

MINUTES OF HAVERHILL FIRE COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday, November 26, 2012
Draft Subject to Review, Correction and Approval at Following Meeting

Members Present: Rick Ladd, Howard Hatch, Don Hammond, Deb McDanolds, Shawn Bigelow, Mike Bonanno, Richard Morris, Rich Clifford, Dick Guy, Joe Maccini, Chris Demers, and Brad Kennedy

Member Excused: Mike Lavoie

Staff Present: Glenn English, Town Manager and Karen Hyde, Clerk

Call Meeting to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM

Rick Ladd introduced Joe Maccini to the Committee members. Mr. Ladd stated the ways things were left at the last meeting was they were trying to get all the figures for what each fire department spends from various other sources other than from the Town. He stated that they did receive that information. He passed out two sheets of new information. The first sheet was the Fire Department budgets for 2012 broken down per department and the total amount. The second sheet was a possible new formula for the Fire Departments. He asked TM English to explain the different columns on the second sheet. TM English stated that the information on the second sheet was documented with the DRA with the final tax rate for the Town and the precincts of 2012 based on final assessed value. The first column was the precinct; the second column was the 2012 amount to be collected from property taxes for each precinct; the next column was the precinct cost to operate the Fire Department. The next column is the monies raised by the department; the next column was the total needed for each precinct, which was the total of the precinct cost and fund raising monies. The next column was the 2012 MS1 Value of assessed property; the next column was the precinct tax rate as it is now; the next column was the taxes collected for each precinct if the Town took over costs; the next was what the Precinct Tax Rate would be if the Town funded all costs and then the net savings to the rate per 1,000 per each of the precincts. The bottom part of the sheet was the impact on the Town – the first column is the 2012 amount of taxes collected (\$1,809,433). If the Town took over all the precinct costs, the amount needed to be collected from taxes would be \$2,005,243, which would raise the town rate from \$5.156 to \$5.714, with a net increase to the Town rate of 0.558 cents per thousand. For example, on a property valued at \$100,000, the Town tax rate would go up \$56. Joe Maccini stated that the Committee must be in unanimous agreement to any changes so that when the voters ask questions there would be consistent answers.

Mr. Ladd then asked if there were any issues which they wanted to bring forward or did they want to look back and decide if they wanted to do this or maybe make a recommendation to the Selectboard. Joe Maccini asked how many areas of the Town were getting hit by the in lieu of taxes deal like the Opera Block, AHEAD housing and others that don't pay any taxes. He was told that it was just Woodsville. Rick Ladd commented that the schools and churches don't pay taxes either. Mr. Ladd stated that he had heard about issues on how the Commissioners were paying stipends to the Chiefs and some of the officers. He asked if everyone was comfortable with what the Fire Departments had set and recommended to their Commissioners to leave as is. Howard Hatch said no. Brad Kennedy asked to go back to the minutes of the first meeting as to what the Committee was actually supposed to be doing, which was not reorganizing the Fire Departments. Mr. Ladd stated that they were not reorganizing; they needed to come up with recommendations to take to Town Meeting, where Townspeople will be asking about the pay issues.

Mr. Ladd asked if there were any issues on how the budgets had been put together and was there any disagreement with moving forward with something such as this? Rich Clifford asked that the Fire

Departments were going to be getting their money from the Town, but the precincts still run the Fire Departments. Mr. Ladd stated that the statutes hadn't changed; it's just where the money was coming from. Dick Guy asked who the departments would answer to for their budgets. If the money is coming from the Town; the Town is holding the purse strings. For example, if Woodsville wants to buy a helicopter, is the Town just going to pay for it? Who has the ultimate control over the budgets? The budgets would be decided by the precinct commissioners. The Town of Haverhill through Town Meeting would be the final approval.

Rick Ladd stated that all departments would be coming into this with some debt. There were comments about the Chiefs getting together once a year to go over equipment needs. Rick Ladd stated that they would be saving money by talking. Howard Hatch asked if everything was on the table that needed to be on the table. He asked Brad Kennedy about the lease on their truck. Mr. Hatch felt that things were not entirely on the table and he just wanted to see things moving forward. He stated that the chiefs should work together, not just deciding who needs a new truck in what order, but everything as far as fire equipment. He wondered about buying in bulk whether they would get a better deal on radios, etc. He was told that they didn't think that was the case. Don Hammond also told Mr. Hatch that it really didn't matter how much equipment they bought, the price of equipment was going up. Brad Kennedy stated that there wouldn't be a lot of discount.

Rick Ladd stated that there was no centralized purchasing, so basically they were losing money. The recommendation he had heard was that the chiefs needed to get together prior to submitting their budgets, work together, in terms of the large pieces of equipment, not just trucks, to see if they can start purchasing similar types of equipment. If they could get on the same wavelength, they could start saving some dollars in interchangeable equipment that would be great to have. The same thing would go for trucks. If you're going to buy a truck, does that truck complement the other vehicles that we have in the total mission in Haverhill. Mr. Ladd stated that he thought that the chiefs getting together and discussing equipment needs before submitting budgets to their commissioners would be a good step forward.

