

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
JANUARY 12, 2012
WORK SESSION

Members Present: David Parker, Francis Cavaco, Robert McLintock, William Rice

Absent: 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. The Chairman stated that this is a work session and public comments are not allowed.

Fire Chief Alan Jack, President of Career Firefighters Union Adam Clement, and President of Call Firefighters Union Paul McPherson were in attendance.

Mr. Cavaco asked the Chairman to poll the members to see if they had submitted specific questions to the Chief. He said that he had contacted the Chief.

Members responded that they had not. Mr. McLintock said it was supposed to be a presentation, but it is not on the agenda.

Current and Possible Future Staffing

Chief Jack distributed a handout to Board members.

He explained that currently staffing is as follows: Captain who works an administrative day position and 4 shifts of career firefighters working 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Each shift has an assignment of a Lieutenant and 6 firefighters. Sixteen out of 28 shift firefighters are paramedics; three are EMT-Intermediates and 8 EMT-Basics. Five are newly-hired probationary firefighters – one is currently in the Fire Academy and the other 4 are on the Academy wait list. Two of the newly-hired firefighters will have to attend paramedic school after graduating from the mandated State Fire Academy. There are three call firefighters (a Lieutenant and two firefighters) who respond from the Pine Street Station in the north part of Town.

As for future staffing, he would like to provide for an additional 4 career firefighters. Each shift would be able to assign 2 firefighters to a station providing housing for modern apparatus and 24/7 coverage in the south part of Town. Upon completion of the Banna Station, 2 firefighters each shift could be permanently reassigned to the north part of Town.

Chief Jack noted that Seekonk provides Advanced Life Support (ALS) and each vehicle put on the street has to have at least one paramedic.

Chief Jack noted that the County Street Station is used to house apparatus. The station is in extreme disrepair and even with repairs it would not provide adequate coverage.

He said they are trying to find suitable locations for the south part of Town, especially with the increased growth in that area. There might be State land off of Route 114.

The Chief noted that, in replacing an existing facility, stations should be the size to accommodate the modern apparatus.

Chief Jack said the Town currently has sufficient apparatus and equipment for a north, south, and central station. Some of the apparatus is old, and consideration should be given to replace the ladder truck and an engine.

The Town has regularly replaced rescue and ambulances on a more frequent basis. They just went out to bid for a new ambulance.

He recommended that Ladder 1 be replaced within the next two years and replacement of an engine in four years. Further, a new or low mileage used sedan should be purchased in 2 years, replacing a 2000 sedan received from the Police Department.

All apparatus is checked by an outside firm annually.

The current budget does not allow for the purchase of fire apparatus. It would have to go through Town Meeting.

Chief Jack noted that the bulk of incidents are emergency medical. Those calls are increasing. There is a need for more personnel who are available to respond as paramedics. The four recently hired personnel will provide sufficient staffing for two rescues with more frequency. They currently use a rescue as often as possible augmented with minimal overtime.

The Chief is hoping to have 24/7 coverage at Banna Station; and, within the next four or five years, full coverage in the Town.

Goals and Objectives

He talked about the goals and objectives submitted to the previous Town Administrator. It addressed personnel and equipment intermediate to long term. He said some of these goals have been met.

Chief Jack prepared a summation of the 2011 annual response to the Seekonk Fire Department (all type of calls).

Last year there were 2,575 runs; an increase of 17.25% in two years. The busiest time of the day is on weekdays during daylight hours.

Rescue calls were 1,760 for the year 2011, or 68.3% of all incidents. Of those, 60% were ALS calls, where personnel had to intervene. A little over 5% of calls (140) were mutual aid.

Firefighter Adam Clement put together facts and figures about the department. Firefighters are involved in several charities.

The rescue generates about \$500,000 in revenue for the Town of Seekonk.

Bristol County North awarded Sandra Lowery as Paramedic of the Year. She is EMS Coordinator, as well.

Since 2002 the staff has increased by 31% and total of calls increased by 25%.

Seekonk Firefighters go on mutual aid runs to surrounding areas. The amount of mutual aid coming into Seekonk is decreasing. The Seekonk Fire Department strives to provide the best care for the Town - 2 rescues 24/7. Increasing south, north and central is the best way to obtain that goal.

Mr. McPherson, spoke about Call Firefighters. He said they have been in Town for many years to help the full time department. Not many of them are available during the day, but they are on nights and weekends, when necessary.

Mr. Rice said he was very pleased that Chief Jack presented the information based on the needs of the community and not on justifying staff and equipment.

Chairman Parker clarified that the four new firefighters would allow the staffing of the Banna Fire Station more frequently. They would need more staffing for the south end of Town.

Chief Jack concurred. He said probably an additional four people.

Mr. McLintock asked about the status of the Banna Station.

Chief Jack responded that he couldn't answer that. The Building Committee is meeting and has brought in an architect for design work.

