

HALIFAX BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SELECTMEN MEETING
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1, 2016 - 7:00 P.M.
GREAT HALL

Meeting came to order at 7:00 p.m. with Selectmen, Troy E. Garron, Thomas Millias and Kim R. Roy present.

Chair announces that the meeting is being taped.

The following business was discussed:

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Board as well as those attending tonight's meeting stood to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

SCHEDULED APPOINTMENTS

Public Forum – Regional Dispatch discussion

Kim Roy opened the forum explaining the past history and including the work with OCPC. She said several years ago we looked at other centers because the State was asking towns to look at regionalization. We want to choose the region we want to go with instead of the State telling us who we have to go with. We knew we wanted the level of service to be equal to what we provide and saw that Duxbury ran a high quality operation. So when Duxbury offered the Board decided to investigate.

Roy said that they also looked into the financial constraints the Town is facing and if we regionalize it will help save the town money. She stated that right now it cost us \$300K of which \$50K will be a grant from the State and the State would subsidize Duxbury for \$100,000. So what it comes down to is Duxbury would charge \$250,000, minus \$100,000 equals \$150,000. Duxbury would also qualify for additional funds on its own. She added that we pay about \$25,000 in health insurance per year in addition to the Dispatch Center.

We have met with the chiefs, captains, lieutenants, and sergeants to go over what the dispatchers do and everyone felt that this transition was achievable. Dog issues, forms, appointments all can be done through Duxbury.

Our dispatchers also work the window so if someone was to come into the lobby they dispatch a police officer to station. They cannot go out to the lobby or let someone in. With technology, which the State is committed to upgrades for the station, there will be cameras in the lobby. There are only two Firefighter/Paramedics at fire station so when they are out on a call the station is dark.

No decision has been made as the Board wanted to get public's input. Two Halifax dispatchers are committed to going to Duxbury.

We only have one Dispatcher on for each shift so when multiple calls come in, which range from storms, trees down, car accidents it does create problems but with three to four Dispatchers there is back-up and response times can be quicker.

Kevin Rogers - 25 Ninth Avenue

Rogers wanted to comment on a few things beginning with the fire station being dark when out on a call. He said that is not true as they call up for coverage and people fill in. Roy that is new over the last few weeks and they do not always get people to respond. He also disagrees that the money saved will go towards lowering the taxes. Roy said when first talked to the Finance Committee they talked about it being a permanent under-ride.

She wanted to say that we do not always collect to the levy even though we could so that is something we can plan on leaving on the table. She added that the reason why we are looking at these kind of savings because the budgets keep going up and we cannot keep up with things such as a new senior center and the school roof needs to be replaced (both will be a debt exclusion). It would be great to pay for them within the levy and not have to raise taxes. Yes and station coverage is fairly new but we are looking to add additional staff to the department.

Chief Viveiros said they started station coverage about a month ago as he was concerned that there was about two hours without someone at the station when out on a call. Dispatch will send out a tone and alert off duty firefighters then it was a guessing game to see who would come back. They are experimenting with station coverage and at this time the Chief does not think they filling it 50% of the time. For example today we had zero out of three, no one came back to the station. This new and has paid off in a couple of situations.

Rogers then wanted to point out that the selectmen are presenting this project and no one is going to speak against because they may want something somewhere down the line.

Roy said that most people who know her know that they can voice their own opinions and she is not leading this. She continued to say that when Duxbury approached the town she was not excited about it but it is their job to look into these kinds of things. People are making us (BOS) accountable for their tax bills; we hear the debates at Town meeting so it is our job when presented with these cost savings to look into them. This Board is working alongside the chiefs to help them figure out issues of their everyday job. We are elected to assist employees, department heads and residents to make this town efficient and affordable and this would not be something to do if it was not comfortable for the fire and police department and their Chiefs.

Rogers said that he thinks the town would be better off in saving money in other areas. He understands about being efficient. He feels that the calls may be delayed when getting them from Duxbury therefore not as efficient and said that the people in Duxbury won't know the Town like our dispatchers know it. A lot of the elderly residents will give a description as they might say next to so and so house or the cranberry bog at the end of Lingan Street. Last point he wanted to make was over the years there was a lot of turnover at the dispatch center and part of that was management, but since hiring a manager that has helped.

Garron wanted to respond to some of the points Rogers brought up. He began by saying that in the past the BOS had presented projects at Town Meeting and they were shut down, so we do have to listen to the residents of the town. As for people not knowing the street two of the people from dispatch have already been hired by Duxbury.

Roy explained that when we hire new dispatchers they too have to learn the streets. She wanted to clarify that there won't be any delay because if anything it will be quicker because you have you have a call taker and a dispatcher. If we thought there would be a delay we wouldn't have pursued this because we would not want to jeopardize the lives of the community. Garron pointed out that some of the 911 calls now go through the State Police barracks in Middleboro or Framingham and they re-route it so in essence we have been doing that and there has not been any delay in the service.

