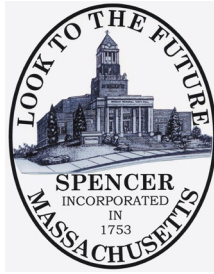


TOWN OF SPENCER

Fire and Emergency Services

“On Call Professionals Serving Spencer with Pride”

*Robert P. Parsons
Fire Chief
Director of Emergency
Management
Local Emergency
Management Committee*



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After Action Report for the fire at 207 Main Street, First Congregational Church of Spencer that occurred Friday June 2, 2023, at 1427hrs.

A meeting to discuss the fire took place on Wednesday June 28, 2023 at 1300hrs.

The meeting took place at the Spencer Memorial Town Hall in the Great Hall. Attendees will be listed separately at the end of the report. Notes were taken for the report by Spencer Fire Chief Robert P. Parsons. We note he was not present at the fire until later in the incident, approximately at 5pm.

The audio from the fire was played for all attendees as well as a power point that showed the progression of the fire throughout the afternoon on June 2nd. This was to refresh the memories of those in attendance and those that were not present the day of the fire to understand the intensity and quickness of the fire that afternoon. At this point we are all aware of an intense thunderstorm that went through Spencer just prior to the alarm.

The two on duty Spencer Firefighters, Lt Palmer and FF Seymour were dispatched for a possible lightning strike on Lakeview Ave. (With Engine 2) While they were responding to that incident the fire alarm activation for 207 Main Street was dispatched by Spencer Police. Off duty Firefighters, Lt Parsons, Lt Miller and FF Donohue were responding on the initial call on Lakeview Ave and were further advised to respond to 207 Main Street prior to leaving the station. (With Engine 1) While enroute they were advised by Dispatch that SPD Ofc Shea was on scene at the church with nothing showing. Engine 1 arrived with nothing showing as well in a downpour. Engine 2 arrived shortly thereafter, clearing from the previous call. Lt Parsons stated he assumed command of the incident and entered the church and found the panel showing the second-floor foyer in alarm as well as two other faults in the system. Lt Parsons, FF Donohue and Ofc Shea investigated with Liz Goyette from the church and walked the building trying to see where there may have been an alarm activated. Nothing was found and once they got to the second-floor

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foyer. Lt Parsons was notified by Lt Palmer if he could get into the steeple as he observed a puff of smoke coming from the steeple under the clock. The Ms. Goyette of the church did not have the key for the steeple on her (there was also a cell tower located within the steeple) and she ran to her office for the key. After opening the steeple doorway Lt Parsons and FF Donohue climbed the narrow stairs up to the landing in the steeple. At this point Lt Parsons observed a light haze and could see a fire in the rear (C side) of the attic space at the floor level and requested a 2 ½" hand line as a feeder with a gate with the high-rise pack to make the attic. FF Donohue left his tools and went down the stairs to the front door to assist with the hand lines. Shortly thereafter Lt Parsons observed zero visibility with heavy smoke filling the attic space to the point he observed he no longer could see his feet and decided this was the time to leave the attic as quickly as possible. As he got to the second floor Lt Miller outside observed what appeared to be a backdraft that occurred with smoke and flames coming out all the eaves and steeple area and sucking back in and now smoke was billowing out. He announced over the radio and hit the air horns in Engine 1 to evacuate the building. Lt Parsons at this point struck the working fire assignment to dispatch. Then quickly struck the second and third alarms and they went defensive. *Lt Parsons stated that with training they had all their PPE on and hand tools with them even though it came in as a fire alarm.*

Staff from Senior Living at Prouty, Lilly Kinney, Keith Carter and Stacey LaBrie, 195 Main Street were given the opportunity to speak of any concerns they may have first as to allow them to leave once done to be mindful of their time. We discussed the issue of evacuation of the residents with some refusing to leave and even under the threat of arrest. They are aware of the issue and will try to address it going forward in their leases. They requested that the Fire Department come up and speak to the residents about the dangers of staying inside the need to evacuate when the alarm goes off even though it may be an inconvenience to them. They will work on having a list of occupants and their contact numbers near the exits in a lock box where they or us can contact them to find out if they are evacuated to the outside or off property if unable to provide a headcount on site. This list will need to be updated by staff periodically. (Perhaps every 6 months). The staff stated they have 34 apartments in the building with a total of 35 residents. We discussed the issue with tenants sneaking back in until Keith Carter was able to change the locks which then provided no access to the fire department. Discussion was had as well on the issue of moving the residents to another location since they could not move their cars due to the fire hose across the driveway.

