

Sunapee Fire Department  
Board of Engineers  
Special Meeting  
August 7, 2017

Present were Dan Ruggles, Dana Ramspott, Howard Sargent & Mark Scott

Also present were: Gerald Patnode, Matt Pollari, Philip Corbett, John Gosselin, Dick Byrne, Tom Blinn, John Galloway, Bradley Palmer, Corey Oxland, Craig Seagrove, Amelia Gallup & Rich Hamm.

The meeting was called to order at 7:03pm

Chief Ruggles opened the meeting stating this is a fact finding meeting and would like all to voice their opinions regarding the Sunapee Fire Department (SFD) moving forward. This has come to light after the petition article was presented in March 2017. The Board of Engineers (BOE) were asked to attend the September 5, 2017 meeting of the Board of Selectmen to bring forth a plan or a plan in progress.

Howard Sargent passed out an outline he composed to try to make it easier to proceed with the meeting.

Steve Marshall began stating we need more structure in the SFD. We operate with far too many officers and not enough firefighters. As one of the petitioners he is asking for change in this area. He noted when a truck rolls with 3 people it should not be 3 officers, it makes it very difficult to identify chain of command. Chief Ruggles stated that the SFD tried to change the officer structure and the body voted it down. John Galloway expressed the need for job description from top to bottom and describing what command you may take. This should not be determined just by the amount of classroom schooling but years of service and experience. He went on to say he feels torn between the rules between the Town Handbook and the Fire Department rules and feels job descriptions would be helpful in this area. Mr. Galloway went on to say that the BOE should not be an even number for voting purpose. He also takes issue with the fact that the BOE are voting themselves for Chief & Deputy Chiefs. Chief Ruggles indicated that at this point we are following the SFD by-laws which will probably go away and become policies, and at that point the body of the SFD will not have any say in how the SFD is operated. Steve Marshall commented that if the by-laws become policies they are still have no purpose unless we enforce them. He went on further to say he has heard too many times that we are just volunteers, if we do not enforce our own policies someone is going to get hurt. Daryl Sencabaugh explained on his former department a test was required to prove you had qualifications for a position before one could become an officer. Chief Ruggles replied that writing on a piece of paper does not qualify you to perform duties on a scene. He went on to explain that in past it was the most seasoned person who becomes captain as this was normally the person with the most knowledge about the piece of apparatus they were on. He feels until a

recent election that the companies vote the best person to represent them. John Galloway stated that duties need to be assigned to people on a scene. Phil Corbett expressed that we should work like the military and work cohesively as a team and each member know what each individual's responsibilities are. Steve Marshall felt it was unfair for Chief Ruggles to say the body voted it down when really it was a decision of all that we should wait until we met at meetings like these to discuss the structure of the SFD as a whole. Chief Ruggles stated his opinion is that within 2-3 years a full time chief will be needed. Howard Sargent stated the BOE do read and follow up on different topics. He went on to say that the SFD has always had the luxury of enough personnel to support the number of officers. In past the individual companies took extra days to do added training other than the monthly trainings. He added that we want to put ourselves in a position to get all companies in shape including BOE and take some pride in what you are doing. As a Chief Officer I do not like trucks not being washed and cleaned after every call. When you come back from call it should be cleaned and restocked. We need to make some positive changes so that the SFD can move forward. John Galloway questioned what duties the Chief does that would warrant a full time one. Chief Ruggles says he is inundated with phone calls every day, has to attend 1-2 meetings a week at town office, writes fireworks permits, inspection and several miscellaneous duties. The full time chief should be an EMT also and attend all Department Head Meetings held by the Town Manager. Howard Sargent reiterated that we need to make this step forward collectively. Craig Seagrove noted that a town that he came from the time of the idea of full time chief was brought up it took 7 years to happen. Steve Marshall expressed again the way the SFD is governed now is not the way any business or other department is run. He feels you cannot have the same people making decision about pay and policies also be the people carrying them out. Howard Sargent stated at the Summer Town Meeting the Town Manager spoke of many positions that needed filling on many boards so he cannot imagine anyone wanting to join the Board of Engineers and having to make administrative decisions. John Galloway stated each year the BOE vote themselves in as deputy chiefs. He stated it makes it very difficult if a problem occurs with one of the chief officers who do you go to and voice a complaint. Mark Scott pointed out that statutorily deputy chiefs and engineers have the same power. Howard Sargent wanted to make it clear that the Town Manager has no authority only the Selectmen have authority over the BOE. Chief Ruggles noted that you should always go to the Chief first, then to the Board of Selectmen if you do not get satisfaction. Steve Marshall stated there is no cohesive chain of command, and it is a complete conflict of interest. John Galloway questioned what if the BOE were members of the department and not officers. Howard Sargent stated if the town appoints a full time chief the chief should not be on the BOE. Mark Scott asked if everyone understood this whole issue came about because a vote in 1994 was not taken and we need to come up with something for the warrant article for the March 2018 warrant. Steve Marshall believes it goes back further than that. Brad Palmer posed the question "How will you four BOE feel if are not appointed chief?" Howard Sargent hoped no matter the outcome that it would be what is best for the SFD. Depending on how fast this all happened it was noted that some of the BOE would not be at an age to become Chief.

