

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SEPTEMBER 7, 2011
WORK SESSION

Members Present: David Parker, Francis Cavaco, Robert McLintock

Absent: William Rice, John Whelan

Town Administrator: Pamela T. Nolan

Chairman Parker called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and moment of silence.

He advised the meeting was taped via audio and video and asked if anybody in the audience was taping. Mr. George Morse of the Seekonk Star was taping audio and Abigail Crocker of The Patch was taping audio and video.

Storm Related Issues Update with Fire Chief, Police Chief, Communications Director and DPW Superintendent

Fire Chief Alan Jack reported that the Town was severely impacted by the tropical storm of Sunday, August 28, 2011. The Town is now about 90% back to normal. There were communication issues with National Grid. It took a couple of days to respond. Finally, a liaison from National Grid came to Town. National Grid representatives agreed that there was a lack of contact on their part.

The impact of this storm was wide ranged. The Town gets its electricity from the Franklin area. Transmission lines were impacted. National Grid considered it a priority to get those lines up and running. Chief Jack felt that National Grid did a great job, other than the communication issue.

Chief Jack commended Mr. Lamoureux and DPW workers, Mr. LeClerc of Communications and Police Chief Charron. They worked closely together. He thanked the Patch and the Seekonk Star for getting information out.

The Health Agent opened a shelter, which was manned by volunteers from 6 a.m. to midnight. Only one citizen of the Town took advantage of that. Two Seekonk residents went to the shelter in Attleboro at La Salette.

Chairman Parker said the response was outstanding, especially since this kind of storm doesn't happen very often.

Police Chief Ronald Charron reported that he scheduled a tabletop hurricane exercise for the Police Department on August 3, 2011. They had a plan in place.

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All days off were cancelled. He had 14 to 15 officers on each shift.

Communications shut down at 8:15 a.m. on the day of the storm (Sunday, August 28, 2011). The Fire side was still working. Verizon responded quickly and by 11 a.m. communication was restored.

At the height of the storm, they were getting calls about trees and live power lines down. By late Sunday night, a decision was made to back down a little and go to regular shifts on Monday. They went to regular shifts on Tuesday. Overtime for the three-day period was a little over \$14,000, which will impact the budget.

Chief Charron stated that he saw first hand the benefits of combining the police and fire in one building. He talked about the coordination between the police, fire, communications, and DPW.

Mr. McLintock asked if there was any reason for the lack of communication by National Grid.

Chief Charron said it was explained that National Grid focused on the main transmission. Route 6 was fixed because a line was done. That was a safety factor. It worked out because people had a place to go (restaurants, hotels, shopping). There was no action in the north end of Town because National Grid crews were working on the transmission.

Chairman Parker stated that communication between Town departments was exemplary.

Communications Director Dennis LeClerc commended Lt. Grocott and DPW. The 911 calls caused them to exceed the minutes ó 25,200 minutes were used. He noted that for just \$300 more the Town could have unlimited calls.

Chairman Parker suggested that residents do not call the Police Department to find out when power will be restored. They don't know and it takes away from what they should be doing. There were 260 calls for service between Saturday and Sunday night.

DPW Supt. Robert Lamoureux reported that all equipment was prepared in anticipation of the storm. DPW crews worked all day to make sure roads were opened. They removed trees and limbs. Over 58 streets were closed because trees and live power lines were down. They continued to clear the streets after the storm. He continued to call National Grid with no response. The transfer station was opened two days after the storm so that residents could bring their brush. Crews are still picking up brush. A full assessment will be made within the next several weeks.

Mr. Lamoureux noted that DPW does not have the capability of picking up brush from residents. The transfer station had extended hours last week, and there was a lot of traffic there.

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DPW did an assessment of town buildings. The Public Safety Complex lost shingles. The animal shelter had a tree fall on the roof. DPW removed the tree and repaired the roof.

Mr. McLintock said there are two huge trees on the backside of that building that need to be removed.

Mr. Lamoureux said it would be a shame to take them down if they are healthy trees.

Mr. Cavaco said he received a complaint from a citizen that DPW is charging \$25 per vehicle for the transfer station. He is also getting complaints about brush on sidewalks.

Mr. Lamoureux advised that Chief Jack, Chief Charron, and he will meet with representatives from NEMA. They need to do a damage assessment and submit one document into NEMA by September 13, 2011.

He commended department heads for their preparedness, communication and coordination.

Mr. McLintock suggested an extra trash pick up day.

Mr. Lamoureux said he would have to evaluate what to pick up. People are having tree companies cut down and put out trees for the Town to pick up.

He said it would be at least a couple of weeks to clear the debris.

Mr. McLintock felt that taxpayers should not have to pay to remove debris from their property.

Mr. Lamoureux stated that departments are not budgeted for these type things.

Mr. Cavaco said the Forestry line has \$1000.

Mr. Lamoureux noted that it costs \$1,400 per day to hire a claw truck.

Mrs. Nolan said that she is pleased to come to a town where there is so much competence. She is very proud of what they did. She felt the Reverse 911 was very reassuring to residents.

Chairman Parker read a letter of appreciation from a resident.

He said that the Seekonk YMCA and Planet Fitness opened its doors during the storm.

He congratulated and expressed his appreciation to department heads for their efforts.

152 Traffic Control Agreement for the Safety Improvement Project with Mass DOT for Central Avenue

Chairman Parker noted that this is a work session and there is no public input.

