Joint Meeting of Board of Selectmen & Board of Fire Commissioners
Municipal Office Complex
Via YouTube Live
March 11, 2021
Special Meeting Minutes
Joint Meeting with the Board of Fire Commissioners &
East Haddam Volunteer Fire Department Executive Board

Selectmen Present: R. Smith; T. Govert; C. Quinn (via phone)
Fire Commissioners Present: B. Dutch; J. Spencer
Also Present: R. Bennett; J. Boynton; S. Daigle; E. Kolasinski; K. Mosig; N. Mosig; W. Parkus; K. Rutty; D. Wallace; S. Wheeler; L. Zemienieski, and other members of the public via virtual media

1. Call to Order

   First Selectman Smith called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. Mr. Dutch called the Board of Fire Commissioners' meeting to order at 7:06 p.m.

2. East Haddam Volunteer Fire Department Overview and General Discussion

   Mr. Smith made the following opening comments: He clarified that the Fire Department is a private organization which works closely with but is not under the control of the Town of East Haddam government. He stated that the Town does not have any input into the organization of the Fire Department or the election of its officers. He noted that the Town works through the Board of Fire Commissioners to provide the Fire Department with the proper fire apparatus, equipment, and housing.

   Mr. Smith further stated that it is the responsibility of the Fire Department's executive board to develop the department's Capital Budget and provide it to the Board of Fire Commissioners for their review; representatives from the Board of Fire Commissioners and the Volunteer Fire Department then jointly present the budget to the Board of Selectmen for their consideration. He noted that this is historically how the department's budget has been handled; however, he did not know if that process had occurred for the FY2021-2022 budget.

   Mr. Smith advised that the Capital budget list projects 10-years out into the future and he stated that it is important to recognize that it is not guaranteed that the long-range Capital planning items will be purchased at the projected future date as originally specified or for the estimated cost originally anticipated. He noted that the Town puts aside Capital reserves, based on the projected Capital needs, to stabilize the budget.

   Mr. Smith opened the floor to the Board of Fire Commissioners. Ms. Spencer reviewed the typical internal process used by the Volunteer Fire Department for developing their annual budgets. She stated that it is her understanding that the standard process for developing the Fire Department's budget was not followed for the past two fiscal years. Ms. Spencer stated that there was a clear break down in communications this year and reviewed the abridged process that occurred regarding the development of the Fire Department's FY2021-2022 budget. She noted that "drastic" changes were made to this year's Capital budget to catch up with oversights from FY2020-2021.

Mr. Dutch stated that the issues within the Fire Department have been building over the past several years but noted that, it is his belief, that they can be resolved with open communications. Ms. Govert acknowledged the challenge in creating a long-range Capital budget but confirmed that it is the Town's intention to support the Fire Department by ensuring they have the proper equipment.

Mr. Smith reviewed the Fire Department's Capital items for FY2021-22 that the Board of Selectmen have recommended to the Board of Finance. Mr. Smith responded to questions from Mr. K. Mosig regarding the department's tanker trucks. Mr. Boynton confirmed that the department's volunteer staff and executive board have not been involved in developing the budget for the past two fiscal years and that is a problem. He also stated the breakdown in communication between the Fire Department and the Board of Commissioners needs to be fixed. The Board of Selectmen and Fire Commissioners agreed. Mr. Boynton emphasized that, notwithstanding the issues being discussed tonight, the volunteer and paid staff are very committed to meeting their responsibility as the Town's fire fighters.

In response to Mr. Rutty's recommendation that follow-up occur when feedback is not received for an extended period of time, Ms. Spencer listed multiple e-communication methods that were used to follow-up on her requests for input on the budget. Mr. Smith noted that the Chief also had the opportunity to provide input through ClearGov.

Mr. K. Mosig recommended the following steps to help resolve the issues within the Fire Department:

1. Initiate monthly meetings for the volunteer staff, paid staff, and Fire Commissioners to go over major items affecting the Volunteer Fire Department and have minutes from those meetings. Ms. Spencer suggested meetings initially be held every two weeks.