We will work with MEMA on alternative methods of transportation whether we get an MOU from the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA), use of the ambul bus from CMED or EMS strike teams. (One was attempted during the fire by the IC Chief Normandin an East 1 EMS strike team but was unable to provide more than 1 ambulance (Douglas) due to another structure fire at the same time in the town of Upton.). We also do not want to tie up ambulances for transport of uninjured people. This will be an action point for the Spencer EMA to come up with solutions working with MEMA.

They also had residents' express concerns over asbestos after seeing the signs posted at the site. Advised there was ongoing testing being performed by DEP prior to removal of the material but it is covered by plastic and any during the fire was not a major concern. The staff were then allowed to leave if they wanted to, which they did.

Leicester Fire Chief Michael Dupuis spoke next explaining he was listening to the two calls in his office, and nothing stood out until he heard Lt Parsons say he had active fire in the attic then Lt Miller say to evacuate there was a backdraft. He immediately got into his cruiser and drove with his lights and siren on to the scene and could not believe his eyes the amount of smoke as he was traveling to Spencer in a short amount of time. He arrived to find Spencer Fire Units going defensive on his arrival and the steeple and roof area chugging with smoke. He spoke to Lt Parsons to make sure everyone was out and confirmed. He spoke to Chief Normandin and took over Operations and started setting up the Ladder trucks as they arrived.

North Brookfield Chief Joseph Holway advised when they arrived, they set up on the East side of the fire on North Street and hand jacked hose to the hydrant on Main Street. Radiant heat was a concern even where they were located and worked on trying to set up a water curtain to reduce some of the heat. Commended all for their hard work and excellent placement of the apparatus that arrived on scene. He also asked if the church had lightning protection and its our understanding it did but we need to follow up with the church.

Southbridge Chief Paul Normandin, the Incident Commander throughout the incident after the third alarm was struck. He arrived after listening to the calls on his way home from work and was in Rochdale when the alarm turned into a working fire and started his way there via Greenville Street. He arrived shortly after Chief Dupuis and met with Lt Parsons who gave him a quick update and handed him Spencer Fire's cheat sheet for the alarms that all the officers carry. *We understand this is difficult to see as the type is small but there are full alarm cards in the apparatus. (No one thought to grab them). More training for all the Spencer Firefighters on the use of the alarms cards and where they are in case of another incident where a Chief Fire Officer is not on scene.*

Good job by all the District 7 Chief's that responded and knowing each of our peers allows for ease at incidents. Chief Normandin spoke about the bad placement of his cruiser as well as the Spencer Apparatus as all were parked on the terrace in front of the church. They had also placed Leicester's Tower 53 there as well when they arrived. *Spencer needs to look at preplanning and better placement of apparatus when responding to calls, especially fire alarms and we get complacent on where we always park.* This was a major concern once the fire took hold of the structure and we needed to move apparatus out of the way due to the high volume of fire and radiant heat as well as the steeple concerns of collapsing. Command asked for the evacuation tone over the radio to alert people to move all apparatus. Dispatch did not understand the request, so they only made an announcement over Spencer Fire's Repeater channel only. *Dispatch*

was unaware that they had the capability to do the tone which was already in their console. Chief Parsons has since shown them where the button is and how to accomplish this task. Perhaps dispatch can incorporate this into a weekly test, Rutland RECC does this on Mondays. To move the vehicles out of the way hoses were chopped off Engine 2 using an axe to quickly back it out of the way, Spencer's Ladder had to be retracted and bedded and the outriggers slightly raised off the pavement and moved backwards still out. They left pads and chock blocks in place on the road. Engine 1 and East Brookfield's Engine 3 was also backed onto Route 9 to get out of the way for Spencer's Ladder and Paxton's. Paxton's Ladder took longer due to an issue with an outrigger but finally were able to move it. Leicester's Tower 53 set back up on Main Street by North Street and started flowing their ladder pipe. When the steeple did come down debris landed on Spencer's pads. Not a lot of water was flowing shortly afterwards due to Spencer's Ladder no longer getting water from the hydrant East Brookfield tagged for them. Unknown what happened but water was later restored.

