

MINUTES OF HAVERHILL FIRE COMMITTEE MEETING
Thursday, September 13, 2012
Draft Subject to Review, Correction and Approval at Following Meeting

Members Present: Rick Ladd, Rich Clifford, Dick Guy, Howard Hatch, Brad Kennedy, Don Hammond, Mike Bonanno, Chris Demers, and Richard Morris

Others Present: Bob Long, Mountain Lakes Commissioner

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

Call Meeting to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 PM

Rick Ladd had a go-around for everyone to introduce themselves as this was the first meeting of the newly-formed Fire Committee. He did a brief overview of why this committee was formed, which is equitable funding of the fire departments. He then asked Howard Hatch to give a brief history of the formula that is now used for funding. Rick Ladd asked Howard if this was based on structure or assessed value. He told Mr. Ladd that it was based on assessed value of structure. Mr. Ladd then inquired of TM English if he had any information that he wanted to share. TM English passed out the 2012 Fire Department budgets, the total of which was broken down between Town and precinct portions. Rick Ladd commented that the formula hadn't been changed; the change this year as was presented was based upon inflation; an inflation factor for every fire district in the area of supplies. TM English stated that his budget analysis was based on the current formula. Dick Guy stated that he had talked with Dan Martin, emergency management manager in Newbury, as they have a similar town structure as Haverhill. Each fire department sends Mr. Martin their budgets; they are then combined into one budget that he provides to the town and the town pays for all of them. On an individual basis, how they handle payments is through Town government. Mr. Ladd asked Mr. Guy if he had asked Mr. Martin if there were any kind of basic formula in order for them to derive their budgets they are submitting -- what you pay for labor and what you're going to pay annually for fire suits. TM English stated that Newbury does not have village districts for each fire department just Wells River and the Town. Brad Kennedy stated that another difference between Newbury and Haverhill is that Newbury rents their stations, they don't own them. TM English stated that the people in Haverhill who live in a precinct with a fire department are actually paying twice for fire protection, where people outside of a precinct only pay once. He also stated that he had a problem with the Benton arrangement. Benton has no fire department and they get full fire protection and they're getting charged something like \$1200 for North Haverhill and Haverhill Corner \$750. Don Hammond stated that this figure is what they get whether they have a fire or not. When they have a fire, they pay Twin States's rate of \$300 per hour. TM English asked if the fire departments were billing Benton for their full costs when they respond. Don Hammond said they were.

Rick Ladd asked if it was worth pursuing finding out what the three departments raise through other sources beyond what is reflected as revenue from the Town and through their own local taxes. Howard Hatch said that he wanted to know how much money is currently being raised through fundraising and how it is being spent. There was discussion about the cost of fire suits.

TM English stated that if the main problem is that the cost of doing business is up, we should broaden the cost to as many as people as we could. The way to do that is for all the Town taxpayers to equally fund the departments. Then the question would be who controls the individual fire department budgets. Town meeting is going to be the ultimate authority to approve them. The departments are providing more and more services to their districts and absorbing more and more price increases and overhead costs. Most of the taxpayers in the Town live in a precinct and they are unfairly bearing the burden. The

cost should be broadened out. If the Town paid the total budget, the fire departments would be treated like any other Town department, they would go through the Town budget process. He stated that the precinct commissioners could still have some level of control. If Town meeting didn't appropriate enough money, the individual precincts could still appropriate more money. Each fire department budget could be totally offset by the Town appropriation, which would zero out the precinct taxes for fire departments. The precinct commissioners could still retain control of spending of the budgets if they were uncomfortable with the Town doing that. In other words, we can change the inequities of funding without changing the authority. TM English stated that the fire chiefs could bring their budgets to the precinct commissioners and then they would be submitted to the Town Manager and go through the Budget Committee and Selectmen and then to Town Meeting where all of the taxpayers would have the right to have a say about their budgets.

Don Hammond suggested that budgets be developed for each department coverage area. TM English stated that he reviewed the statutes and there is no provision for this type of authority. Fire departments are either part of the village district or the Town. Rick Ladd stated that they needed to get a hold of what is being used to purchase equipment and supplies which is being raised through fundraising. Money from fundraising is not reflected in the budgets. There was a discussion of what type of trucks should be purchased and how that would be done to prevent duplication. That is something that the 3 chiefs will ultimately have to work out.

Rick Ladd stated that it would be a good idea if the 3 fire departments looked at their own checkbooks for the last 5 or 10 years to see what they have spent on equipment such as generators or radios. He would like to see those figures by the next meeting so that they could come up with an average. This might give them an idea of the true costs of running each department. He also asked Mr. Guy about getting Dan Martin, from Newbury, to come in for the next meeting. He also requested the outstanding debt on trucks for the next meeting.

The date of the next meeting is Monday, October 29, 2012 at 6:30 PM.

Adjourn Meeting: The meeting adjourned at 7:58 PM

Minutes transcribed by Karen Hyde