

Selectmen Present: Scott Bastarache, William Bembury

Also Present: Bryan Smith, Philp Wonkka,
10 Members of the public

At 6:30PM **Selectman Bastarache** called the meeting to order.

Fire Department Staffing Conversation

Selectman Bastarache provided a review of previous discussions that the Board of Selectmen have had, the county wide fire service study from 2014, and the events that have led the Board to hold these current conversations with citizens regarding a proposal to provide day time staffing for the Fire Department.

Bud Meattey asked for a breakdown of medical, fire, and miscellaneous calls. Philip Wonkka, Fire Chief, explained the breakdown of calls received in 2016; noting that the majority of calls were for medical response. **Selectman Bastarache** explained that 75 calls from Erving center, 97 calls from Erving side, and 21 calls were for mutual aid. **Selectman Bastarache** explained that staffing would rotate between both fire stations.

Bud Meattey asked why the Department had not used the Around Town newsletter to advertise vacancies within the call-force. **Selectman Bastarache** stated that regardless of how the Town votes on the proposal he plans to work with the Fire Chief to grow the call force. Additionally, Bud asked **Selectman Bembury** what had happened to the 7 applications that were submitted to the Town over a year ago. **Selectman Bembury** explained that the applications were given to the Fire Chief and that as a strong chief it is his purview to review applications and make a determination about hiring.

Bud Meattey raised the concern about moving in this direction and asked if the Town would move to a 24/7 staffing structure. He noted a concern about limited response in the night hours. Additionally, Bud asked how many call firefighters were on the department. Chief Wonkka answered 17; 16 live in town.

Brenda Silva asked if the proposed firefighters would be paramedic trained. **Selectman Bastarache** answered "no" and explained that they would be required to be EMT trained.

Brenda Silva asked how many staff members would be necessary to respond to a mutual aid call. Chief Wonkka explained that it would depend on the need, but at least 2 firefighters to operate a tanker and at least 4 to operate a pumper truck.

Brenda raised the concern that the Orange ambulance service can respond quicker than the current call force staff can. **Selectman Bembury** explained that the proposed firefighters would have EMT level certification. He explained that he personally envisions that it would increase to a medical response staff and if that was to happen he would be interested in reducing the Orange Ambulance service. He acknowledged that the Town has not had that discussion yet. As a resident he indicated that he would be supportive.

Bud Meattey stated that you cannot put a price on a life. He encouraged the Town "to do this right if we are going to do this at all." Bud also raised concern about the cost associated with an ambulance service.

Bud Meattey asked how the Town would conduct the hiring process for the proposed positions. **Selectman Bastarache** explained that the Chief's position is not new. The proposal is to expand the part-time position to a full-time position. Because the duties are not new and the position is currently

filled, the expectation is that the full-time position would be offered to the current Chief. As for the proposed full-time firefighter positions, the Fire Chief will oversee the process. Chief Wonkka explained that he would have the process remain consistent with the Town process, using a committee that was independent of the Chief to review applicants and make recommendations to the Chief.

Dan Hammock, Finance Committee member, explained his perspective which included a concern for the Town's equipment to be redistributed through regionalization and the concern about regionalizing through a cost sharing formula like many of the other regional agreements include. Dan reminded those in attendance that the Town had lost manufacturing employers that had often allowed their employees who worked on the call-force to respond to calls. Now that they are gone, residents often work out of the area and may not be in a position to respond.

Selectman Bastarache, responding to the earlier question about considering a 24/7 staffing model, stated that he estimated that the Town would need 10 to 13 full-time staff members with benefits to cover shifts and allow for sick time, vacation, and training. He roughly estimated that salaries, benefits, and overtimes costs could for that type of staffing model could approach \$800,000.

Selectman Bembury stated that the staffing of the Fire Department has been an issue for many years and that he believes it is time to address it. He noted that he doesn't want to rely on luck on whether or not the Department will be able to respond to a call.

Selectman Bastarache explained that the FY18 budget had been prepared with the funding necessary for the salaries and health insurance for the proposal.

Dan Hammock asked if the Town could find out what factored into home owners' insurance rates and how the Fire Department staffing levels impacts that rate.

Bud Meattay asked the Board to clarify the job duties of the proposed staff noting that home inspections and outreach are already part of existing job duties. **Selectman Bastarache** agreed, but stated that the goal is to enhance and increase the Department's capacity to respond.

At 7:21 PM public conversation ended.

In closing, **Selectman Bastarache** acknowledged appreciation for the participations from citizens and their interest in the betterment of the Town.

Adjournment

At 7:24 PM **Selectman Bastarache** made a motion to adjourn. **Selectman Bembury** seconded. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,



Bryan Smith
Administrative Coordinator