Chief Normandin set up the command post at Main Street and North Street out of the back of his Tahoe. Deputy Chief Matt Tebo from Leicester assisted in listening to the different radio channels. Dispatch brought up the command post was never recognized where it was set up and therefore, they did not know where to send people when asked. Greg Karpowicz from Spencer Water advised that's why he did not get there right away even though he was on scene right after the fire started. This should be formally announced by any Incident Commander as soon as it's established to dispatch and over the radio.

Even though he had the alarm cards cheat sheet he was unsure who was coming. He recognized he could access them off the District 7 web site as well but did not.

Some good things, no houses were directly behind the church, radiant heat was intense and the houses and Denny Hall across the street were steaming. Steeple fell into and to the west of the church (basketball court) and not forward onto Main Street or on any fire trucks. Multiple hydrants were tagged by numerous departments as they arrived on scene. We understand 6 in total were being used during the fire. Worked with the water department to move off the municipal system and to draft out of Muzzy Pond on Maple Street. He worked with the Fire Marshal Peter Ostrowski that was on scene to work with the church on getting a company in to demo the front that was still standing at the end due to the fear of it falling onto Route 9. The Fire Marshal was also able to provide real time drone video of where the fire was still in the rubble of the building to focus on the ladder pipes that were operating.

Moving everyone off the Spencer Fire main channel to District 7 Red and Blue channels can have two effects. One alleviates radio chatter that dispatch must listen to that may not be pertinent but also reduces the ability for it to be recorded if something goes wrong and now dispatch does not hear it. Spencer Fire does have two other fireground channels that can be utilized, perhaps get them also into dispatch as they are simplex channels and

may help dispatch and be recorded. Calling in District 7 Communications Teams sooner into an incident will be beneficial as well as relieving some of the radio traffic from dispatch.

Spencer Chief Robert Parsons praised Chief Paul Normandin and his ability to lead this incident. He listened to it while returning from Maine and was impressed and didn't believe he would have done anything differently.

Greg Karpowicz of Spencer Water said they never ran out of water during the incident but were watching it closely and once it got to a point that water customers were going to be having an issue, he met with Chief Normandin to start moving off the municipal system. *Realize we need to mark the two zones on Pleasant Street. This was recently discussed with a training course a few months back with the Fire Department and will be taken care of shortly with help from Retired Deputy Chief William Locke. He has volunteered to work with Greg to get them marked. Need to also note on our alarms cards to notify the water department when there is a large event such as this. It's always done but by request of the IC but should be automatic.*

West Brookfield Fire Chief Richard Lapierre advised some of the issues he saw that people were running over the 4" hose with their vehicles on Maple Street especially by the Terrace. *Massachusetts State Police that were on scene told people to stop but then they left the area. Police were hampered due to the number of streets affected by the fire and where we had laid hose, but they needed to be at key areas to protect the hose line laid in the streets. Chief Befford will work with local Police Departments and MSP on better relationships and responses for large fires and they need to stay in place.*

Oakham Fire Chief Timothy Howe advised he arrived on scene and first worked on moving Spencer's and Paxton's aerials off the Terrace and then the water supply on Pleasant Street and his engine on Pope Street behind Senior Living at Prouty and their crew used a new blitz gun in the cemetery. Chief Dupuis also mentioned Charlton used a blitz fire back there as well.

