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Fire Services Study Committee

August 16, 2018

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present:

Don Beaudin, Douglas Erb, Kathy Parsons, Richard Sagar, Bruce Ulricson.

There were 11 people in the audience; Bath Chief Willie Minot and Bethlehem Chief Jack Anderson were also present.

Meeting opened at 6:00 pm.

- Doug read Warrant Article 5, as amended at Town Meeting. He reiterated that this committee was a fact-finding, not a decision-making entity.
- There was a discussion of the minutes of the August 2, 2018 meeting. Kathy pointed out an omission of the discussion of the trust issue in town. After discussion it was agreed to add after paragraph 7 the following: A trust issue in Town was raised and needs to be acknowledged and investigated. Richard questioned if that was within the scope of the Committee's mission, and wondered how the Committee could handle the issue.
- Jason Cartwright suggested that it might benefit the report to the town if there were information included regarding the Landaff Fire Association. He said that he would be willing to gather information to present to the Committee to create a better understanding of the Association's history and mission. He also explained that the Association is independent of the fire department and could continue to exist regardless of a disbandment of the fire department. Bruce said that public trust is an important issue and more information is needed, so he welcomed learning more about the Association. The other Committee members agreed, and Jason will make a presentation at the next meeting.
- Don reported that he has contacted Ron Howard and Kevin Scofield about possible renovations on the existing fire station. They plan to evaluate the station on August 22, and report back to the Committee at the next meeting.
- Pat addressed the public trust issue, reporting on the recent questionnaire sent out by the Planning Board. Ten years ago in answer to the question, "do you feel that the community spirit in Landaff is still strong", 89% responded yes; on the recent survey that number had dropped to 47%.
- Bath Chief Willie Minot, and Bethlehem Chief & Twin State President Jack Anderson were present at the request of the Committee. They expressed their opinions regarding the Landaff FD and proposed changes. They also explained the history and function of the Twin State Mutual Aid Association, and took questions from the Committee and audience.

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- Willie Minot spoke about the Twin State Mutual Aid Association. He explained that Bath, being located between Benton and Lyman, responds to those towns as part of the mutual aid, although both towns are not full members. He said that there is not a fire department in the area that can stand alone. Usually two to three departments respond. The typical number of firefighters responding is about five or six, but fifteen or more may be needed. He explained the importance of the mutual aid system. Chief Minot said that the Landaff FD is a great resource and very valuable to Bath.
- Willie said that he and his members monitor the Woodsville ambulance calls, and are ready to respond. They often respond before being called if they feel that they will be needed. He said that the population is aging and the local department knows their neighbors. They know who may need extra help, and other special situations. They are out with the road crew when there are trees and wires down. They know whom to check on in a power outage.
- Willie said that Twin State started with about 20 member agencies. Benton and Lyman have never had their own department, but pay annual dues as an associate member and receive mutual aid services. They have remained the only non-contributing towns. The Twin State bylaws allow responding departments to charge when they provide services to associate towns, but have traditionally not done so. With the possible discontinuation of the Landaff FD, Twin State has re-thought its policies and will begin charging for services in member towns that lack their own FD. He said that the allowable per hour charges are \$175 engine, \$150 tanker, and \$20 for each firefighter. Mr. Minot said that a fire similar to the Lisbon Main Street fire, in a town without its own department, could cost \$10K. He pointed out that the South Landaff area is served by Bath and North Haverhill without cost under the mutual aid, but that those would be charged calls if Landaff has no FD. He said that many calls are minor, such as an auto accident, but that such a call would now cost Landaff at least \$250, and possibly more if the responders were held at the scene. He also said that the number of structures in that area is growing.
- Asked about similarities between Benton and Landaff, he said that the problem is that Benton has never had a FD, and the cost to establish a department would be prohibitive.
- Jack Anderson said that Alan Clark (Sugar Hill Chief) wanted to attend, but that he was called out on a Pemi search and rescue.
- Jack Anderson said that Twin State was formed circa 1948. Jack has been president for 18 years. He said that the fire service gets more complicated every day, and it is unbelievable what is expected of the fire service today. No small town can support a fire department able to stand alone, without mutual aid. When he took over there were problems with dispatch and communications with the agencies that it served. He said that things have changed and they have done a tremendous job with Tom Andross as a communication specialist. They are now able to provide expertise in the communication world, which is important to every

