

HALIFAX BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SELECTMEN MEETING
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25, 2018 - 6:00 P.M.
SELECTMEN MEETING ROOM

Meeting came to order at 6:00 p.m. with Selectmen Thomas Millias, Kim R. Roy and Troy E. Garron present.

The following business was discussed:

DISCUSSION

Shared Services for Fire Department

Roy began by saying that this joint meeting between Halifax and Plympton Board of Selectmen is to talk about the possibility of shared fire services. The same discussion evolved back in November of 2016 where the Halifax BOS was invited to a meeting with the Plympton BOS to discuss possibilities of some shared services.

She stated last year Plympton engaged with a MRI fire study and in January of 2018 we were told that there was in interest in looking at shared services. At that point there was a State grant available to assist us in looking at this particular area. Halifax and Plympton wrote a grant and both towns received funding.

She continued to say that Halifax's Fire Study Committee, which has been in effect for the last ten years, was started so that we could provide a better service when the department went 24/7 and became an ALS provider. We then reconvened with the committee about two years ago to look at retaining our staff, providing a better service for our residents and engaging our call fire department. The committee did a study and proposed adding a third position by using ambulance fees. This decision has been wonderful for Halifax as we now have engaged our call fire department; have shifts that are being filled and have conducted training for our staff. Roy said that they come to Plympton with a healthy and proud fire department but please know that Halifax has not always had the perfect fire department and has learned what works and what doesn't. It has been years in the making to be where we are now and Chief Viveiros leadership has assisted in that. We are proud of the service that Halifax provides and the quality of our firefighters so it makes sense to look at a shared service. Both towns struggle with retaining full time staff because we are not able to pay what other communities pay. So by banding together we can improve the quality, provide a better service, improve retaining the staff both town have and have more people and resources to relay on for second and third calls.

Roy proposed that both towns' fire study committees continue to work individually and if it looks like this is the direction we all want to go in then maybe the two committees join together. But before going any further we need to have a series of public forums with tangible numbers and a plan to get the feel from our residents.

Roy said back in November 2016 one thing that was talked about was that Plympton wanted a stationed manned 100% in their community. We understand that Plympton does not feel comfortable with Halifax responding to Plympton having one fire station so our Fire Study Committee is looking into keeping both stations manned at all times.

John Traynor - Plympton Selectmen

He began by saying that they had a study done by MRI back in the fall/winter because there were concerns about the fire department and as a result of the study a number of recommendations were made and it opened their eyes to concerns that needed to be addressed. Two committees have been formed; a fire technical committee composed of the fire fighters and then an oversight committee comprised of people from businesses who were concerned of how they are going to be addressed should there be a problem.

They want to maintain ALS service; want to staff the Plympton station 24/7; training and certification is a priority; ability to attract on call firefighters from within the town or close enough so that it is not a problem; financially stable. He explained that they have about \$200,000 of revenue coming in of which they take \$50,000 and put it in a fund because they are going to need a new ambulance. They also have a building that is questionable but they just started construction for a new police department so a fire building would be a major impact. What they need is an operational plan for the next four to five years that makes sense for everybody (residents, firefighters and the businesses). He understands that Halifax is steps ahead of them and they can learn from Halifax.

Roy said that if we are going to engage in this service Halifax is 100% committed to responding to Plympton's residents as if they were our own and there are no boundaries when it comes to fire safety or ambulance service. We will not be comfortable providing a service to Plympton until we know for sure we can do an outstanding job for you town.

Power point presentation (copy attached hereto and made an official part of these minutes)

Geographical Review - page 7

Christine Joy - Plympton Selectmen

She asked if there would be one labor pool where firefighters would be assigned in Halifax or Plympton on rotation basis and the on call group would be from both communities and Chief Viveiros said that was correct. Viveiros said that in most systems generally a Captain works out of headquarters and the Lieutenant would work out of a substation. Ideally that would stay the same however they could swap them out from time to time so they get more exposure and the firefighters will always rotate on a monthly basis. He added that if there was a medical call the Captain responds no matter what town it was in and he would be that third person on hand.