Mrs. Nolan advised that she has been going to those meetings. The architect was at the last one. They are hoping to finalize the plan and prepare a RFP and be ready to begin building in the spring/summer months. It will be modular and the entire project will be done with the money appropriated at Town Meeting.

The excavating will be prevailing wage. She suggested the RFP should include a one story and alternate two-story building.

Mr. McLintock asked how the Town benefits by increasing the coverage in mutual aid.

Chief Jack responded that when Seekonk's EMS takes the patient, the Town has the right to bill the insurance.

Mr. McLintock asked for a breakdown of mutual calls – fire and ambulance.

Mr. Cavaco stated that the Town needs more coverage, especially with the building going on at Greenbrier.

The State offered a piece of land near the 99 Restaurant on Fall River Avenue. The location is too small. Mr. McLintock and he will continue to work with the State.

Mr. Cavaco asked Chief Jack's opinion about the County Street Station.

Chief Jack said the location of the State land was inviting because there would be access to Rte. 114 and Highland Avenue.

He said the County Street Station is in disrepair. It is too small for modern fire apparatus and doesn't have sleeping quarters.

He noted that the Fire Department can control the traffic signals at Luthers Corner, Lowes, and the BJ location on Highland Avenue.

The Chief said that 400+ households are going in at Greenbrier.

Mr. Rice said he is more interested in the long term planning (10 to 15 years).

In response to Mr. McLintock's question, Chief Jack said he would not want to go any further than Anthony Street for a fire station. That would provide availability of going south and coming back this way.

Mr. McLintock asked about a satellite station with just rescues.

Chief Jack said that is where he would put the rescues if there were two satellites – one at the north and one at the south.

Mr. McLintock asked about vehicles that don't carry much equipment such as "jaws."

Chief Jack replied that it more of a manning issue and available personnel.

Mr. Rice inquired about a line item for equipment.

Chief Jack replied that he can't answer that. The CIC seems to be very aggressive on evaluating the needs.

Mrs. Nolan said that it is striking how lean the Fire Department budget is. She noticed that Emergency Management should be increased. It is a big responsibility of the Fire Department since 911. It has to be fully developed in this Town.

Mr. Cavaco noted that the bills for vehicle repairs are huge due to the age of the vehicles.

Mr. McLintock felt that impact fees to help police and fire should be looked into.

Chairman Parker noted that the recently-formed Economic Development Committee will meet with businesses coming into town and address that.

Mr. Rice said that it was approached when he served on the Planning Board and faced with a stone wall.

The Chief said that he has been able to show what the Fire Department can do. They are highly trained and dedicated individuals. It is important not to lose sight of that.

Chairman Parker mentioned that he had occasion to speak to several chiefs from surrounding towns. They said that Seekonk has a dedicated and professional fire department.

Mr. McLintock said that call firefighters are in the room and there has been no discussion. He asked the Chief about his plans.

Chief Jack responded that he had taken direction from the Board about six months ago.

Chairman Parker stated that in September or October of 2010 the then Board of Selectmen challenged the Chief to make an aggressive effort to build on the call firefighter department. He did and since then there has been no direction from this Board except to concentrate on full time.

Mr. McLintock said that call firefighters have been a part of this Town for a long time. There are places where they could be utilized to help career firefighters do the job at a lower cost than adding a full time firefighter. In his opinion, the Chief is trying to dismantle a valuable asset.

Chief Jack stated that he is not trying to dismantle the call fire department. The previous Board had asked for a study on how to better respond to the needs of the Town.

There were three options – to utilize call people, to utilize career people, or utilize overtime.

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He was told to operate on the premise that there was no additional funding to increase the budget for personnel, so he would have to do the best to answer the needs of the community.

He told the Board at the time that they would have to put more highly trained people on the street. His intention was not to dismantle the call department. He had no money.

He noted that most calls are during the day. It would be better as a fire chief to have call meet the needs of assisting the career firefighters, and a combination department can work. The money is just not there.

He noted that back in 2002, the career firefighters worked days and the call worked nights and weekends.

The Chief noted that it has got to be difficult to work an 8 hour day and then attend training for about 3 hours per night. A training class just started in Fall River until the middle of June. Call firefighters can go to that.

Mr. McLintock said that surrounding communities have strong call fire departments and have cut off taking applications.

Chief Jack replied that is not what he is hearing. Nearby Swansea is having a difficult time.

Mr. McLintock said the Board of Selectmen should not have put the call firefighter money into full time firefighters. That money was approved at Town Meeting for a specific line item.

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

VOTED: To adjourn at 8:48 p.m.

The vote: Mr. Cavaco – Aye Mr. Rice – Aye; Mr. McLintock – Aye; Chairman Parker – Aye.

Respectfully submitted,

John Whelan, Clerk



Patricia Gamer, Secretary