Department's National Night Out on August 13 despite rain with high community turnout; Deputy Fire Marshal Kelly's personal safety series for 6 adults at Star Vocational Services on August 14; and education for 150 students at Room to Grow Preschool fire safety assembly on August 15.

Mayor Rilling thanked Fire Marshal Donahue for being up to speed on the pending fire code legislation.

2. Fire Marshal Fees

Total income \$1710.

3. Fire Marshal's Office Calls

Spoken about in summary of activities.

E. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

1. Emergency Management Update

No discussion on emergency management update occurred.

F. TRAINING DIVISION REPORT

1. Current Training Activities

a. Flax Hill Road temporary water main/hydrant training

Training Division Chief Coppola reported orienting all personnel on the Flax Hill Road temporary water main replacement from Clay Street to Soundview, with a temporary hydrant featuring a different connection and on/off valve; all companies trained on-site, coordinated with Pat Moran from SNHU to ensure operational continuity in this target hazard area.

b. Structural Collapse Shoring (Classroom and Practical)

Training Division Chief Coppola reported completing the classroom portion of a two-week structural collapse shoring class delivered by a hired company, with sessions for all four shifts last week; hands-on training to begin Monday at Renzuli Road using vacant houses.

c. Marine training with new asset (The vessel Harry Rilling)

Training Division Chief Coppola reported ongoing marine training with the new vessel, the Harry Rilling.

d. Tiller driver training (new drivers)

Training Division Chief Coppola reported ongoing tiller driver training for new drivers, a recurring monthly focus due to many newer drivers in the department.

e. 9-11 Health and Safety Seminar Fairfield Fire School (members attending)

Training Division Chief Coppola reported four members attended a two-day 9-11 Health and Safety Seminar at Fairfield Fire School, covering pillars of firefighter health and safety including sleep, nutrition, physical fitness, and an additional topic (unspecified), featuring external speakers like a retired U.S. Navy SEAL.

f. Ongoing pre-incident Planning for First Due Software

Training Division Chief Coppola reported ongoing pre-incident planning on Fridays using the new records management software, First Due.

g. Rescue Company equipment familiarization (newer members)

Training Division Chief Coppola reported ongoing equipment familiarization for newer rescue company members, focusing on less frequently used equipment.

h. Ground ladders for entry & vent @ Renzulli vacants

Training Division Chief Joseph Coppola reported using Ranzilli Road for ground ladders, entry, and vent training.

i. Norwalk Hospital MRI awareness safety training (recent fatality in tri state area)

Training Division Chief Coppola reported all four shifts trained through Norwalk Hospital's MRI department following a recent tri-state area fatality involving metal on a person in an MRI machine, to familiarize members given the metal firefighters carry during calls.

j. Greens Ledge lighthouse pre-planning tours (MU-238 Crews)

Training Division Chief Coppola reported Marine Unit 238 conducted four days of pre-planning tours at Greens Ledge Lighthouse, one per shift, including a facility tour and software data entry.

k. Above-grade hose line deployment at River Street Garage

Training Division Chief Coppola reported training on above-grade hose line deployment at River Street Garage, simulating fire attacks on 4-5 story apartment buildings with engines stretching hose up the side.

l. Recruit Academy ongoing and all are doing exemplary work

Training Division Chief Coppola reported recruits in their fourth week at Fairfield Regional Fire School with Bridgeport Fire Academy, performing exemplary work with excellent evaluations; he meets with them weekly and receives positive feedback from academy staff. Training Division Chief Joseph Coppola concluded his report and invited questions. Mayor Harry Rilling noted the high quality of recruits reflects strong vetting and interest in joining the department. Mr. Steve Ferguson and Ms. Ita Paskind praised the informative report, the quick progression from interviews to training, and the rigorous application process ensuring fits for community needs.

G. LOCAL 830 REPORTS

1. There are no items

No Local 830 reports were presented.

H. CORRESPONDENCE

1. There are no items

No correspondence was reviewed.

I. PERSONNEL

1. Executive Session:

a. Discussion on Promotions

Mayor Rilling requested a motion to enter executive session.

****COMMISSIONER PASKIND MOVED TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION.**

****MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The commission entered executive session at approximately 3:29 p.m. The commission returned to public session at 3:44 p.m., with Mayor Rilling noting no motions were made and no votes taken during executive session.

Mayor Rilling announced Chief Gino Gatto's retirement effective close of business September 30, 2025, reading from his letter detailing 43 years of service, gratitude to Mayor Rilling for support over eight years, pride in the team, and cherished memories in the fire service brotherhood. Mayor Rilling proposed accepting the retirement with regrets and extending thanks and appreciation.

**** COMMISSIONER PASKIND MOVED TO PROMOTE ASSISTANT CHIEF MCCABE TO NORWALK FIRE CHIEF EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1, 2025.**

**** COMMISSIONER SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Commissioner Dixon noted the tough decision among candidates and congratulated Chief Edward McCabe. Mayor Rilling congratulated Chief McCabe, wished him Godspeed, and emphasized improving upon Chief Gatto's legacy. Chief McCabe thanked Mayor Rilling and the Commissioners for their confidence, committing to hard work for firefighters and citizens. Mayor Rilling then requested a motion for the resulting vacancy.

**** COMMISSIONER FERGUSON MOVED TO PROMOTE DEPUTY ASSISTANT CHIEF RIORDAN TO ASSISTANT FIRE CHIEF EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1, 2025.**

**** COMMISSIONER PASKIND SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mayor Rilling congratulated Assistant Chief Riordan, praising the department's leadership based on his skills, knowledge, and dedication. Commissioner Destruge congratulated all, echoing Mayor Rilling's comments.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

A. There are no items

No old business was discussed.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. There are no items

No new business was discussed.

Commissioner Ferguson commented thanking the Fire Department for support at the first Black Heritage Parade over the weekend, including full participation and seeing Assistant Fire Chief Conte with his son blending family and service, appreciating involvement from Public Works, Fire, and Police as sponsors. Mayor Rilling concurred on the excellent day despite warmth, testifying to Norwalk's diversity, recognition, respect, inclusion, and honoring all residents.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

**** COMMISSIONER DESTRUGE MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 3:53 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Courtney Baldwin,
Recording Secretary