2. Annual budgets should be reviewed by the Fire Chief, officers, and paid staff and a record of their timely sign-offs should be maintained. Mr. Smith recommended adding this suggestion to the Fire Department's Standard Operating Procedures manual.

3. The chief officer should have access to the fire houses' camera system. Mr. Smith confirmed that the Chief officer can view the cameras in real time; however, if there is a need to view a section from a previous day/time, the officer must (a) specify a span of time to research, and (b) view the tape together with either the Facilities Director or a member of the Technology staff to avoid accidental erasures or damage to the tapes.

4. A detailed procedure should be drafted to formalize the process for appointing the Fire Department's Apparatus Committee and how their meetings should operate. The procedure should be added to the department's by-laws.

5. The lack of cleanliness of Firehouse Company #1 must be addressed. There was a general discussion about multiple groups using the facility and whose responsibility it is to clean the firehouse. Mr. Smith recommended that this topic be discussed with all the agencies using the Firehouse, to establish and agree to shared responsibility.

In response to a question raised by Mr. K. Mosig, Ms. Spencer confirmed that monthly meetings of the Board of Fire Commissioners occur on the first Tuesday of the month at 5:00pm. The Fire Chief, Fire Marshal and First Selectman are usually in attendance, but the Commissioners meetings are completely open to the public. Mr. Parkus confirmed that the East Haddam Volunteer Fire

Department Executive Board meetings are scheduled on the last Tuesday of each month and are open to the Commissioners to attend. Mr. K. Mosig agreed to forward his recommendations to the Board of Selectmen and Board of Fire Commissioners.

Mr. N. Mosig and Mr. Wallace supported the need to improve communications. Mr. Wallace stated that there should always be a general consensus among officers, that the chain of command must be followed, and communications should be open and transparent.

Mr. Smith again reviewed the Capital budget and the list of FY2021-2020 Capital items. Ms. Govert noted that the Board of Selectmen's motion to forward the budget to the Board of Finance specifically stated that the Board requested the opportunity to work with the Board of Finance members to decide on any change in reserve and capital funding for the Fire Department.

Mr. Smith informed the Fire Department staff that he is always available to discuss their questions or concerns. He noted that the Board of Selectmen will look to fill the vacant Fire Commissioner position as soon as possible

Mr. Daigle stated that he agreed that much of the problem is due to poor communication and reiterated a number of the problems that were previously discussed. He reviewed staffing needs and noted that much of the daytime workload is related to ambulance calls. Mr. Daigle indicated he did not think there was a need to hire any additional paid staff for the daytime shifts; however, he expressed his desire to achieve a better balance and more collaboration between the existing volunteer and paid staff. Mr. Smith confirmed that the Board of Selectmen did not approve any increase to the Fire Department's staff this fiscal year.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Dutch, Mr. Kolasinski reviewed the chain of command for the paid staff and stated that he did not know how the captain's position was created. He noted the importance of completing NFIRs and stated that that had not been done for an extended period. There was a general discussion regarding cleaning at Fire Company No. 1. There was a consensus that there is a serious problem with the lack of cleanliness of Fire Company No. 1 and Mr. Smith confirmed that the issue has come up previously in joint meetings with the Fire Department and the Ambulance Association.

The meeting participants agreed for the need to have regular meetings to address the issues raised at this meeting and to keep the lines of communication open.

Mr. Smith provided instructions on how the public can submit their questions and comments regarding the issues discussed at this meeting.

3. Adjournment

There being no additional business for the Board of Fire Commissioners to discuss, a motion was made Mr. Dutch, seconded by Ms. Spencer, to adjourn their meeting at 9:02 p.m. Unanimous aye.

There being no additional business for the Board of Selectmen to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Govert, seconded by Mr. Smith, to adjourn their meeting at 9:03 p.m. Unanimous aye.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Theresa Govert, Secretary