

MELROSE FIRE DISTRICT
Firehouse Project Facts #5
November 17, 2025
NEW FIREHOUSE RATIONALE II

Fire Commissioners – Duties To The Community

New York fire districts are established under Article 11 of the NYS Town Law which outlines their formation, powers, and the roles of fire district commissioners. Fire districts are governed by a board of five elected unpaid fire commissioners.

The Melrose Fire District (District) is a separate public corporation (municipal governmental entity) that contracts with the Melrose Fire Co., Inc. (Company), a nonprofit 501c3 organization, to provide fire and rescue services in the District's geographic area which covers 36 sq miles in the Town of Schaghticoke and 19 sq miles in the Town of Pittstown.

MELROSE FIRE DISTRICT FACTS

The District has a duty to the community to provide effective fire protection by:

- Fostering an environment that enhances recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighting personnel to ensure proper incident response staffing levels.
- Managing the fire district's affairs, including setting operational policies, controlling District property, and by developing, adopting and monitoring the District's annual budget.
- Planning for both long-range capital facilities and equipment replacement and for the ongoing maintenance of equipment and buildings necessary for the Company to safely execute their mission.
- Ensuring the efficient and proper use of public funds to provide fire protection.

The Current State of Volunteer Fire Service

Volunteer Fire Departments across the United States are in severe danger of losing the critical mass required to safely respond and fight fire. If a department is unable to turn out enough trained firefighters on an engine, firefighter safety is at risk. Further, if minimal fire department staffing prevents them from responding in a reasonable time or without the necessary force to fight the fire, this also has a downstream effect on community safety. In 2020, there were an estimated 1,041,200 firefighters in the US, of which 35% were career and 65% were volunteer. In 2020, the US fire service had the fewest number of volunteer firefighters reported over the last few decades, with 676,900 volunteer firefighters, representing a 6 percent decrease from the previous year and a 25% decrease from the peak number of volunteers in 1984. 95% of volunteer firefighters serve in departments that protect small communities of less than 25,000 people. NFPA, August 2023

Without firefighter staffing, the condition of a community's firehouse will make no difference because without these dedicated volunteers, delayed or no response at all is inevitable. One needs to look no further than in our local region to see how the loss of volunteer firefighters can cause a fire company's shuttering.

Fire protection service in the Tomhannock Fire Protection District (TFPD), within the Town of Pittstown, was previously covered by a fire department that unfortunately had to close due to lack of volunteers and funding. When this closure occurred, our District sought out the opportunity to serve our neighbors in the TFPD and as of 2025, we have proudly accepted into the Melrose Fire District boundaries, an additional 19 sq miles of coverage area in the Town of Pittstown from the now dissolved TFPD.

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To ensure the District is able to meet its duty to provide the community with effective fire protection, the Commissioners have been considering various methods for enhancing volunteer recruitment and retention. These methods included implementing a Length of Service Program (LOSAP), tuition reimbursement and other volunteerism incentives. Several fire districts and fire companies within Rensselaer County already provide LOSAP programs for their volunteers.

LOSAP programs provide tax-deferred income benefits to active volunteers similar to an employer pension plan with benefits earned based on a volunteer service hour point system. The LOSAP program would need to have been totally funded by the District, consequently the program was not adopted because the program's expensive cost made it financially incompatible with the more pressing need of addressing the failing firehouse facility.

Furthermore, studies show that younger volunteers don't see the benefit of LOSAP programs because the benefits are typically paid out many years in the future, often not until age 65, which is too far off for the benefits to be a significant motivator. This contrasts with the immediate emotional and social benefits of volunteering, making the long-term, deferred financial reward less appealing.

Conversely, the firehouse environment is indisputably regarded by all generations of volunteers as an important element in their desire to join and contribute to the fire company.

Firefighter Recruitment & Retention – The Firehouse's Influence

The firehouse is a key component of any volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention plan for the following reasons:

- **First impressions:** The firehouse is often the first physical point of contact for a prospective volunteer. A tour of a station that is clean, well-organized, and modern creates a positive first impression, suggesting a professionally run company. Conversely, a poorly maintained station can send a message of neglect.
- **Atmosphere and morale:** A comfortable and functional station promotes a positive atmosphere, encouraging members to spend time there between calls, which builds camaraderie and a sense of community. Amenities like comfortable common areas, kitchens, and modern training spaces can motivate volunteers to stay engaged and be present.
- **Demonstrates value and support:** Providing amenities like showers, laundry facilities, and a space for training shows that the fire company values its volunteers and is willing to invest in their well-being and development. A station that lacks these basic facilities can suggest a lack of support and can deter potential members who have to juggle their volunteer work with careers and families.
- **Impacts reputation:** A firehouse's condition is a visible representation of the fire company's reputation within the community. A successful and well-maintained firehouse reflects positively on the organization, while a neglected one can lead to a poor reputation, making it harder to recruit.
- **Sets expectations:** The station's facilities can set expectations for the level of commitment and resources required, and can be used to highlight the benefits and lifestyle of being a volunteer. Showing potential recruits, the modern equipment and clean facilities can make the role seem more professional and less daunting.