Paxton Fire Chief Michael Pingatore advised they did have some issues with their Ladder truck at first, but they overcame the issues and were able to move it without issue other than a few moments of concern. Very tough topography where the church was overall and having the basketball court located where it did not allow closer reach on the B side (west side). They had the smallest ladder in height (75') on scene and were not able to really get up over the church to penetrate with their ladder pipe. It was mentioned about the use of engines deck guns by Chief Parsons and others noted they were in use initially but were shut down to move trucks and for some reason never turned back on. *Use of deck guns on apparatus at large fires like these should be utilized along with ladder pipes to increase suppression efforts.*

Chief Lapierre brought up the lack of 5" hose. *It was noted that very few towns in District 7 carry it and only a few towns in District 8 as well. Perhaps though a list should be maintained of who has it as it would have been useful for the laying of the large diameter hose to Muzzy Pond.* Chief Normandin noted one of the task force towns that came in later did have a reel of 5" on it. *We also noted that we left one 4" line in the street for the task force to utilize for the evening. We should not have done this. Have all companies that laid hose down to pick it up to return to their towns in service and have the task force lay a new line down for their use.*

Three 4" Large diameter hoses were laid to Muzzy Pond from the scene and numerous pumpers were put in place to pump those lines to move everyone off the municipal system. *We must be aware if a pumper/ladder is receiving water from a static source not the municipal system we MUST remove them immediately off the municipal system to not create an issue with cross contamination. We did do that but needs to be noted for the future as well.*

Spencer Town Administrator Jeffrey Bridges briefly spoke to thank everyone that responded to the incident and were there today to discuss the fire. He stated there are three things that needs to be addressed in the future by Spencer: Manpower, Communications and Water Supply. These items were all important issues during the incident.

Chief Normandin also brought up that Spencer should have a Public Information Officer (PIO). That would help corral the media that was about. Media should also be sent to a location for any updates or press conferences. Spencer Police Chief Michael Befford also brought up a PIO needs to be made for the town and cannot be the Fire Chief if he/she has a major incident occurring will be tied up and cannot be hounded by the Press. *Spencer needs to figure someone out in town to be a PIO for events that can speak to the press and be on live TV.*

Chief Befford also noted that being only a Chief shortly he was looking for the Fire Chief for guidance, but he was not in town. He worked well with Chief Normandin. He moved around too much and realized he should have stayed close to the Command Post to assist Chief Normandin through a unified command. *Police Chief or OIC should stay with the command post to assist.* Traffic was an absolute nightmare as the fire was on Route 9 and then later when we took away the main detour of Cherry Street to lay hoses down Maple Street. *Need to find out why MSP left their posts and were directed back to patrol by MSP in Holden. Brookfield MSP Lt was fine with it and was overridden by HQ. Their CAD system kept crashing and is antiquated and needs to be replaced. The town is actively looking to replace it with something more robust. Also only having one radio console was a nightmare and only one telephone in dispatch with preprogrammed numbers. This needs to be addressed with some capital funds. At one point we had three dispatchers in, but it was difficult to work with these challenges.*

Dispatcher Holly Collette noted these items.

Command post not knowing where it was located.

We evacuated Senior Living at Prouty, but they had no idea where to.

Dispatch had issues with Highway at first not wanting to come out.

Dispatch needed to know what area streets are being closed off and what the detours are.

Dispatch needs to be able to have that PIO to deal with the Press. They were receiving multiple calls all day from the Press looking for something.

The dispatch CAD system kept crashing and needs to be robust which theirs currently is not.

Only one radio console, need at least two.

Only one phone with preprogrammed phone numbers in dispatch.