Shared Service Organizational chart – page 8

Traynor asked if Viveiros had a breakdown of the responsibilities between the Fire Chief and the Deputy Chief and Viveiros said not at this point. He said that it is pretty standard that the Fire Chief oversees everything but in this scenario one of the major responsibilities of the Deputy would be fire prevention and inspections however he would go to person in the event of the Fire Chief's absence. Traynor asked what the responsibility of the four call groups were and Viveiros said the Captains and the Lieutenants are responsible for the firefighters that worked under them. They make sure they are doing their weekly training and supervise smaller incidents and report back to the Fire Chief. Viveiros said that this chart is pretty standard in the fire service and Roy added that this does not look much different than Halifax's organizational chart.

Lady in the audience

She asked if most of the positions within the different group's fulltime or are some part time and Viveiros said if we were to merge we were to have four additional full time positions. Viveiros explained that Halifax has four groups each with two firefighters assigned to it and two firefighters who are technically assigned to day spots. At night we get to the third person by bringing in a member from the call department. He said in this model we are adding one more full time person but we are also adding a call spot as it helps keep members of the call department engaged in doing shifts, familiarizing themselves with the equipment and it is cost effective.

Discussion Points - page 10

Chief Viveiros went through this page and touched briefly on the following:

Plympton would need to designate the Halifax Fire Chief as Plympton Fire Chief this is to cover the legalities or enforcing rules & regulations and law & ordinances.

Capital budgets for town stations will remain responsibility of individual towns

Viveiros stated that if we were to enter a five year inter-municipal agreement both towns will continue to own their stations and equipment. However we could come up with a list of recommendations of things that could be reduced and work out a capital plan.

Geographical Review - page 7

Viveiros said that both fire stations are in perfect spots so if in five years from now if we were to go with this we could look into the possibility of one fire station on Route 58 almost on the town line. This would have minimal impact with the furthest points in each town and would save money. As for capital needs Viveiros said that is something they could look at for a new station. Also they could think about putting a new fire alarm system, make administrative offices and live in quarters at Plympton's location creating a small substation.

Proposed Timeline & Next Steps - page 11

Viveiros explained this page.

Roy said that the timeline dates looks aggressive but not to be alarmed and the thought of having this overview presentation was a good way to see if they are heading in the right direction. She thinks having a municipal agreement would be better than starting off as a joint entity saying that we have regional dispatch that is contracted municipal agreement and it has worked well for us.

Viveiros said under this agreement the fire departments will be looked at as one land mass area; an incident in Plympton is just as important as one in Halifax and there will be no difference in how we respond to each community. Our standards will remain the same which is all firefighters have to have firefighter I/II certification and very least be an EMT. We have aggressively funded our training budget and cover all of the training that is required. Roy says that this not only protects the resident but also the employees and that we take the safety of our firefighters very seriously and want to make sure they are trained to do their job.

Roy then opened it up to questions and concerns from the Plympton Board of Selectmen.

Traynor said that if Plympton was to enter into anything they would want to be equal partners and they would want to set up some sort of joint entity such as Plympton Halifax District because he is not sure how his residents would feel with Halifax showing up. Roy pointed out that Plympton has the same district dispatch and this would be the same model. He is talking about the equipment that actually shows up with the firefighter with the patch on their arm. Millias asked if he was suggesting going right to a district kind of thing and he said a least looking through it his initial reaction to this is it looks like Halifax is taking over Plympton and they are going to become the smaller part of it therefore they will need to talk this through. Traynor also question that in the presentation they had chief and deputy chief stating being a Halifax employee (page 7) and Roy said that is because Halifax will be providing the service at first.

Viveiros said as far as the name our committee talked a little bit about it and the patches and vehicles can all be discussed and understands Traynor's point and said all this can be a part of the municipal agreement.

Mark Russo - Plympton Selectmen

Russo said that they have pretty good model already which is Area 58 - they have done a good job merging the three towns and yes you hear that shared and merged stuff does not work but he feels that they are smart enough to pull this together. The key is that they need to recognize that we are not going to save money and the goal is better service and retaining staff, which is an issue for both towns. He likes the idea of taking baby steps as it will give them four years to get their stuff together.

