

MINUTES
COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

November 3, 2025

Mayor Jason DeFrance opened with the pledge of allegiance with Deputy Mayor Tim Ridenour leading in prayer. The Town of White Hall Council meeting was held in the Council Chambers at the Town of White Public Safety Building and called to order by Mayor Jason DeFrance at 6:00 p.m.

Officers Roll Call:

<i>Mayor Jason DeFrance</i>	<i>Present</i>
<i>Deputy Mayor Tim Ridenour</i>	<i>Present</i>
<i>Councilmember Bob Wotring</i>	<i>Present</i>
<i>Councilmember Kristine Mason</i>	<i>Present</i>
<i>Treasurer John Jacobs</i>	<i>Present</i>
<i>Councilmember Mandy Espanol</i>	<i>Present</i>
<i>Recorder Charles Mason</i>	<i>Absent with Pay</i>

Also present:

Town Administrator Cindy Stover
Town Attorney Trey Simmerman
Chief of Police Geno Guerrieri
Deputy Chief of Police Jakob Streyle

A quorum was present.

Deputy Mayor Tim Ridenour made a motion to excuse Recorder Charles Mason with pay due to illness.

Motion passed.

New Business to Consider:

Discussion with Valley Volunteer Fire Department:

Mayor Jason DeFrance went through a PowerPoint presentation which first went over the payments the Town of White Hall makes for the space Valley VFD uses at the White Hall Public Safety Building.

Mayor Jason DeFrance then went over the previous and current lease, stating that as of the end of 2021 Valley VFD is on a month-to-month lease and is charged \$35 a month which consists of

\$10 the Town is required to charge by the state and a \$25 cleaning fee. No fees have been collected from Valley VFD. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that the Town of White Hall pays for all maintenance.

Mayor Jason DeFrance then went over numbers pulled from January 2025 to present calls. There were 894 calls with 218 being in White Hall. Valley VFD responded to 140 calls.

A first due map was then viewed which showed that White Hall is Valley VFD's first due.

Mayor Jason DeFrance discussed the growth of White Hall and the steps the Town has had to take because of the growth.

Mayor Jason DeFrance then went through a timeline of happenings and discussions between the Town and Valley VFD, beginning at the May 27, 2025 Council Meeting.

Funds collected and given to Valley VFD from the Town of White Hall by fire fees were then listed by Mayor Jason DeFrance which is \$220,000 from 2021 to 2025. Mayor Jason DeFrance then gave information on the Town's fire fees.

Mayor Jason DeFrance then stated that when Valley VFD asked for more funding from Council, a financial report was requested and not received.

Mayor Jason DeFrance then went over a few separate incidents for clarity and discussions.

Mayor Jason DeFrance then went over the timeline which included a discussion held between Mayor Jason DeFrance and Boothsville VFD on August 11 on their service area, a Council meeting on October 13th, a phone call between Valley VFD Chief Yost and Deputy Chief Eakle and Boothsville on October 13th regarding the August 11th phone call, and the removal of equipment in the bays of the White Hall substation by Valley VFD on October 14th.

Before and after pictures of the bay at the White Hall substation were then viewed.

Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that after a discussion between Mayor DeFrance and Town Administrator Cindy Stover on October 15th, a letter as sent to Valley VFD terminating the month to month lease. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that a workshop was confirmed with Council for November 3rd on the same day, and Deputy Chief Eakle and Mayor Jason DeFrance also had a conversation about Valley VFD abandoning the station, Town may have a better use for that space with its growth, options for using partial space if that works better for Valley VFD, and the scheduling of the Workshop to have further discussions.

Lastly, Mayor DeFrance stated that on October 21st he heard about Valley VFD doing a story with WBOY by getting a call from the reporter.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief, Zac Eakle, then spoke to Mayor Jason DeFrance and Council, first

asking why and whose authority the letter was sent to Valley VFD. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that the letter was sent to Valley VFD by Town Administrator Cindy Stover under his authority. Mayor Jason DeFrance explained that an ordinance that created the Town Administrator allows Town Administrator Cindy Stover to act on behalf of Council because of the size of the Town.