Chief Parsons read an email sent from Warren Fire Chief Adam Lavoie who served as the accountability officer during the incident. Advised the first arriving crews did a great job even though they were behind the eight ball right away. Handled it well and backed out and went defensive right away. He was staging but got there after a lot of towns were already there, but incoming towns did a great job checking in as things went along. Some towns did not have accountability tags, which was an issue, but he did his best to write things down. Chief Howe did a great job as crews came to staging to finding a job for them to do and assigned them where operations wanted them. *The biggest take away for him was to keep everyone corralled without a job or the job has been completed and to avoid freelancing and to make sure all members are accounted for that did not have tags. In the future a large-scale event such as this needs multiple accountability officers for each sector.*

East Brookfield Fire Chief David Messier provided the following information. *Pump operators need to remain with their trucks or near radios if requested. Lots of trucks parked that we could have used to set up the relay pumping from Pleasant Street and then later Maple Street. Had an issue with one pump operator of a community which he did not want to name as he would seek out that Chief that refused to be involved with relay pumping and would not move his truck as requested.*

Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Representative Kevin Filchak in attendance stated he was there to help at any time and was in contact with Chief Parsons as he was coming in and just needed to get asked to respond which was done by Chief Parsons. He went to the command post and advised what he could provide and later provided the light towers requested to the scene. He thought the operation went very well overall.

An email from Sandy Fritze Director of Operations from Spencer Emergency Management was discussed as well since she could not attend. The issues with Senior Living at Prouty were already discussed at length with those representatives. As SEMA goes forward, we need to meet with our local businesspeople in town to try and coordinate a better response to requests for food and beverages. As she was going out to

get these items, she found out that businesses had already taken it upon themselves to provide items directly to the fire scene. Creating a backlog of food etc. At one point we had purchased 15 pizzas to find out 30 had already been delivered. While we greatly appreciate the gesture, we just need to better coordinate the food and drinks at large incidents. Also, she received information from at least two chiefs that contradicted the evacuations to Senior Living at Prouty. Need to work on transportation at any event and that was already discussed earlier.

The consensus of all the individuals at the After Action was that Spencer Fire was behind the eight ball from the time of the fire alarm was received and they did an excellent job considering the lack of manpower available during the day as they only had 5 firefighters initially. Mutual Aid is a necessity in today's age, and it shows we do a very good job of it. Towns work very well together. *Spencer will also be reviewing their 10 alarm run cards for their community to see if in the future we a better job of utilizing mutual aid perhaps a little closer than in the end. It will also be noted we were under the impression that there was another structure fire in the town of Oxford at the same time.*

All items that were discussed and mentioned to be worked on to improve our overall response to incidents or a sure positive that were in italicize throughout this document are listed below in order that they appeared.

Lt Parsons stated that with training they had all their PPE on and hand tools with them even though it came in as a fire alarm.

We will work with MEMA on alternative methods of transportation whether we get an MOU from the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA), use of theambu bus from CMED or EMS strike teams. (One was attempted during the fire by the IC Chief Normandin an East 1 EMS strike team but was unable to provide more than 1 ambulance (Douglas) due to another structure fire at the same time in the town of Upton.). We also do not want to tie up ambulances for transport of uninjured people. This will be an action point for the Spencer EMA to come up with solutions working with MEMA.

(Cheat sheet alarm cards) We understand this is difficult to see as the type is small but there are full alarm cards in the apparatus. (No one thought to grab them). More training for all the Spencer Firefighters on the use of the alarms cards and where they are in case of another incident where a Chief Fire Officer is not on scene.

Spencer needs to look at preplanning and better placement of apparatus when responding to calls, especially fire alarms and we get complacent on where we always park.

Dispatch was unaware that they had the capability to do the tone which was already in their console. Chief Parsons has since shown them where the button is and how to accomplish this task. (Warble tone for an announcement)

Dispatch brought up the command post was never recognized where it was set up and therefore, they did not know where to send people when asked. Greg Karpowicz from Spencer Water advised that's why he did not get there right away even though he was on scene right after the fire started. This should be formally announced by any Incident Commander as soon as it's established to dispatch and over the radio.

Even though he had the alarm cards cheat sheet he was unsure who was coming. He recognized he could access them off the District 7 web site as well but did not.

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Realize we need to mark the two zones on Pleasant Street. This was recently discussed with a training course a few months back with the Fire Department and will be taken care of shortly with help from Retired Deputy Chief William Locke. He has volunteered to work with Greg to get them marked. Need to also note on our alarms cards to notify the water department when there is a large event such as this. It's always done but by request of the IC but should be automatic.