Roy understands that it is really hard to give up that control and before regionalizing with Duxbury we were not comfortable doing it but two years later we are glad we moved forward with it and it was one of the toughest decisions we had to make for our town. She stated that both towns are equally important and we are not here to take over but to assist them so before we go any further we need to know Plympton's take on this as we do not want to waste time if you are not interested.

Russo said that the regional dispatch is another perfect example as they joined four years ago and there was concern of loss of control and local knowledge and in the end we ended up with a better service.

Viveiros said that one of the benefits of the inter-municipal agreement is that you are able to spell out for your community exactly what you want ahead of time. He explained that a district becomes an independent taxing authority where the Board of Selectmen has no say and the members can vote their own budgets and the budgets could increase immensely because they have a small poll of people voting on that budget and the community has less say of what type of fire department they have.

Roy said that they are a nonprofit organization and would not provide a service thinking that they would be charging a town more money as it will be based on a formula that is fair. This will not save either town any money but will provide a better service and a better firefighter.

Millias said the bottom line that if it does not work for both communities it doesn't work at all and he would not be in support of anything that would not do the job.

Garron said that it does not matter what the patch says what matters is that someone shows up at your door to help save your life or put the fire out. This does not demean a firefighter because he is in a satellite office they are still doing their job.

Roy said that this has been a great opportunity to look at retainage and regardless of what happens Halifax is going to continue to look at how to retain staff. But at the end of the day we start holding public forums and we have angry Halifax residents we certainly are not going to go forward. As long as we can say services will improve her hope is that the residents will support it. She does not want to start holding the forums until we are confident in what we are going to accomplish. The Plympton BOS agreed.

Joy like the model and thought it made a lot of sense and thinks the equality for the towns are going to be important. She was not a fan of Halifax being the governing body to this and thinks they will have to come up with something different maybe it be both Boards. She thinks this should be explored to the fullest extent as they will have better trained department and the firefighters and that work for both towns will be challenged and trained in an environment where they can thrive and do really well. Not to mention that they will feel good about themselves and what they are doing which will help with retention. She mentioned that integration is going to be really important in order for this to be successful and suggested that every quarter change it up so everyone is working with new people.

Russo said hopefully the department will run on a sense of pride and excellence if we were to do a shared service. He thinks they should continue with the aggressive timeline that was presented tonight.

Millias said that this presents a lot of positive possibilities and that we should go forward with this to see what we can develop because of the potential benefits for everyone.

Garron stated that if in the end this does not happen maybe something positive will come out where you can revamp what you're doing at your department. We are tied by mutual services already and just because you are from the other town no one is going to deny the other services.

Roy asked if everyone was on board about starting with baby steps and then deal with the governing board later.

Joy is more comfortable with an inter-municipal agreement than a district and Millias agreed saying that makes the most sense.

Traynor thinks it is worth exploring and the details are going to be what makes or breaks it. In the MRI consulting report there was a lot of questions that were raised and thinks they need to sit down and go through that. They also need some positive and negatives from the fire personnel. He is not that concerned about inter municipal or district because once they get into the details it will fall out.

Another thing Roy said they need to talk/think about is the grant money that was received from the State. She thinks it is a great idea about using some of the money for training but wanted to put it out there setting aside some money to help with legality of the inter-municipal agreement or the district agreement.

Traynor's understanding was that they got \$50,000 and are putting \$20,000 towards the MRI consultant leaving them with \$30,000.

Viveiros said Halifax has \$83,000 - \$5,000 for legal fees; \$30,000 for training; \$25,000 for radio system upgrades. The rest of the funds will be for transitional cost such as patches, uniforms and transitioning employees in. He asked Plympton if they had any idea of where they would use the remaining \$30,000. Joy said to create and negotiate an inter-municipal agreement and to help with a cost analysis if it was necessary.

Russo suggested bring in consultants and lawyers in early to forewarn us so that they do not spin their wheels and end up with something that is not going to work. Traynor said that he would like to see how this is going to work before passing this by legal because he feels it is going to be changed quite a few times resulting in running up huge bills in legal. Russo then said they could say to legal that they are starting this and do they have anything to fore warn them about.

