

**Town of Haverhill Selectboard  
Haverhill Corner and North Haverhill Fire Department Merger Meeting Minutes  
March 6, 2020 at 3:00 PM**

**Draft Subject to Review by the Board.**

**Board Members in Attendance:** Chair Darwin Clogston, Howard Hatch, Matthew Bjelobrk, and Fred Garofalo

**Town Employees Present:**

**Town Manager:** Brigitte Codling  
**Finance Officer:** Jennifer Boucher

**Members of the Public in Attendance:** Dennis Fournier, Rich Clifford, Doug Dutile, Jon Bouffard, Richard Morris, Ed Ballam, Phil Blanchard.

**At the January 13, 2020 Meeting the following goals and considerations were established:**

Goals discussed at the meeting included:

- Eliminate duplication of services
- Ensure consistency
- Improve training opportunities
- Reduce overhead / costs
- Streamline management of fire services
- Ensure continuity of service
- Improve the level of service provided

Considerations discussed regarding logistics of merging:

- Cost savings to taxpayers
- Location of merged department
- Leadership at the department level
- Leadership at the Town level
- Overall organizational structure
- Transition planning needed
- Committee to be formed
- Ensure all residents have a say

**Subsequently the Town and both Precincts established the following Warrant Articles for resident's consideration:**

**Town of Haverhill Warrant Articles:**

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**Article 22 Haverhill Corner Fire Department**

To see if the town will vote to accept the control of the Haverhill Corner Fire Department and all fire related assets. Furthermore, to agree to fully accept the obligation to operate and maintain the Fire Department as a Department of the Town. This article is contingent upon a vote from the Haverhill Corner Precinct relinquishing its control over the Fire Department and its fire related assets. (Majority Vote Required)

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**Article 23    North Haverhill Fire Department**

To see if the town will vote to accept the control of the North Haverhill Fire Department and all fire related assets. Furthermore, to agree to fully accept the obligation to operate and maintain the Fire Department as a Department of the Town. This article is contingent upon a vote from the North Haverhill Precinct relinquishing its control over the Fire Department and its fire related assets. (Majority Vote Required)

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**North Haverhill Warrant Article:**

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**Article 10    To Merge Fire Departments**

To see if the District will vote to relinquish its fire department, to include all fire related assets, to the Town of Haverhill, subject to acceptance of such at Haverhill's annual town meeting.

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**Haverhill Corner Warrant Article:**

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**Article 09    Fire Department Preference**

To see if the Haverhill Corner Precinct shall relinquish its Fire Department, to include all fire related assets, to the Town of Haverhill, subject to acceptance of such at Haverhill's annual Town Meeting

**Discussion:**

Town Manager Codling provided an overview of discussions related to “merging” fire departments, which go back as far as the early 1980’s; more recently in 2012 the Town decided to have all fire departments funded at the Town level for their annual operating budgets; in 2018 at the Vision to Action forum merging fire departments was cited as something the Town should address; in 2018 there were also warrant articles put forward by all three precincts, Haverhill Corner and North Haverhill voted to move forward with discussions to merge their fire departments, Woodsville tabled the article at their precinct annual meeting; in 2019 the Town Manager Public Opinion Survey revealed that residents 65% of residents in Haverhill support the merging of fire departments.

It was agreed that the Fire Service Mutual Aide Agreement would not be altered and will remain in place and continued in the future.

There was some discussion about the future status of the Haverhill Corner Fire Station. The group discussed this at length as some were concerned that the station would be closed in the future. The group determined after much discussion that closing the Haverhill Corner Fire Station would certainly not happen in the foreseeable future, and closing it at all, would be very unlikely because the property deed states clearly that the Town would lose the facility should it ever stop being used for fire service and the precinct uses that structure for its operations. The group agreed that the Haverhill Corner Fire Station would continue to serve as a station or sub-station of a larger station.

The group agreed that the goal of establishing a Fire Department under the blanket of the Town is to provide equal or better fire services to the residents of Haverhill, and this should be the primary goal of the new Fire Committee.

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It was agreed that no matter the outcome of the Town or Precinct votes the group still wants to see a Fire Committee developed and work to begin as outlined below; with the first meeting being ASAP after March 20, 2020:

1. A Fire Committee will be formed, and they will:
  - a. Establish Rules of Procedure for the Fire Committee.
  - b. Facilitate a Fire Service Study.
  - c. Facilitate a Fire Staffing Study.
  - d. Facilitate a Fire Facility Study.
  - e. Facilitate a Fire Station Location Study.
  
2. Fire Committee, Town Manager (TM), Fire Chief(s), and Precinct Commissioners will:
  - a. Establish a transition plan for development of the new Town Fire Department.
  - b. Establish a schedule for development of the new Town Fire Department.
  - c. Establish an organizational structure for the new Town Fire Department.
  - d. Establish a staffing plan for the new Town Fire Department.
  - e. Establish a training plan for the new Town Fire Department.
  - f. Develop processes and procedures for the new Town Fire Department.
  - g. Work with Town Officials and Department Heads on long term planning for cohabitated emergency services.

There was discussion about who should be on the Fire Committee and the group agreed to the following, as a foundation for the Fire Committee:

1. The Town Manager
2. The Fire Chief from Haverhill Corner
3. The Fire Chief from North Haverhill
4. One member of the Woodsville Fire Department
5. One commissioner from Haverhill Corner
6. One commissioner from North Haverhill
7. One Select Board member

It was agreed that the Town should pursue grant funding to assist with the planning process, i.e. to complete the multiple studies outlined for development of the new Town Fire Department.

There was discussion that currently the three fire departments of the Town are not paying their fire fighters in accordance with State of New Hampshire employment law and that under a Town Fire Department all fire fighters would be paid in accordance with the law and pay would be equalized for fire service staff of equal rank, seniority, and experience. This would all be part of the larger staffing study outlined in the road map / plan for development of a Town Fire Department.

The meeting adjourned at 4:05 PM

*Minutes by Brigitte Codling, Town Manager*