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Fire Services Study Committee

September 06, 2018

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present:

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

There were 3 people in the audience

Meeting opened at 6:00 pm.

- There was a discussion of the minutes for the previous meeting. A correction on page 6, last paragraph to change the date from 1993 to 1994 was suggested by Claudia Lavoie. After discussion the change was approved and the amended minutes accepted.
- Doug stated that it is important for the Committee to seek input from the Select Board on the issues that are being studied. He stressed the importance of getting all information in writing to avoid future misunderstandings. He said that if not in writing any input is open to interpretation. He feels that it is best to be as transparent as possible.
- The Committee crafted a letter to the Select Board asking for their input.
- Discussing the last meeting, Doug said it revealed just how turbulent and contentious a matter the trust issue presents. Richard stated that the disclosure is good, but wondered how the issue can be resolved. He said that, as important as the trust issue may be, we need to look forward rather than back. He said that the more important issue was to provide for the best fire services going forward. Doug said that hopefully we can create an environment that fosters trust. Richard said that we can help by getting out information.
- Jason Cartwright addressed the Committee regarding the requested chronology of the dispute between the Select Board and the Association over the disputed funds. He has prepared a document of 50 pages of emails that document the interactions between the parties. He reported that he needed a few more days to collate and organize the materials, but would get copies to the Committee then.
- Jason summarized the report for the Committee. He explained the confusion and misunderstandings regarding the transfer of the monies. Regarding legal expenses, he said that the Association costs were paid for by donations from the members. He felt that the Town could have avoided their legal costs if the Select Board had been more willing to talk. He also said that the email record showed that the Association was concerned about the costs to the Town and sought to minimize those costs.
- Jason said that the FD sought to have more flexibility in expending funds. He explained that their needs vary, with new recruits and unexpected expenses, so it is difficult to budget accordingly.

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- Jason also addressed the background checks. He said that the department has no problem with reasonable checks, but that the original request was more intrusive than necessary. He said that there needs to be a strong privacy policy. He reported that he is working with the Select Board on a revised background check, and feels the issue is being resolved.
- Jason said that rumors persist in town that the department is seeking a new million dollar station. He said that the \$850K proposal was withdrawn long ago, and new proposals are for a much lower cost; and include suggestions to renovate the existing structure.
- Jason said that the department is trying to be forthcoming and interactive, not drive a wedge into Town.
- Richard stated that it seemed likely that the perspective of the events surrounding the monies, that the Select Board will present, will differ from that presented by the Association. He asked Jason if he had any suggestions of how to resolve the issue. Jason said that it might help if the Select Board and the Association both issued statements. He suggested that the Select Board should acknowledge the fact that no money was missing and that no money was mis-spent, and that everything was done through proper procedure with a full and proper accounting of the funds. He said that the Association could state that the FD is happy to be an entity of the Town and willing to cooperate in the best interest of the Town.
- Richard suggested that it would be helpful to have more disclosure of the Association funds in the annual Town Report. He thought that it might be helpful to explain the scholarship program and how it is funded. He said that steps have been taken to clarify to donors how to direct their donations to either the FD or the Association, but that those efforts needed to continue.
- Doug thanked Jason for his report. He said that we cannot solve this tonight, and need to focus on going forward.
- The Committee discussed the upcoming Town Hearing. It was decided that Doug will provide an introduction with an overview of the approaches taken. Kathy and Bruce will report on the meetings with Lisbon and Lyman Select Boards. Don will report on the findings regarding the possible renovations to the existing fire station. A comparison of the fire service expenses in similar towns, and insurance and tax implications will be provided by Doug. Richard will report on the Twin State Mutual Aid Association and the Landaff Volunteer Fire Department.
- The next meeting will be the Town Hearing at 6:00 PM, Thursday, September 13.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 PM

Respectfully submitted, Heidi Sagar