Town Engineer David Cabral advised that he will review plans with GPI representatives and get back to the Board with a final agreement at the September 21, 2011 meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Cavaco, seconded by Mr. McLintock, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To indefinitely postpone the 152 Traffic Control Agreement for the Safety Improvement Project with Mass DOT ó Central Avenue.

Mr. McLintock had questions about the traffic control signs.

Mr. Cabral said he has a full set of plans at the DPW office.

Funding for Additional Fire Department Staffing

Chief Jack stated that he had approached the Board regarding the hiring of additional career firefighters based on a considerable need. He worked with the previous Town Administrator and Finance Director back in March 2011 regarding financing. Figures were presented at Town Meeting that provided for four additional firefighters.

He met with Mrs. Nolan, and it still looks like funding is available.

At the prior Board's recommendation, testing was conducted for call firefighters and there are two who meet all the criteria. They will be at the top of the list for hiring. There is also a current list of paramedics that qualify. Those individuals have not gone through physical and psychological evaluations because of the cost involved. The Chief wanted to wait on the Board's action.

Mrs. Nolan said she met with the Fire Chief and Finance Director. She recommended they go forward with the hiring process. It will cut down on overtime.

Chairman Parker said that the plan was to redirect \$25,000 to \$30,000 from the call firefighters but they have not settled with them.

Chief Jack advised that Mr. Carroll had reinstated revenue dollars in the current existing budget for four personnel (\$25,000) and \$4,000 in training for call personnel. The two call firefighters have agreed to go to paramedics training.

Chairman Parker noted that about a year ago the Board challenged the Chief to attract additional call firefighters. He made every effort and there was no interest.

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Mr. McLintock stated that he understood under the Goals and Objectives set a few months ago the Chief was supposed to have 22 call firefighters on board by September of this year.

Chief Jack responded that it was to attempt to do that.

Mr. McLintock said he is dead set against hiring additional firefighters until the manning situation is settled for the north and south ends of town.

He noted there is a contract with the call firefighters so why are they talking about eliminating them without negotiating a final decision. Further, he felt it makes no sense to put these individuals at the central station.

Chief Jack said that he staffs the north end station whenever possible. There is a Building Committee in the process of rebuilding the north end station.

Mr. Cavaco noted that the Pine Street station took a year and a half in litigation, which cost \$25,000 in legal fees. If the residents next door hadn't complained, the building would have been up because it would have fallen within the \$750,000 appropriated at Town Meeting. Unfortunately, the State changed the building codes and requires sprinklers at an additional \$100,000 to \$150,000. The Building Committee will come before the Board with recommendations.

Mr. McLintock said that Town Meeting appropriated money for call firefighters. He said he spoke to surrounding towns about call firefighters.

Mr. McLintock said that the manning issue has been erroneous for about 2 or 3 years. There were never serious manning issues before that.

Mr. Cavaco noted that the State offered a piece of land for the south end, and he contacted the Chief to see if it was suitable. He felt that some taxpayers prevented the fire station in the north end.

He objected to Mr. McLintock's comments about the past two to three years. He said that Chief Jack is doing a good job but some people in this community cannot get that in their head.

Mr. McLintock said we have a manning issue and it is going to come back and do a lot of harm. He wants to see the north and south end protected.

Mrs. Nolan said that she doesn't see anything in the contracts that would prevent from putting four more career firefighters on staff.

Chief Jack agreed with Mrs. Nolan.

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Chairman Parker said he was originally against it; but, he is now convinced that it can work.

Chief Jack said they should be in place by the second week in October.

Mr. Cavaco wanted an agenda item for the September 14, 2011 meeting to waive the vote taken in June or July to hire only paramedics. That waiver would be for this time only.

A motion was made by Mr. Cavaco, seconded by Chairman Parker, and it was

VOTED: 2 Ayes; 1 Abstention; To authorize the Fire Chief to proceed with the hiring of four additional firefighters, subject to the waiver of the vote taken in June or July to hire only paramedics.

The vote: Mr. Cavaco ó Aye; Chairman Parker ó Aye; Mr. McLintock ó Abstained.

Status of Police Association Building (Located Behind the Library)

Chairman Parker said the building was turned over the Town. The dirt road cannot be used.

Mr. Lamoureux said there is a gravel road that goes over the landfill. There is limited use of that building. There is a walkway. He noted there are conservation problems and there is a covenant on the property.

Mr. Dennis LeClerc spoke on behalf of the Recreation Commission. The building is good for indoor activities. The only problem is parking.

It was decided to invite the Recreation Commission Chairman or Director to the next meeting.

Chairman Parker read an invitation to citizens to join in commemorating the 12th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorists attack. The ceremony will take place on Thursday, September 8, 2011 at 6 p.m. at the Public Safety Complex.

The Chairman noted that Seekonk is the only town that has done this every year.

Sen. Timilty and Rep. Howitt will attend. Mr. Cavaco will speak on the donation of the bench at the Public Safety Complex.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A motion was made by Mr. Cavaco, seconded by Mr. McLintock, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To indefinitely postpone Executive Session.

The vote: Mr. Cavaco ó Aye; Mr. McLintock ó Aye; Chairman Parker ó Aye.

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A motion was made by Mr. Cavaco, seconded by Mr. McLintock, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To dissolve the meeting at 9:10 p.m.

The vote: Mr. Cavaco ó Aye; Mr. McLintock ó Aye; Chairman Parker ó Aye.

Respectfully submitted,

John Whelan, Clerk

Patricia Gamer, Secretary