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department that relies on dispatch. Twin State covers 26 agencies, both fire and medical, with medical becoming more important. Available manpower is getting less and less all the time and it is hard to get people to commit to the time consuming training programs. He said that the state does not mandate that the personnel be trained as level 1, or interior certified, to be on the department. What does dictate is insurance companies, and there are standards that we try to live up to, but none of us can fully comply because of budget and personnel constraints. Demands on the fire service are large, and it becomes more important for all of the towns who have fire departments to maintain them as best as they can. There is no law that says that departments have to have specific equipment, but hose, air packs and other vital equipment need to be updated, and if you have a department who is up on that, you are very fortunate. Bethlehem just spent \$5K on 4" hose. Jack said that a set of top of the line gear for a fireman is about \$2100.00; a valve \$1000.00.

- Jack said that there is no state law requiring a department to have top of the line equipment, and sometimes richer departments give equipment that is still serviceable to the smaller departments. Mutual aid allows area towns to benefit from the resources of other departments. Doug noted that the Landaff FD has an estimated \$300K in assets, not including the building. Jack said that if the voters of Landaff should decide to shut down the fire department, it would be difficult to start back, once gone. He thought that it would be difficult to liquidate the assets, and that the town would not realize anything because other departments either get it for free or are rich enough to buy new. He said that to replace the equipment could be difficult and costly. As you get established you would begin to get things from other departments.
- Jack said that the real core of a department is the group of dedicated volunteers. Pat Webb said that Landaff is the last unpaid volunteer department in the state. Jack said that is exceptional . . . it is great. When you get people like that who want to volunteer for their town, and neighbors through mutual aid, you are truly blessed.
- Jack explained run cards and some examples of how mutual aid works. He stated that mutual aid helps everyone and is critical. He said run cards are pre-determined pieces of apparatus or manpower that respond to a fire. Using an example of a fire in a single family home in Lisbon, he explained that the first alarm would bring Landaff and Littleton to the scene. Fires in rural areas bring in more tankers, while in the case of a larger building extra ladders would respond. A second alarm would bring more equipment and manpower from other towns; Bath, Sugar Hill, and Woodsville in this scenario. If it is in the middle of the day, most people have jobs unless they are retired, so it's a challenge with manpower. If it is a super hot day you need more manpower; interiors need more manpower because of exhaustion. Then there is station coverage where Whitefield will go to Littleton. Why do you need a cover truck? It is an active fire, and you never know what is going to happen on an active fire. The cover truck is ready to respond if there are additional alarms. That's where the real mutual aid comes in. We all work to enhance our departments to be compatible with

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our neighbors. Bethlehem will self start to Twin Mountain because they know that Twin Mountain is short on manpower. It is a long way out to Landaff, and if you have a department who is in your town and even if it's not fully manned, Landaff is way ahead of the game. There is value in having a department close in town.

- Jack said that fire departments are expected to do everything with nothing. He said that he has known Landaff people for a long time, and they work diligently to do a lot with nothing.
- With regard to making level 1 training more accessible, he said that they are working on a basic course that would be 100 hours instead of the present 250 hours.
- Willie said that we are lucky in this area because of courses in Vermont that we can attend, as some Twin State members are part of that training. He said that the cost in Vermont is \$83; in New Hampshire \$810. He said that so long as half of the participants are from Vermont, they can have New Hampshire firefighters in the class.
- Willie said, if you have a department that is working, thank God for it and for those people that are so dedicated to the town; you are lucky, they get paid by serving the people, and that is the greatest pay you can get.
- Bruce asked if there is a policy to deal with members who volunteer, but don't show up. Jack responded, saying that each year can be different. You try to entice them to come more. Sometimes, repeated calls are missed because the person is unable to respond because of work or other reasons. There may be times when that happens one right after another, but then next year they make all of those calls, as you never know when the tone is coming. Jack noted that you have to be real careful how many policies you make as they will drive away volunteers faster than anything.
- Bruce asked Jack about his feelings on background checks. Jack said that the state does not require background checks. Bethlehem has adopted background checks, and he backs them 100%. In a fire the department takes control of the structure, and the firefighters are his responsibility on scene, so he wants people he can trust. He never wants to hear "some jewelry is missing" or worse.
- Bruce was concerned if there are any guidelines requiring annual physicals or other requirements for physical fitness. Jack said that if Bethlehem adopted a policy that says out of shape people can't be on the department, they wouldn't have any members. He said that interiors could have some guidelines. If you restrict it too much you take talent that is useful and you are hampered as a department. Assignments are a judgement call for the department and the chief. We all work together and it is important to have more, rather than fewer people. The chief needs to use judgement.