Traynor said that although his Board has not talked about taking part of the \$30,000 and having a consult help them that is something he would like to do. We are going to need a lot of help because this is a lot of work taking two structures and merging them together, the issues that come with people career paths and the resident's expectations. He continued to say that he thinks there is opportunity for the training and the career paths. He does not think the cost will go down but will go up. Not sure about the idea of having capital plans for each town or who should be in the room to discuss all this because it is going to take a lot of time and when you have more than seven people it turns into a debate.

Roy said that Halifax has five on their Fire Study Committee and Plympton has two tracks; a technical and an over sight track. She asked which track is going to be exploring the financial impact and Traynor said the over sight is to deal with looking at the municipal agreement. She then asked who is going to do the modeling for the budgets and Traynor said they have a woman who is on the Finance Committee who is a CPA and will volunteer. They also have another woman on the technical committee who is very analytical.

Roy said at our next meeting the Halifax Fire Study Committee will be diving into the finances. We have done some salary surveys to get a sense what the difference in pay is. We not only have to think salary costs we also have to think about retirement insurance. Then the next step would be the inter-municipal agreement.

Viveiros said that some of the money was designated to bring both departments on what they might lack in training at this time. His thought was to do training at Sysco so the Halifax people can see what the facility is all about. Plympton could also benefit on this training seeing as they may have had some turn around in the department. Also this is kind of how the grant was written to train each town in. Training could include identifying some of the hazards in the facility; have a HazMat tech do a class on the hazards we have Sysco. Another training session Viveiros suggested was aerial training seeing as Plympton does not have an aerial truck because if responding to a mutual aid call Plympton personnel will have the training should they need to use the equipment.

Traynor liked the idea of joint training at Sysco and thinks they should move forward on it. Millias said that this makes sense in case Halifax came to Plympton on a mutual aid call.

Russo asked how is the training going to be coordinated and Viveiros said that he will get a call into Phil and asked him for a couple of dates and they can ask their department who will want to do it and he will do the same in Halifax. As for the billing he said the easiest way would be to have Plympton send over a bill with the lump sum of the employee costs broken down and Halifax would reimburse them out of the grant money.

Joy asked who would employ the firefighters and the EMTs and Roy said that if it was a municipal agreement it would be the Town of Halifax.

Viveiros said one of things he is finding from the firefighters who have left Plympton to come to Halifax is that they want to be part of the Union, which is a big thing for career firefighters.

The benefit package and the payroll will be the same. We still are working on coming up with a funding formula and Roy said they will meet as a joint group and come up with a formula.

Roy said before seeing the timeline in the presentation tonight what was Plympton BOS thought of a timeframe and Traynor said it was not as aggressive as what was presented. First off he said that he does to like Special Town Meetings (stated on page 11) so he was thinking a year from now but on the other hand we have to get this going and they are in a position where they are looking at a whole department anyways and need to make a decision on a number of things. They ruled out privatization as it is too expensive so they either they have the municipal agreement or have what they have now and will have to staff, retain and train better or there may be something in between. Having something ready by the summer/fall is too aggressive for him but he said let's try.

Russo hope is that in six months they will have a strong idea as to whether this is going to work or not and if not they have lot of work to do.

Garron asked if we have a municipal agreement would this open more doors for grants from the State? Traynor said that if they became a unique model he would think people will ask how we can help you and Roy agrees. At one time Plympton and Halifax fire departments were close and that kind of went away and now we want to bring it back. Millias said that these two communities have more in common than other communities that abut each other both historically and geographically.

Both Boards agreed on meeting again on June 20th at 6:00 p.m. in Halifax up in the Great Hall.

Viveiros said it would be helpful if they could to provide feedback on this presentation to him or Roy. Another thing he thought that it would be important is to look at the Plympton station for a projection of what station improvements were needed. Viveiros is willing to do it but if they want to that is fine as he does not want to step on anyone's toes in the process.

Traynor said that they will need to have a meeting among themselves to talk it through and see where they all are at and then they will get back to the Chief.

The Plympton Board of Selectmen thanked the BOS for meeting with them this evening and putting the presentation together.

MEETING ADJOURNED

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Thomas Millias
Clerk

/pjm