A discussion was then held on communicating prior to sending a letter, where Mayor of neighboring city, Pleasant Valley, Emily Haddix stated she sent a letter on behalf of Valley VFD to the Marion County Sheriff's Department asking for clarity on concerns of unknown authority being challenged when on-ramps were blocked and things were done that were impeding. Pleasant Valley Mayor Emily Haddix stated that she sent the letter from the City of Pleasant Valley after having conversations with not just the Valley VFD but also a couple Marion County Sheriff Deputies who had the same concerns.

A discussion was held on mutual aid.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief, Zac Eakle, explained to Council his reasoning for being a volunteer firefighter and asked for clarity on if Valley VFD is on a yearly or month-to-month lease. Town Attorney Trey Simmeman stated that Valley VFD signed a yearly lease in 2021 and at its expiration is now a month-to-month lease.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief, Zac Eakle, then listed some things off to Council, first stating that he had sent texts to Town Administrator Cindy Stover about getting a few guys in and hadn't gotten a response and felt a disconnection, but that the Town has no problem reaching out about fireworks.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle stated that despite what the numbers on the slideshow showed, Valley VFD has a 100% response rate.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle stated that if the Town needs space for Public Works equipment, reach out to Valley VFD.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle went on to say that they did take everything out of the White Hall substation, including cages out of there with gear, and left the ladder truck and they don't have a place to put it at the moment. Eakle stated that in case the ladder truck is needed, someone from the area will come from Pleasant Valley will come to White Hall and grab the ladder truck with no gear here. Eakle explained that when the fire department gets a call, they use an app called Active 911 to register they're going to the fire and another firefighter will see that and bring their gear for them to the fire. Eakle then spoke on the old hose left at the White Hall substation which is 800 feet of hosing which White Hall paid to get tested.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle stated that financial statements were given to Town Administrator Cindy Stover in 2022 and 2023. Eakle went on to say that they don't have an accountant that works for Valley VFD and he operates out of 9 accounts which were audited in

2022 and 2024. Eakle then stated that all this was given to their tax lady which is off of Boulevard Ave in Buckhannon and can bring those to the Town again.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief, Zac Eakle, then stated that from 2022 to 2025, \$1.1 million was given to Valley VFD for equipment money by the City of Pleasant Valley. Eakle stated that the Mayor and the City of Pleasant Valley have kept them up-to-date and afloat and they're very thankful for that.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief, Zac Eakle, then spoke on the incident in front of Toothman Sowers. Eakle spoke on the policies and by-laws about entrapment in a vehicle and a paramedic being present. Eakle went on to say that if White Hall PD decided to pull a patient from the vehicle, there could be liabilities that come with that and talked about a woman in attendance at the meeting who suffers from serious back issues due to not being done correctly.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief, Zac Eakle, then spoke on a vehicle accident with no injuries in front of Mon Power. Eakle stated that the call was escalated to MVA with injuries and that per code, it is the fire department's call if it is a MVA with injuries.

Lastly, Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle stated that he isn't sure what is going on, and he didn't know that a Town wanted to argue with a bunch of volunteer firemen who are trying to help.

Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that White Hall PD has come to him stating that they are uncomfortable being on calls with Valley VFD due to past incidences. A discussion throughout the room was held on communication and whose responsibility it is to reach out and communicate any issues. Valley VFD firefighter Eric Floyd asked if it was the mayor's responsibility to resolve issues if they're brought to his attention. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that if he did this about every single issue, nothing else would get done. However, DeFrance stated that after hearing about the accumulation of issues, he did reach out to Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle at a scene at Winston's Tire and Eakle stated it wasn't a big deal and there were no issues. Eakle confirmed he did say that at the time it wasn't a big deal. Mayor Jason DeFrance then stated that after that conversation with Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle, DeFrance then called Boothsville VFD Fire Chief on August 11th as stated in the timeline earlier. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that from then until October 13th nothing went on until DeFrance was alerted that Valley VFD had pulled their stuff from the building and was upset about how much money they get from the Town of White Hall.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle stated that while White Hall gave Valley VFD \$25,000 for fire fees, \$5,000 for fireworks, and the \$5,000 for hose testing it is irritating when people come to Valley VFD and say White Hall is growing, and that White Hall Police Department gets around \$900,000 and Valley VFD is still only getting \$25,000 a year and it's a slap in the face they aren't getting enough financial assistance. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that White Hall PD is a paid department and White Hall Chief of Police Geno Guerrieri submits a yearly budget that is voted on yearly by Council. DeFrance then went on to explain that White Hall has charged a fire fee

since 1999 and the disconnect is when the fire levy passed in 2021, it was to even the playing field because the Town has a lot of areas of what is considered White Hall but actually isn't White Hall. DeFrance explained that the Town even looked into extending fire fees onto first due areas but were told they weren't allowed to since Valley VFD are volunteers. DeFrance explained how he didn't want to put the burden on White Hall businesses to make up for those outside of White Hall.