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- Willie said that insurance companies talk around policies related to health, and you can't dictate, or we would all have full time fire departments. You use your head and put the 70 year old on the pump or as safety officer. You don't dismiss those folks, as they may have 40 years on the department. Willie, at 65, said that he doesn't want to go into a burn, but will if he only has 3 people on scene and needs to.
- Jack explained that Twin State has minimum standards, and a committee that looks at the standards to make sure Twin State members can work together. They are looking at training records and trying to adopt standards, but it is a work in progress. He said that Landaff more than meets the minimum standards for Twin State. Littleton was given as an example of a department which works hard to stay up to national standards, and he stressed that they are standards, not rules. He said that there are times when even they are unable to do so. If they get a structure fire in the middle of the night when there are 2 people on the engine the 2 in 2 out rule is not going to work too well, and they will do the best that they can in the circumstances. To meet the standards is something to shoot for, but hard to achieve.
- Don asked how many firefighters are on the Twin Mountain rosters. Jack said that they will be able to answer that soon. The state is now requiring accurate rosters. He said that there are presently people on the rosters that are no longer active, and they are working to clean up the rosters.
- Kathy stated that a volunteer is making a commitment and that they should keep that commitment. She said that they need to be at training sessions. Jack said that for volunteers, you have to stay after them. You have to get people who are proud of the department, and if we can do that our possibilities are unlimited; and that is a big factor.
- Bethlehem is down on people now, with about 28 members including the ambulance service. They have an Explorer program to encourage younger people to join. Bath is accepting high school students with restrictions. Bath has 21 members, with 4 who are high school students.
- Bath meets twice a month; once for drills and once for a meeting.
- Twin State has a training facility in Bethlehem where each member town can get 4 days of classes a year. Towns can share their days with other departments to extend the total training time.
- Jason mentioned a recent "high profile" training incident involving the Landaff FD, and asked about training outside of regular meetings not involving the whole department. It was stated that if 2 or more are involved it would be considered training. Willie said that they always should log on with dispatch to let them know of the training. Jason said that in the incident that he referred to, dispatch was notified.

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- Willie stated his opinion that once you lose your fire department, the voters lose control of the costs.
- There was a question if in the future Landaff found itself without coverage, would Bath consider providing that coverage. Willie said, they have enough terrain and don't need any more. He would not take on a contract.
- Jack said he and Alan Clark agreed that Landaff is trying to address a problem that we don't have. He said that Landaff has a good little department.
- Jack said that Alan figures that a small fire such as a first alarm chimney fire would cost Landaff around \$6K per call. He explained that fire service is very expensive, Bethlehem's budget is \$85K, and if they are going to support a town that won't invest in their own department, they have to figure out a way to cover their costs. Jack said that the dues are the same for all towns, regardless if they have a department or not, but a town without a department must have a contract with another member town.
- Pat Webb, Landaff's representative to Twin State and a member of the Twin State Executive Board said that other members ask "what the hell is going on". He said that other members value our department.
- Jason asked if Landaff would lose membership if they were unable to meet the standards because of a low roster. Jack said that Twin State would work with the department to work things out in the short term. They would ask the chief for a plan. Willie stated that any help is valuable, even if the roster is low.
- Harry McGovern pointed out that under the new Twin State structure Landaff would charge for any mutual aid responses in Lyman or Benton providing income to the town to offset the cost of fire protection.
- Jack noted that at the DCI fire several years ago the Landaff Fire Department performed admirably.
- Bruce brought up the trust issue and said that it needs to be addressed. It was agreed that it is an issue that needs to be looked at.
- The next scheduled meeting will be Thursday, August 30, 2018 in the Town Hall at 6 PM. At that meeting the Committee will continue to prepare for the Town Hearing on September 13, 2018, discuss the report on possible renovations to the fire station, and hear from Jason Cartwright regarding the Landaff Volunteer Fire Association. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend.

Meeting adjourned at 7:57 PM.

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Respectfully submitted, Heidi Sagar