Chief Ruggles asked for more thoughts and Daryl Sencabaugh would like to see

2-3 full time people on duty, and we should think of having our own ambulance. He stated it baffled him why we want to spend \$170,000 on a Forestry Truck that made 7 calls last year and some of those were mutual aid. Howard Sargent stated this is not just about having 2-3 people on duty but need to hire more employees because we would have to do our own billing and other duties associated with a town owned ambulance. Dan Ruggles felt that would be a hard sell when we pay only \$56,000 to New London Hospital annually.

Steve Marshall questioned how the BOE feels about the advice received from the Town Attorney that said they do not advise the Chief to be on the BOE. Howard Sargent said that was just advise and we are not doing anything illegal.

John Galloway suggested we give others some other levels of responsibility. Howard Sargent questioned who is going to do it and how are you going to keep track of who is responsible for duties. John Galloway stated he feels you should offer the opportunities to others. Howard Sargent did not agree as the number of people showing up for calls does not allow for this.

Steve Marshall stated is in total agreement we need a full time chief. Dan Ruggles agreed we are coming to that point.

Amelia Gallup asked is there a reason why we cannot take the Chief off the BOE, and asked when the Chief's term was up as an Engineer. It was stated our by-laws would have to altered to do this.

Dan Ruggles suggested the BOE become a 3 member board.

Chief Ruggles informed everyone that he would ask for their input and have it to him as we are going to meet again on August 21, 2017. After we receive your thoughts and ideas the BOE will discuss and come up with something to present to the Board of Selectmen on September 5, 2017.

John Galloway posed the question how the BOE would feel if they were under the guidance of the town. Howard Sargent gave a brief history of the SFD over the years and how things have changed. Howard Sargent feels SFD issues are better kept at the SFD level.

Daryl Sencabaugh asked if it makes sense to go to an on call department vs volunteer. It was noted that was experimented with and did not work out. Some members said that just would not be able to commit to on call.

John Galloway stated that the reason people are not responding to calls is that a person gets up in the middle of the night gets dressed heads out the door and gets cancelled. Howard Sargent questioned the logic of not cancelling.

Steve Marshall asked if the BOE had a strategy as to how they were going to come up with a plan to bring to the Board of Selectmen. Craig Seagrove says he sees the biggest topic as a full time Chief. Steve Marshall stated now matter what we come up with we need to go to the Board of Selectmen as a cohesive group.

B Palmer conveyed that we need to concentrate on getting some more people to join the SFD but feels people are holding back due to what he sees as turmoil in the ranks. He also asked the question do you believe the Board of Selectmen will agree to the plan the BOE come up with. It was stated there is no reason to believe otherwise. Phil Corbett said from his travels around the this is not just a Sunapee issue not having enough volunteers it is nationwide. Dan Ruggles said the BOE have an appointment with BOS on September 5th and have to have a plan in progress.

Tom Blinn expressed concern that he informed the BOE about his retirement from the SFD and has not heard from anyone about who will be stepping up to take his place as Captain with only twenty four days left. It was noted that the BOE can move personnel as they see appropriate.

Craig Seagrove asked who is coming up with these policies that are often discussed. Dan Ruggles said the Chief will appoint a committee so that we have something in place. Also, the full time Chief is not something that will happen overnight.

John Galloway expressed his concern that we cannot move forward without job descriptions for everyone.

John Galloway asked about lifetime members, and allowing them some freedoms in the Safety Service Building. Howard Sargent expressed that he does not think any retired members should be in building without an active member present. Rich Hamm asked what is the benefit of lifetime members. John Galloway said this status would allow them to go to meetings, help out with cookouts, station activities etc., just like a supportive member. Dan Ruggles asked if they knew of any other towns that do this. Rich Hamm feels this should fall under the Auxiliary. Dan Ruggles affirmed a person is not on SFD roster they cannot be in town building or have a key for the Safety Services Building. Howard Sargent compared it to the Town Office where you need a key to get beyond the lobby.

Steve Marshall asked Chief Ruggles if he had heard from the FEMA Grant. Dan Ruggles said he is working on it, there is an issue with the ID number.

John Galloway asked if we have parts for the Forestry Truck, and Dan Ruggles replied he has not been able to find parts. John Galloway said he has a catalog that offers the parts.


Steve Marshall asked if there was any word when Engine 3 would be back in service. Chief Ruggles said it would be soon.

Dan Ruggles asked that anyone that has ideas about how the SFD should be structured to write them down and come to the next meeting which will be on August 21<sup>st</sup>.


It was noted that the Rescue Tool Replacement is in the station and in service.

Dana Ramspott made a motion and Howard Sargent seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:26pm.

  
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Daniel Ruggles, Chief

  
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Howard Sargent, Deputy Chief

  
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Dana Ramspott, Deputy Chief

  
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Mark Scott, Deputy Chief