Meeting attendee Chuck Stalnaker stated that it seems like where this originally started is authority of jurisdiction and since the Town has an attorney, if Council would have asked the attorney about jurisdiction it would have been resolved. Town Attorney Trey Simmerman stated that every relationship is a two-way street, and he has learned by hearing both sides this is a communication issue between two entities and trying to put the burden on one party in a relationship is not a fair take on the issues being discussed tonight.

Pleasant Valley Mayor, Emily Haddix, stated that she would like to make a note that Mayor Jason DeFrance stated he hadn't heard of the letter sent by Haddix to Marion County Sheriff's Dept. but Haddix and DeFrance spoke about the letter the day the letter was sent. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that he knew of the letter after speaking with Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zack Eakle on August 11th. Haddix stated that this all stems from the letter that was personally sent from Haddix, not Valley VFD, after speaking to several Marion County Sheriff Deputies. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that from August 11th to October 13th there were no discussions about it. Haddix stated she called Mayor Jason DeFrance out of respect within the hour of sending the letter. Haddix went on to say that the main thing she is concerned about it that these are volunteers who have full-time jobs outside of this, and the Town has put them in the position where they have nowhere to put their trucks. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that is why this meeting is being held. Haddix argued this meeting is being held in response to the issue going public to which DeFrance stated this was scheduled before it went public. Town Attorney Trey Simmerman asked parties to be respectful and not talk over one another.

Tim Eakle, Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle's father, stated that he enjoyed the PowerPoint as it was very informative because he didn't know the building costs that much and the Town pays a bond on it. Tim Eakle went on to say that there isn't a VFD in the country who isn't in trouble, except Valley VFD, and that is because of all their volunteer firefighters. Tim Eakle discussed the money it takes to run a VFD and his concerns with not having the funds for important maintenance. Tim Eakle stated that there has been no communication between Valley VFD and the Town. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that this meeting is the most helpful thing that could happen to open up communication.

Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that this subject will be put on the next agenda for the Council Meeting on Monday, November 10th and be voted on. Discussions can continue to be held until then. DeFrance stated that no one wants the fire trucks put out in the cold. DeFrance went on to say that when the building was built, there was a vision that the fire department would spend more time here as we have a workout room, restrooms, day room, kitchen, and day room and stated that maybe Valley VFD could get to the that point to have a paid/volunteer department in

White Hall.

A member of the Valley VFD stated that it sounds like the expectations were off from the get-go as volunteer fire departments aren't what they used to be, and firefighters work full-time jobs and would rather be home on their time off.

Pleasant Valley Mayor Emily Haddix stated that she remembered another point on the PowerPoint Mayor Jason DeFrance presented and wanted to bring up that whenever Pleasant Valley has received any and everything financial they've ever asked of Valley VFD. When asked by Mayor Jason DeFrance, Town Administrator Cindy Stover stated she was given bank statements a spreadsheet of working papers, not a financial report. Valley VFD Secretary and Treasurer Jerry Pinson stated that it was brought to his attention that Town Administrator Cindy Stover wanted to see those things and so Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle printed off everything from White Hall and Pinson brought those to a White Hall Council meeting and gave those to Stover. A discussion was held on bank statements not being a financial report. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that typically a financial report shows expenses. Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle stated they do not do that and he doesn't have an itemized list for a budget.

Mayor Jason DeFrance asked Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle if the new ladder truck has put added pressure on their financials. Deputy Chief Zac Eakle stated that it has not added pressure, they are just looking for more financial assistance. Valley VFD Secretary and Treasurer stated that the ladder truck is around \$21,000 a year and White Hall gives \$25,000 a year.

Mayor Jason DeFrance stated he doesn't want to nickel and dime White Hall businesses and residents. A discussion was held on raising fire fees and that they must be raised evenly across the board between residents and businesses. DeFrance stated that ideally what he would like to do is that if Valley VFD does end up with some sort of paid/volunteer department in the future, he would like to extend the first due. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that he thinks we need a better understanding of everyone's role and expectations and he believes everyone is there for the right reasons.

