



Victor Fire District

Public Hearing on Addition of Paid Fire Chief

VILLAGE OF VICTOR

VICTOR FIRE DISTRICT



Purpose of Public Hearing

To review and evaluate the need for a paid fire chief and to give community members the opportunity to provide input on both the decision and the hiring process should the Fire District decide to move forward with the creation of a paid chief position.



Fire District/Fire Department History

The Victor Volunteer Fire Department was formed in 1904 after a series of fires decimated a significant portion of the Village of Victor. Initially, the Victor Volunteer Fire Department was a part of the Village of Victor and its operations were funded as part of the Village's budget. When it was founded, the Victor Fire Department was subject to oversight by the Village Board of Trustees.

In 2019, in recognition of the challenges facing the fire department, the Victor Fire District was formed by joint resolution of the Town and Village of Victor.

A map of the Victor Fire District in Ontario, Canada. The district boundary is highlighted in a light purple color. The map shows major roads like Highway 90, Highway 96, and Highway 42. Two fire houses are marked with red dots: Fishers House 1 in the northwest and Victor Fire House in the southeast. The text 'VILLAGE OF VICTOR' is visible in the lower right. At the bottom, the text 'VICTOR FIRE DISTRICT' is written in blue. The map also shows surrounding municipalities: Monroeville, Mendon, and Farmington.

Victor Fire District Mission Statement

“The Victor Fire District will provide professional, definitive, and helpful service in all emergencies that we are called to respond, with in and outside our fire protection district. [...]”



Commitment to Community and Staff

“[...]The District is committed to providing exceptional guidance and support to the volunteers, encouraging growth and enhancing their service by aiding them with paid personnel; continuous and comprehensive training; modern equipment; and relevant technologies.

“We welcome and encourage the participation of our residents and businesses in our process and the cooperation of other public agencies to further our mission.”

Changes in Fire and Emergency Services

Fire and emergency services have long been provided through the commitment of community members.

The Victor Volunteer Fire Department and its membership are a prime example of this commitment. The Victor Fire District, through its relationship to the Victor Volunteer Fire Department, recognizes the importance of volunteers and is committed to continuing to support existing volunteers and to provide new and expanded opportunities to community members who serve their community through the fire service.

Changes in Fire and Emergency Services

Although the Victor Fire District is committed to providing fire services using volunteer members, changes in the demographics and availability of volunteers have required the Fire District to add paid firefighting positions to its staff.

- Volunteer firefighter membership has declined since the 1980s. According to FEMA, there are 25% less volunteers in 2020 than there were in 1984.
- The increase in the number of two income households has also contributed to this decline; economic pressures facing families leaves less time for volunteer activities.

Changes in Fire and Emergency Services

The purpose of these paid firefighters is to provide effective fire and emergency services during the day, at a time when many volunteers are not available due to work and other personal obligations.

An added benefit of paid staff is that they are able to address a number of routine maintenance responsibilities that keep the equipment and apparatus ready to respond to the community's call for emergency services.

Fire equipment and apparatus represent a significant portion of the Fire District's budget and paid staff help to maintain the functionality and useful life of the equipment.

Changes in Fire and Emergency Services (cont'd)

Firefighting itself has experienced numerous changes over the years. In addition to staffing issues, including the toll that emergency response can take on a firefighter's mental and physical health, the following changes have had an impact on the fire service:

- Technology advances that assist in fighting fires and require additional training for their use;
- Changes in building materials that present new and unique risks on the scene of a fire emergency; and
- New and emerging energy sources, such as electric vehicles, that present new safety hazards that require non-traditional responses when fighting fires.

Demographic Changes in Victor

In Victor specifically, as the reputation of our schools has grown, so has the focus of the community. Once a farming community with blue collar ties, we are seeing families moving into Victor for the express purpose of accessing the school. The family's focus is on the academic, extracurricular, and athletic pursuits of the children, which places great demands on the parents' time. Often, the parents leave soon after the children graduate.

With this in mind, parents are not available to join organizations like the fire department.

Membership Data and Call History

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Membership (Volunteer)	42	45	50	45	41
<i>Interior</i>	19	19	21	17	15
<i>Exterior</i>	18	22	19	17	19
Active Members	25	23	23	26	20
Career (“Paid”) Staff	0	0	2	2	3
Total Number of Calls	313	413	411	406	360

- 2024 data is through the end of the 3rd quarter.
- The difference between interior and exterior firefighting is primarily one of training and activities on scene. Interior takes an investment of 2-3 years to achieve.
- To be an “active” member, a volunteer must meet certain annual participation requirements such as attendance at drills and responses to calls.