Massachusetts State Police that were on scene told people to stop but then they left the area. Police were hampered due to the number of streets affected by the fire and where we had laid hose, but they needed to be at key areas to protect the hose line laid in the streets. Chief Befford will work with local Police Departments and MSP on better relationships and responses for large fires and they need to stay in place.

Use of deck guns on apparatus at large fires like these should be utilized along with ladder pipes to increase suppression efforts.

(5" hose) It was noted that very few towns in District 7 carry it and only a few towns in District 8 as well. Perhaps though a list should be maintained of who has it as it would have been useful for the laying of the large diameter hose to Muzzy Pond

We also noted that we left one 4" line in the street for the task force to utilize for the evening. We should not have done this. Have all companies that laid hose down to pick it

up to return to their towns in service and have the task force lay a new line down for their use.

We must be aware if a pumper/ladder is receiving water from a static source not the municipal system we MUST remove them immediately off the municipal system to not create an issue with cross contamination. We did do that but needs to be noted for the future as well.

Spencer needs to figure someone out in town to be a PIO for events that can speak to the press and be on live TV.

Police Chief or OIC should stay with the command post to assist.

Need to find out why MSP left their posts and were directed back to patrol by MSP in Holden. Brookfield MSP Lt was fine with it and was overridden by HQ. Their CAD system kept crashing and is antiquated and needs to be replaced. The town is actively looking to replace it with something more robust. Also only having one radio console was a nightmare and only one telephone in dispatch with preprogrammed numbers. This needs to be addressed with some capital funds. At one point we had three dispatchers in, but it was difficult to work with these challenges.

Command post not knowing where it was located.

We evacuated Senior Living at Prouty, but they had no idea where to.

Dispatch had issues with Highway at first not wanting to come out.

Dispatch needs to know what area streets are being closed off and what the detours are.

Dispatch needed to be able to have that PIO to deal with the Press. They were receiving multiple calls all day from the Press looking for something.

The dispatch CAD system kept crashing and needs to be robust which theirs currently is not.

Only one radio console, need at least two.

Only one phone with preprogrammed phone numbers in dispatch.

The biggest take away for him was to keep everyone corralled without a job or the job has been completed and to avoid freelancing and to make sure all members are accounted for that did not have tags. In the future a large-scale event such as this needs multiple accountability officers for each sector.

Pump operators need to remain with their trucks or near radios if requested. Lots of trucks parked that we could have used to set up the relay pumping from Pleasant Street and then later on Maple Street. Had an issue with one pump operator of a community which he did not want to name as he would seek out that Chief that refused to be involved with relay pumping and would not move his truck as requested.

Spencer will also be reviewing their 10 alarm run cards for their community to see if in the future we a better job of utilizing mutual aid perhaps a little closer than in the end. It will also be noted we were under the impression that there was another structure fire in the town of Oxford at the same time.

The following attended the After-Action Review:

Name:	Agency:
-	
Mark Holmes	Spencer Fire
Michael Befford	Spencer Police
Kevin Filchak	MEMA
Alex Swan	Spencer Fire
Patrick Murray	Spencer Fire
Holly Collette	Spencer Police Dispatchers
Tim Howe	Oakham Fire
Richard Lapierre	West Brookfield Fire
Michael Dupuis	Leicester Fire
Lilly Kinney	Senior Living at Prouty
Keith Carter	Senior Living at Prouty
Stacy LaBrie	Senior Living at Prouty
Thomas Parsons	Spencer Fire
Connor Donohue	Spencer Fire
Paul Normandin	Southbridge Fire
Michael Pingatore	Paxton Fire
Joseph Holway	North Brookfield Fire
Lisa Daoust	Spencer Health Agent
Greg Karpowicz	Spencer Water Department
David Messier	East Brookfield Fire
William Locke	Spencer Fire
Michael Shea	Spencer Police
Aaron Palmer	Spencer Fire
Benjamin Seymour	Spencer Fire
Patrick Entwistle	Spencer Fire
William Cundiff	Spencer U and F

Robert Parsons

Spencer Fire