Rick Ladd asked who put the budgets together before it comes to the commissioners? He asked if it was voted on by the fire guys. He wasn't familiar with how it was done. Was it put together by all the firemen and did they vote on it? Rick Morris said that he went over it with his officers and they agreed on it and then presented it to the Commissioners. Brad Kennedy said that they did it by the Board of Officers. North Haverhill keeps the same budget year to year. Don Hammond stated that when they did increase the budget, they got together with the officers. The last three years, their budget had stayed the same. Brad Kennedy said theirs had, too. The budgets then went to the Commissioners and then to the precinct. Rick Ladd said that with the proposed Town funding, after precinct approval, the Fire Department budgets would go to the Town Manager, go to the Budget Advisory Group; then the Selectboard will have a hearing on it prior to March, sometime in January or February.

Dick Guy stated that they had a truck that was partially dedicated to rescue and it serves 8 towns, not just the Town of Haverhill. He wanted this fact out there so that everybody knows. Dick Guy said that they had tried 3 or 4 years ago to go to the 8 participating towns and asked them if they would be willing to pay and they all turned it down. Joe Maccini said that it was good to have it out on the table, so that when someone asks about it, they had an answer. This was a cost that Woodsville was bringing to this Committee. TM English asked why the 8 participating towns didn't pay for the truck and Dick Guy stated that it was part of a truck, not a separate truck. He also stated that the ambulance and the rescue work together because they go together. The towns that participate are Groton, Ryegate, Newbury, Monroe, Bath, Landaff, Benton, and Haverhill. Rick Ladd asked Joe Maccini if those 8 communities give us anything back in kind. Joe replied that no and he felt that this would be a point of contention when this was presented to the voters. Joe and Dick were asked why that cost wasn't added to their per

capita and they replied that they had tried and it failed. The charges for Benton would also come to the Town, as well as any money collected for fire inspections.

Rick Ladd stated that he had talked with Tom Andros and that the Haverhill Corner charge to Benton of \$750 was very weak compared to many towns in northern New Hampshire. The other towns are getting up to close to \$1,000 now. They need to move in that direction because they've been sitting on the \$750 figure for a long time. Don Hammond stated that they were not losing money the way they were doing it now. This was just a stand-by fee for the year and then they bill if they have to go out. Rick Ladd stated that it was more of a fairness issue. There are other costs besides just labor; there is insurance, maintenance and these service costs need to be paid. Dick Guy stated that they really didn't have all the information to make a judgment. They know what the total valuation of Haverhill is and they could come up with total budget, but they don't know the total valuation of Benton. He was told that was public information and they could get that figure. He thought that if they were going to try and make a fair assessment on whether they are paying their fair share, they needed to know that information. Rick Ladd stated that the question of what to charge surrounding towns for fire/rescue should be discussed amongst the fire chiefs. Joe Maccini asked if there was any way to pass off some costs to Grafton County. Rick Ladd stated that there were some things they were getting back in kind from Grafton County.

Rick Ladd then asked if they were all in agreement about moving forward with bringing this new formula to the Selectboard. He asked if they should make a recommendation that the chiefs work together in complementing their equipment and trying to look at those efficiencies in the budget preparation process. Dick Guy thought that he and Brad Kennedy might have different perspectives on buying something; he would be looking at a cost and Brad would be looking at a need. He was wondering if a commissioner from each district as well as the fire chiefs so that you would have both sides of the equation at the meeting. Dick Guy made the motion to accept the formula; seconded by Joe Maccini, but there was further discussion. Brad Kennedy stated that he would like someone to explain the process to him again. TM English replied that the fire department budgets go to the Commissioners, then to the Town Manager, the Budget Committee next, then the Selectboard and then to Town Meeting. They were just voting on approving this formula. Howard Hatch then asked if the formula was based on taxable property or the operating budget. Rick Ladd stated that it was on the taxable property and then he was told it was on the operating budget and then Howard said he would be against it until salaries and everything else was evened out. Dick Guy felt that that was one of the reasons why the fire chiefs and 1 commissioner from each district would be getting together and discussing how to equalize things.

There was more discussion about the equalization of salaries and stipends for fire chiefs and officers of each district. Dick Guy again stated that that was why the chiefs and commissioners should be getting together. The fire fees also needed to be equalized. Rick Ladd stated that he thought that there needed to be some sort of range of pay between the three departments. Joe Maccini agreed with Rick that there needed to be a range in order to explain this to the voters. Rick also thought that the idea of the 3 chiefs and 3 commissioners sitting down and ironing some of these issues out would be a good one. Rick stated that the pay issues of officers and volunteers should be resolved by the chiefs and commissioners getting together and trying to come up with some sort of range process. It was then decided that the pay issues would be discussed and resolved by the entire Committee at the next meeting.

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday, December 11, 2012 at 6:30 PM.

Adjourn Meeting: The meeting adjourned at 8:10 PM

Minutes transcribed by Karen Hyde