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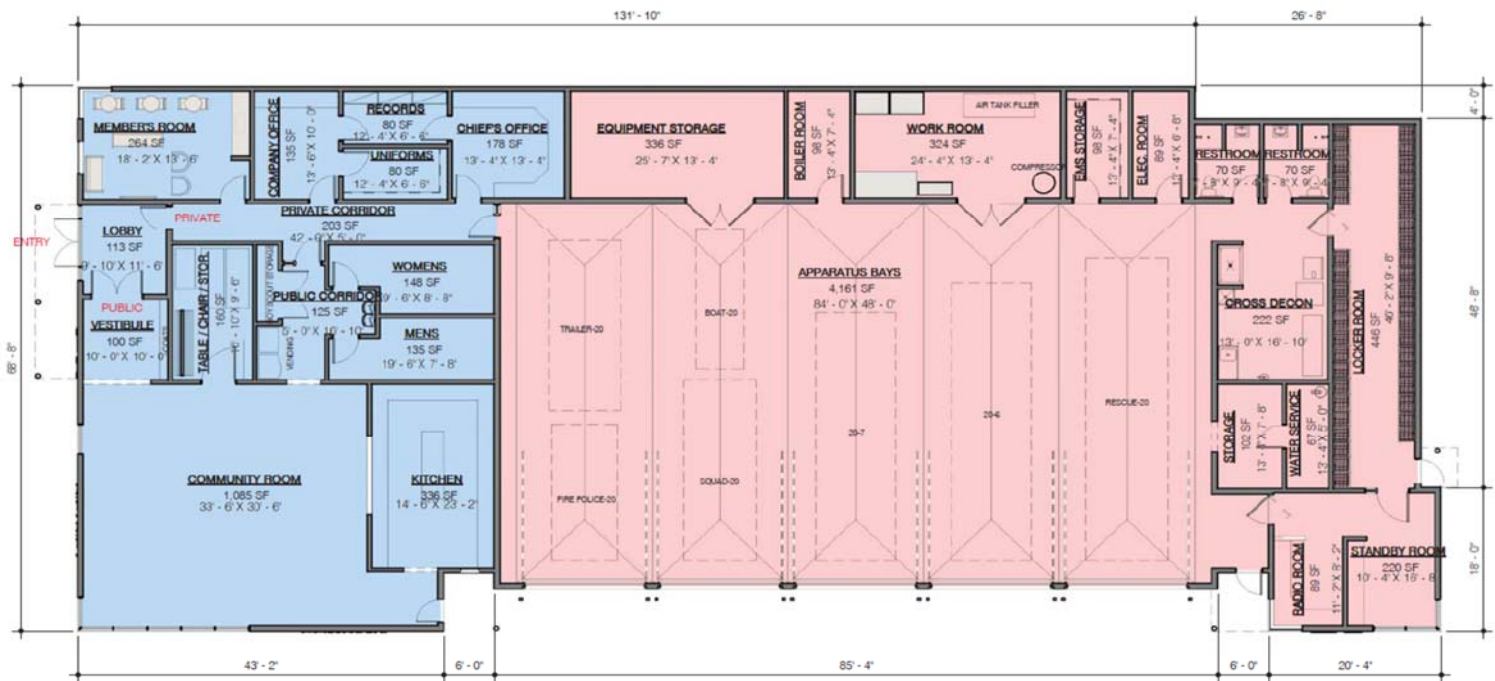
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Over the past three decades, New York alone has seen a 32% decrease in volunteers, according to the Firefighters Association of the State of New York. Fire departments depend on the consistent availability of trained volunteers for staffing. Without them, there are not enough personnel to staff the trucks and respond to emergencies effectively. Companies that struggle with staffing, encounter reduced response capabilities, increased costs, and in some cases, as we have seen locally, a complete inability to provide service.

The District has a duty to provide effective fire protection. Maintaining an appropriately staffed fire company by attracting new volunteers and sustaining theirs and the present volunteers' commitment to our community is essential to fulfilling that duty.

Volunteers spend a great deal of time in the firehouse. The physical firehouse which they work in cannot be overlooked as an integral component to any volunteer recruitment and retention plan.



REVISED FLOOR PLAN DATED AUGUST 27, 2020
10,276 SF



The new firehouse is proposed by the Commissioners as a fundamental element of their volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention plan. For more information on the Board's firehouse plan, please see Firehouse Project Facts #6, November 24, 2025, New Firehouse Rationale III.