Millias said that he talked with Fire Chief in Plympton and he is thrilled with it as they made the transition to Duxbury a couple of years ago. He also said that if you want to talk about obscured streets Plympton is the place that has a few and continued to say that a decision has not been made and that is why we are having this forum to get feedback from the residents. He too was skeptical at first but the more he learned, listened and thought about the potential it has to save the town money he was open to the idea. He also wanted to say that that we do not have a lot of opportunities to keep the tax bills from going up and this is one way to do so. Roy added they haven't even negotiated the "meat of the contract" and that they are at the beginning stage of this.

Sharon Hertz - 63 Palmer Mill Road

Ms. Hartz asked if there have been a study of how many walk-in emergencies there are during night and weekends. She said years ago in Framingham she was being run off the road and someone was there. Police Chief Broderick said less than a handful per year and said that she went into a police station that is staffed 24/7. If you went into our building, we'd need to get a cruiser off the road as the Dispatcher inside physically can't do anything for you or let you in or leave their area but we are trying to do is make the building better.

If we get a grant we will have the ability to create a safe room and improve the building but the response time will be the same. Chief further explained that State 911 is looking to reduce the number of centers because of the cost of each one, hence regionalization will happen; it's inevitable. At first he was not thrilled about going to a regional center as none of them worked the way we wanted but they have done the homework, looked at the technology and the money is available.

He understands the change in mindset and wants to make sure that someone is always available to help the residents because service is most important. Ms. Hertz said that safety very important and they need that safe room.

Garron said Framingham has one of the largest commercial/industrial areas and one of the largest departments in the State but anywhere else there is one police and/or fire station for several towns. Being New Englanders we hate giving up anything we think is ours. At our dispatch center we have had staffing problems and it has been difficult to pay our Dispatchers at rates comparable to other communities. He said that this still has to go to Town Meeting for approval of appropriations.

Jason Conroy - 21 Jordan Road

Mr. Conroy wanted to say that he knows that he probably is not the most liked by some town officials but has had a good encounter with police officer who went above and beyond his duty. And because of the professionalism of this town he is one-hundred percent on board with this. Even though he sometimes disagrees on some issues of the town he doesn't question the integrity of the fire and police chief as they do their jobs to make sure we are safe. He asked how long the contract will be with Duxbury; how many other towns are currently working with Duxbury and if another town would to come on would more dispatchers be hired? Garron said that the contract is for five years and presently it is just Plympton. He continued to say that the contract has not been signed yet but if they do extend to other towns there would be a "savings clause" built into our contract. Roy explained that they have a draft but there are not any specifics within it but it is something they can think about and they are looking into adding Hanson. Right now they have three dispatchers on and if they took on Halifax it would go to four. They figured this out by analyzing our call volume over the last couple of years and with that calculated how many dispatchers would be needed. There would be a set fee for the five year period of time so that we don't have any unnecessary increases. Also if we are not satisfied with the service that we have a certain month where we can get out and find another call center. Another thing we want is protection for us so that they can't just drop us. We have talked with State about what would happen if this does not work out and they said they would find us another call center. Duxbury is on it they don't want to miss a call, want to make sure people are being serviced and provide a good professional product.

Chief Broderick said that neither he nor Chief Viveiros would entertain this if Duxbury could not do this as good as or better than what we have. They are not going into this lightly and the Town could shop around if not satisfactory.

Chief Viveiros said that they don't see any negatives for the fire department as the transition will increase public safety. Duxbury has some features that Halifax does not such as paging, a larger staff, recall for emergencies and because they pay a higher wage they have a larger pool of applicants to draw from. He stated that once every two weeks someone comes in the fire station with an emergency and that they have a dark fire station when out on a call.

Harry Towne – 55 Pond Street

He was skeptical about the estimated \$175,000 and Roy explained that it cost the town \$300,000 at dispatch now we will get a grant for \$50,000 bringing it down to \$250,000 then the State will subsidize Duxbury \$100,000 then we add in our cost for health insurance of \$25,000 and that is how we get to \$175,000.

Rogers would like this to bring this to Town Meeting but it looks like that won't happen. He asked what happens if after a year we want to leave and Garron said they would have an exit clause in the contract. Roy added that there are concerns about the ability to leave but the Town won't provide a subsidy to Duxbury and the number of calls and population will determine costs.

Frank Frederico – 22 Carver Street

He asked if a camera and phone will be at both stations and be 24-hours and Police Chief Broderick said yes. It will be motion activated room and come up on screen in Duxbury, pick up phone real time real person. This infrastructure needs to be in place before transition. This won't change operations at fire department and this could possibility done at the fire station, but has not been written up. Fire Chief Viveiros explained that there will be a phone outside the door that calls dispatch that would just go to Duxbury. There is a surveillance system in house but could connect to Duxbury via internet.