Pleasant Valley Mayor Emily Haddix asked if the letter was still in effect with it being 10 days away. Mayor DeFrance stated that Council will vote on this on November 10th. When asked by Mayor Jason DeFrance if an extension was possible, Town Attorney Trey Simmerman stated that they could talk on that this week if that's the direction Council is going. Town Attorney Trey Simmerman went on to say that he would be amiss if he didn't mention that to be proactive, to look at the Berkeley County model of a metro style fire department. A discussion was held on the benefits of metro-style, also known as county-wide, fire departments.

Deputy Mayor Tim Ridenour stated that he would like to see some of the volunteer activities here in White Hall. Valley VFD firefighter, Fred McDonald, stated that he understands that the Town would like to see more firefighters in White Hall but they don't have the money to buy the gear for White Hall and Pleasant Valley, so it doesn't make sense to do that. Mayor Jason DeFrance

said that it sounds like expectations weren't clear of the Valley VFD at the White Hall substation by previous administration for Valley VFD and the Town.

Valley VFD Firefighter, Tim Eakle, stated that he believes this stems from when the Valley VFD first came to White Hall a lot of their equipment was outdated. Tim Eakle stated that Valley VFD asked for \$12,000 for new radios and the Town gave \$250 and that felt like a slap in the face. Tim Eakle stated that ever since then, people talk about that and remember that. Tim Eakle stated that he thinks the best thing to do is start on a clean page and communicate. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated he isn't sure who made that decision, but he agrees that communication needs to happen.

Mayor Jason DeFrance then talked about how he believes that there is also a disconnect with the financial situation, and that he recommended Valley VFD have a financial report so they can be prepared for unexpected costs.

Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that he thinks that was a good, long overdue meeting and the Town has nothing but the upmost respect for Valley VFD. DeFrance stated that now we need to look at some things that we didn't realize were an issue and gain a better understanding.

Final Remarks:

Treasurer John Jacobs asked Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle to talk more on first due and clarify more on first due and the little blue car incident. Jacobs asked Eakle if White Hall PD sees a patient panicking and wants to help, who is to decide who can help. Eakle stated the fire dept is who should be helping that patient, and if they aren't there yet to wait for them to get there and explained patient care and removing the patient in the safest way possible. A discussion was then held on training that the fire department receives that the police department doesn't, and the proper procedures.

Mayor Jason DeFrance asked to clarify traffic control and Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle stated that if there are injuries, the fire department controls traffic.

Pleasant Valley Mayor Emily Haddix stated that she would like to clarify with what Treasurer John Jacobs's had spoken on, that Haddix's only concern was within the City of Pleasant Valley and stated Pleasant Valley's city boundaries. Haddix stated that Valley VFD has never once not responded to a call and White Hall is mutual aid, but when in the City of Pleasant Valley when several departments are on scene, it gets too crowded and that was Haddix's concern and reason for sending the letter to Marion County Sheriff's Dept.

Pleasant Valley Mayor Emily Haddix went on to say she wasn't aware that her letter transpired into Valley VFD receiving a letter from the Town that they have 30 days to move millions of dollars' worth of equipment. Haddix stated that she hopes that Council does give Valley VFD an extension.

Councilmember Bob Wotring stated that he thinks this has been a fruitful meeting to get some communication together. Wotring stated that he perceived that Valley VFD had just left town, and he doesn't know the history, but knows that since he has been on Council when Valley VFD has asked for funding, Wotring feels like Council has done their part to help out.

To Wrap Up, Mayor Jason DeFrance showed a PowerPoint screen that mentioned the Berkeley County model discussed, allowing Valley to continue to keep trucks on a month to month basis with a financial review. Valley VFD Tim Eakle stated that he didn't agree with the point of having a full financial review and it doesn't sit well. Tim Eakle stated that if the Town wants an audit, the Town would have to pay for it. Councilmember Mandy Espanol asked why it was so difficult to get together a financial statement, and Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle stated that it costs money. Zac Eakle stated that Valley VFD used to pay someone \$6500 a year to do that but cut that service. Zac Eakle stated that Valley VFD bylaws state they have a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and 5 board members and those individuals have a monthly board meeting that goes over their yearly financials, what is in their 8 accounts, what is spent out, and what is approved. Zac Eakle stated that he became a volunteer firefighter to help and was roped into doing financials. Tim Eakle stated that the Town was putting conditions on the Valley VFD already, and there is a trust issue. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that they must remember the Town is stewards of taxpayers' money. Tim Eakle stated he understands that and that it is all public information. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated he believes that tax returns are public information. Chuck Stalnaker stated that every Fire Department in Marion County submits a financial statement to the levy board. Marion County Commissioner Ernie Vanguilder stated that he would think that report would be sufficient if Valley VFD will supply that to the Town of White Hall.