Responsibilities of Fire Chief

The Fire Chief reports directly to the Board of Fire Commissioners and is responsible for the operations of the fire department. Responsibilities of the Fire Chief include:

- Exclusive control of the members of the fire department at all fires, inspections, reviews, and other occasions when the fire department is on duty or on parade;
- Supervision of the engines, fire trucks, pumpers, hose wagons, and other apparatus and of the equipment and other property used for the prevention or extinguishment of fires
- Supervision of all officers and employees of the fire department
- Ensure that the rules and regulations of the Board of Fire Commissioners are observed and that the orders of the Board are duly executed

Responsibilities of Fire Chief (cont'd)

- Reporting to the Board of Fire Commissioners on the condition of the fire district and other information that is required of him by the Board and/or the law; and
- Holding members, officers, and employees of the fire department strictly to account for neglect of duty and may suspend them for improper conduct, subject to the action of the Board of Fire Commissioners
- Additional responsibility for determining the cause or potential cause of fires or explosions to which the department has responded to and to file reports regarding same

See New York Town Law, Section 176-a and General Municipal Law Section 204-d.

Code of Ethics Applicable to Fire Departments and Fire Districts

In recognition of the expanded budgets and responsibilities of fire department and fire district staff members, volunteers, and officers, New York state law requires that all officers, employees, and volunteers of fire departments and fire districts to adopt and follow a Code of Ethics.

Fire departments and fire districts have large budgets, purchase expensive equipment, and have a great responsibility to the community; the Code of Ethics recognizes this and ensures that all involved act in the best interest of the community.

Benefits Available to Volunteers

- Property tax reductions
- State income tax benefits
- Free health checkups
- Length of Service Award Program
- College tuition reimbursement
- Service pensions
- Free equipment and training, training stipends

These are programs that the Fire Chief helps to oversee and to ensure that members have access to the benefits available under the law.

A map of the Victor Fire District in Ontario, Canada. The map shows a network of roads, including major highways like 96 and 42. A blue dashed line outlines the district's boundary. A red dot in the upper left is labeled 'Fishers House 1'. The text 'VICTOR FIRE DISTRICT' is printed in blue at the bottom right. The map also shows the boundaries of 'MORRIS COUNTY - TOWN OF MENDON' and 'ONTARIO COUNTY - TOWN OF VICTOR'.

Volunteer vs. Paid Chief

Currently, the Victor Fire Department operates with a volunteer chief. The issue with this is that volunteer chiefs are often spread too thin to meet all of their duties and responsibilities.

Balancing work and family life with the responsibilities of the Fire Chief duties is a difficult task and the volunteer position often is given the lowest priority.

Areas of Focus Identified for a Paid Chief

- **Volunteer recruiting**

While the Victor Fire District has added career staff members to its roster, we are committed to continuing our longstanding support of volunteerism. To do this, we need to grow our volunteer ranks and a paid chief would have the time and ability to engage in community outreach.

- **Maintenance of Equipment and other Fire District Investments**

The Victor Fire District maintains a significant number of fire and emergency vehicles which require regular maintenance and care. A paid chief whose full time job is to the Fire District will be better positioned to ensure that equipment and apparatus are properly maintained to achieve a maximum service life.

Areas of Focus Identified for a Paid Chief

- **Oversight and mentoring of career staff**

Given the small size of the career staff in the Victor Fire District, it is important for these staff members to feel as though they are being trained and mentored by the fire chief; the presence of a paid chief during the career staff's working hours will help to ensure that these individuals feel supported in their personal growth and contributions to the organization and may reduce membership turnover.

- **Relationship between career staff and volunteer members**

It is central to the goals of the Victor Fire District to maintain a teamwork atmosphere between career staff and volunteers with a shared understanding that the career staff is intended to support and augment the volunteers – not replace them. Appropriate leadership and training for both groups by a paid chief will assist in creating the tone and team building necessary to achieve this goal.