Rich Sannizzaro – 55 Crystal Lake Road

He said \$300,000 is not much as his taxes are \$8,000 his concern is public safety. He is not sold on this and said South Shore Regional Center in Hingham has four towns and has dispatched wrong engines to wrong towns. He added that there are lots of Dispatchers out there if the town was willing to pay. Roy said that we are not doing this because two people are leaving but the budget will have to grow to continue staffing dispatch.

Ms. Hartz asked if Halifax dispatchers were going to be dispatching Halifax and Roy said dispatchers cannot be limited to one town. The Captain in Duxbury who runs the center is meticulous if someone is not a good fit, they are moved along.

Fire Chief Viveiros agrees with Mr. Sannizzaro about that with South Shore and does not want to go there as they hired dispatchers from individual municipalities; there are personnel issues and people earning different wages. In Duxbury everyone is an employee of Duxbury.

Barbara Brenton asked about the response times and Chief Viveiros said the response times if anything will be quicker because there is more than one dispatcher the second dispatcher can dispatch the call while the first one is talking to the 911 caller. When one person is handling multiple calls and agencies response time worsens.

Ms. Hartz asked that if we move, what happens to the center and equipment and Chief Broderick once 911 is gone we will never get it back. This is the trend for this State so these regional dispatchers will be more popular and grow. So in the future there will be more options and we can shop around. As far as the equipment it will stay up and running and will be maintained. Ms. Hartz then said eliminating 911 puts Halifax at a disadvantage because Duxbury can charge what they want and Chief Broderick said that the Dispatch center is non-profit and eventually it was going to be taken away from us. So we are trying to get ahead of the curve and make it work for us. If we decide to wait and then in ten years 911 comes in and says they cannot afford to maintain our equipment and are going to pull it out and we then need to find someone to go with and have to start all over with. Right now we have time to work on a contract and set it up the way we want it and not be under the gun.

Chief Viveiros said that the State is moving people to regionalization and at this time we get \$26K in grant money from the State but they are looking to lower amounts or taking away that money for individual communities, and give more money for regional centers.

We are looking at \$300K in grant money from the State for technology upgrades for Duxbury and Halifax (\$60-70K for upgrades at the police station) if we regionalize but if we wait that money may not be available.

Rogers asked how many surrounding towns are one-town call centers and how many are regional and Chief Broderick does not have actual number but did say that Pembroke is looking to build new station and going regional and Kingston is doing the same.

Mr. Conroy asked when the contract negotiations would be finalized. Roy was uncertain said they only have rough draft at the moment. He then asked what the fifth year cost on the initial contract because it was said that it would be 150,000 for the first year. Roy believes it is the same every year for the five years. Garron said if their cost increase it is on them. Roy did say that if after five years our call volume has increased Halifax may need to pay more and that is the right thing to do because we are paying for the service that we use.

Bert Gaynor asked if the is the \$100K grant from the State guaranteed every year. Seelig said no, as there are not guarantees and that they the can promise it but use it for something else. He continued to say the more regional groups who are getting subsidized by these funds the more pressure there will be on the senators and representatives not to pull the funding because they want to be re-elected. Gaynor asked if the BOS thinks it will be cost effective to go regional and Garron said based on the information they have at this time yes they do and said that we have the opportunity to do something proactively so we should do it so we are not kef out in the cold. Gaynor said as stated earlier by the chiefs, there will be more regional centers so maybe there will be a better price later on. Millias said the underlying problem for him is the challenge of trying to maintain the quality of our own dispatch and that we cannot attract anyone with the salaries we have to offer. Garron said before hiring the manager that we have now it was chaotic at the center and now he is leaving (going to Duxbury) will we be able to find someone like him to do as great as of job that he has done. This is just one of the reasons why we should do this.

Barbara Gaynor just wanted to say that the town will still have same fire/police personnel receiving the calls whether they are dispatched from Halifax or Duxbury and all that matters is that our public safety officers know where the streets are.

A gentleman in the audience asked what the advantage is for the State for cities and town to regionalize and Garron said they are saving money. Chief Broderick said when 911 was first set up each town had the same equipment so the goal is to reduce the equipment with will also reduce the maintenance of this equipment which will equal cost savings for the State.

Ms. Hartz said that she did a lot of research online and she could not find any mention of problems with regional dispatch.

Troy thanked everyone for coming and giving their input.

GENERAL MAIL/DISCUSSIONS

Contract - Architectural Plans - Senior Center

Moved by Roy and seconded by Millias, the Board unanimously voted to execute the contract for the architectural plans for the Senior Center.

Use of Town Green – Boy Scout Bottle Drive

Moved by Garron and seconded by Roy, the Board unanimously approved a request from the Halifax Boy Scouts to use the Town Green on Saturday, July 9th for the Boy Scout Troop 39 bottle drive.

MEETING ADJOURNED

There being no further business, moved by Garron and seconded by Millias, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 P.M.

Troy E. Garron
Clerk

/pjm