Valley VFD Firefighter Tim Eakle asked Mayor Jason DeFrance if Valley VFD will have to wait to hear about the lease until the Town gets Valley VFD's financial review and approve. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that this was drafted prior to this discussion and that it is not necessarily true. Pleasant Valley Mayor Emily Haddix stated that she would like to make it clear that White Hall is still Valley VFD's first due regardless of whether they are in this building or not.

Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that discussions will continue to be held this week for the meeting on November 10th where this will be voted on. DeFrance reiterated that communication was the issue with both parties. Mayor Jason DeFrance then stated that he would like everyone to use their best judgement in the field, as different situations come up and remember that this is to help every business, resident, and person who drives through our area. Mayor Jason DeFrance reiterated possible solutions of a month-to-month lease, a paid/volunteer fire department, more firefighter presence in White Hall, and stated that whatever resolution that everyone comes up with needs to work for the community. Valley VFD Firefighter Eric Floyd asked where the funding would come from to have paid firefighters. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that if firefighters were partially paid, he would explore raising the fire fees because it may justify the cost if residents and businesses have a paid fire department. Mayor Jason DeFrance then stated that he may be able to extend first due to those areas outside of White Hall that most people assume are White Hall to share the costs.

Meeting attendee, Erin Henderson, asked Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle how much money Pleasant Valley has given Valley VFD the past couple years. Eakle stated that \$1.1 was given from the City of Pleasant Valley to Valley VFD. Henderson asked at one point are those funds shared and White Hall give more to Valley VFD. Henderson stated that residents of Pleasant Valley pay 2.5% of every utility bill to go toward emergency services. Pleasant Valley Emily Haddix stated that she thinks Henderson's argument is that the equipment that Valley VFD is using purchased from funds given from Pleasant Valley is also being used in White Hall, so when is the cost also shared. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that he has no control over Pleasant Valley numbers or budget but it's great that they can do that. Mayor Emily Haddix stated that if there was a large commercial fire, it would more than likely be in White Hall. Mayor Jason DeFrance reminded Mayor Haddix that there are 4 hotels in Pleasant Valley.

Pleasant Valley Mayor Emily Haddix then stated that it is a slap in the face that the Town won't fund the volunteers but may fund a paid department. Mayor Haddix also stated that the Valley VFD now feels insecure being in the Public Safety Building, and so she hopes Council doesn't take offense if they pull out due to the insecurities. Mayor Jason DeFrance stated that if a lease is signed, Valley VFD could feel confident and that discussions need to be held. Mayor Haddix stated that this meeting is to have the discussion and giving Valley VFD the time and understanding why the letter was sent from the Town to evict Valley VFD. Mayor Haddix stated that it has to be a discussion between Pleasant Valley and Valley VFD because the Town isn't giving the clarity to know they are safe and their equipment is safe in White Hall. Town Attorney Trey Simmerman asked for decorum in a meeting and have respect when speaking when Pleasant Valley Mayor Emily Haddix questioned Mayor Jason DeFrance on raising fire fees in White Hall to pay for a paid department.

Valley VFD Deputy Chief Zac Eakle thanked Council for their time, Pleasant Valley Mayor Emily Haddix for speaking on behalf of Valley VFD, stated he didn't know why the Town of White Hall's lawyer needed to intervene during a respectful conversation, and then stated that Valley VFD is leaving.

Valley VFD then left the meeting.

Adjournment:

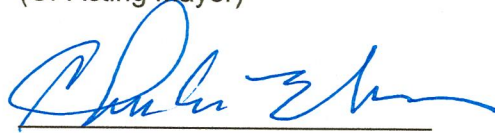
Deputy Mayor Tim Ridenour made the motion to adjourn.

Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:10 pm.



Mayor Jason DeFrance
(Or Acting Mayor)



Recorder Charles Mason
(Or Acting Recorder)

Minutes prepared by Kristin Kirk