Process to Create Paid Chief Position

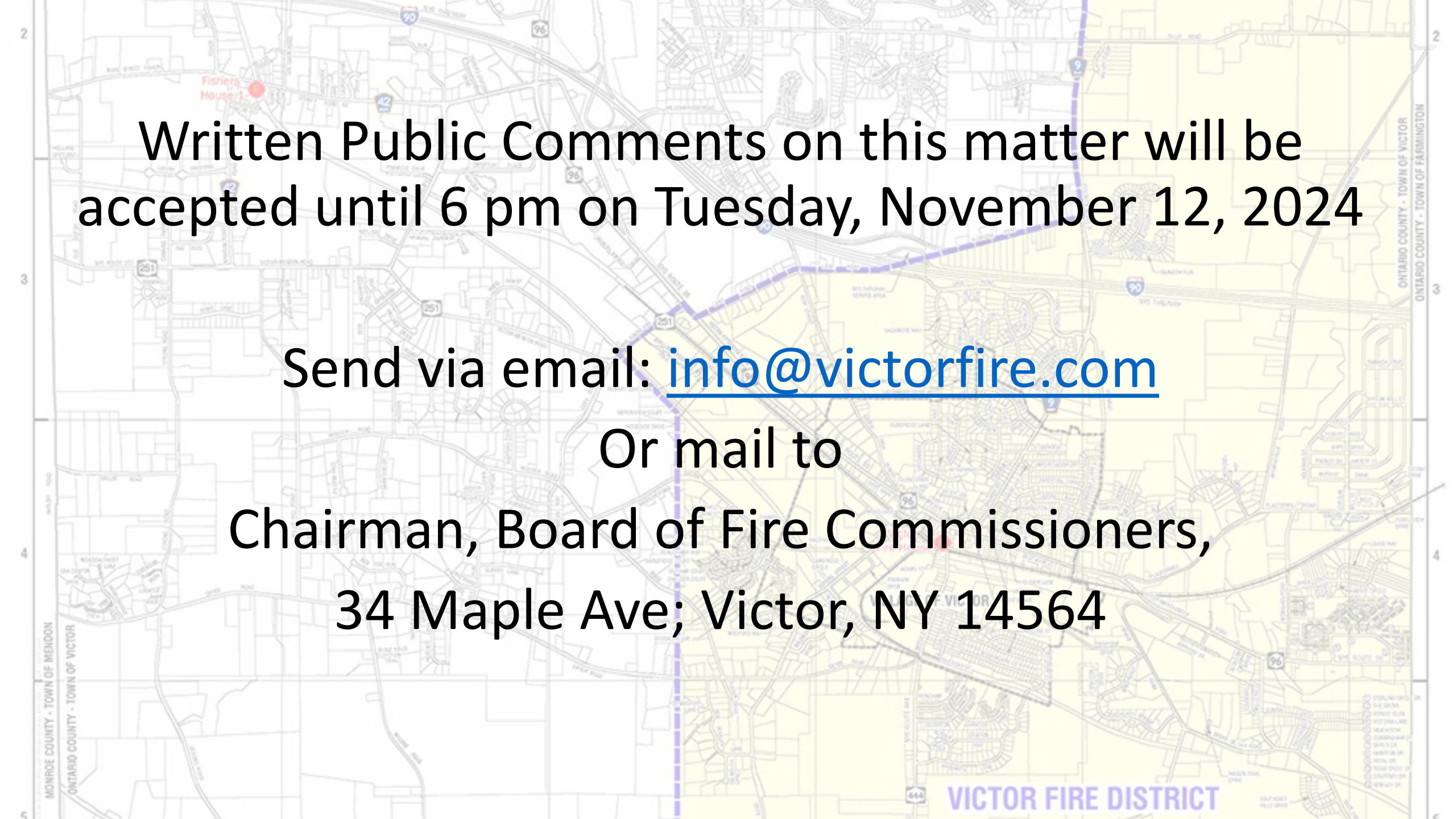
- **Public Hearing** – part of our commitment to transparency to and input from the community
- **Budget Process** – recognizing the cost of the addition of this position, the budget process has reviewed how this position can be absorbed into the budget in such a way as to offset the additional salary through efficiencies and other cost savings
- **Hiring process** – will be developed in such a way as to include participation from the volunteer members of the organization, members of the community, and other stakeholders

Timeline for Addition of Paid Chief

- **Public Hearing – October 29, 2024**
- **District Resolution – date to be determined; will occur after the Board has the opportunity to review community and membership feedback**
- **Job Posting – posting period will be at least 30 days**
- **Interview Process – given the need to include all stakeholders and to thoroughly review all candidates and their suitability for the role, this could take up to three months**
- **Projected Start Date – late 2025, early 2026**

Goals for Paid Chief

- The paid chief will be expected to be an ambassador for the Victor Fire Department and the Fire District in the community, with career staff, and, most importantly, with volunteers.
- The paid chief will work with assistant chiefs, who will continue to be elected by the Fire Department membership. The membership will be given the opportunity to work directly with the paid chief and to provide feedback on the direction of the department and the activities of the paid chief.
- Ultimately, the paid chief will report directly to the Board of Fire Commissioners; however, the Board is committed to ensuring that the paid chief meets the needs of the membership and the community in a positive and effective manner.



Written Public Comments on this matter will be accepted until 6 pm on Tuesday, November 12, 2024

Send via email: info@victorfire.com

Or mail to
Chairman, Board of Fire Commissioners,
34 Maple Ave; Victor, NY 14564