

# DRAFT

## Fire Services Study Committee

October 4, 2018

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present:

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

There were 8 people in the audience

Meeting opened at 6:00 pm.

- There was discussion of the minutes of the September 13, 2018 hearing. The minutes were approved as written. As mentioned in those minutes, an addition was approved to the minutes of the August 30, 2018 meeting. Cliff Boivin had asked for a clarification in the previous minutes regarding the fire station property. He said that Arthur Allbee had donated the property to the department, not the school as previously stated.
- Doug asked for opinions on the September 13, 2018 hearing. Committee members generally agreed that the hearing had gone well, and were impressed by the large turnout. They were also pleased and encouraged by the civil tone and the constructive input from the audience. It was felt that the Hearing and other Committee work had achieved some success in answering townspeople's questions.
- Richard suggested that a couple of issues raised at the hearing might be worth pursuing. He agreed that the Committee should make an effort to contact Lisbon Fire Chief Hartwell. The other issue that he felt deserved consideration was to research the call history, for the last several years, and try to calculate what the costs would have been had we been contracting with Lisbon.
- Kathy was concerned that the question of possible compensation for the firefighters was not taken seriously enough. She felt that it was important to consider the added Town expense if the firefighters were to be compensated in the future. Doug reported that a warrant article to consider compensation had been soundly defeated in the past. Don thought that it was an issue worth consideration. He thought that it might improve recruitment, particularly when other area departments do offer some compensation. Jim LaPierre also felt that some kind of compensation would be helpful.
- Kathy was also concerned about having a system to track available firefighters in real time. She suggested that it would be helpful to have a current on-call list available to the department for specific time periods, with a minimum number of volunteers that could be counted on to respond. She thought that a schedule could be established, and kept current, via email among the members. Don responded that it was a good idea. He said that the department currently employs a similar system, and is generally aware of available personnel, but he felt that improvements could be made. He said that it was an area that the Fire Department could continue to work on.
- There was discussion regarding the need for renovations to the current fire station, or the building of a new structure. Doug said that he originally felt that the Committee should not

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address this issue, but that subsequent input from the community indicated that it needed to be explored. He said that it would be difficult to provide definite costs, but that we had to have some realistic estimates.

- Claudia Lavoie said that the town needed to have an idea of the cost of a new building.
- Reggie Lavoie suggested that the Select Board and the Fire Department should work together to provide cost estimates.
- Ben Peters said that it would be hard to determine final costs. He feels that it is important to determine all that needs to be done to be compliant with applicable codes. He expressed his opinion that those costs may be high, and that the original proposal may not be that far-fetched.
- Don reported that he is still awaiting estimates from contractors for possible renovations to the existing station. He said that he had an estimate for the well of \$10,000; this was based on an anticipated depth of 380 feet.
- There was a discussion of the “trust issue”, with particular reference to the disputed fund transfers. The Committee had previously requested a detailed timeline of those events, from both the Select Board and Fire Association. Both had responded with detailed explanations of those events
- Doug began the discussion by reading the entire report from the Select Board.
- The Select Board’s report began with the Fire Department becoming a department of the Town in 1994, with all funds becoming Town funds at that time. Doug said that his recollection was that the primary concern at the time was regarding insurance issues. Ben Peters clarified, by saying that he felt that it was for workers compensation and liability issues.
- Doug felt that a lack of transparency may have contributed to the mistrust. He stressed that moving forward we need to know where the money goes and its intended uses. He would like to see us move forward as a town, strengthening our organizations with an understanding of the role of each. He also hopes that all will operate in a more transparent way. He said that the people need to understand how things work; we don’t want to open wounds
- Bruce thought that much of the problem was one of personalities. He said that it is behind us, and agreed that we need transparency and efficiency. He said that one of his main concerns is still the safety of the firefighters and any liability for the Town. He feels that we need to move forward considering future costs and efficiencies.
- Richard said that the two accounts describe the same series of events, but provide differing interpretations. He concludes, as has been suggested in testimony to this Committee, that the process was fundamentally flawed. His opinion is that everyone involved was working in what they felt was the best interest of the Town, but that there were misinterpretations of intent and other unintentional mistakes made. He pointed out that the core issue, regarding the funds, has been resolved, and that the parties are now working in a cooperative spirit. Referencing a shared “love of town” that has been expressed often in past discussions, he

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said the past actions cannot be undone, but feels that it is in the best interest of all to move forward in a cooperative manner. He suggested that to achieve this, it might be helpful if the Select Board and the Fire Association both issue statements acknowledging that mistakes may have occurred, and that reconciliation and cooperation is in the best interest of the Town. He also felt that it should be publicly stated that no monies were ever taken or misappropriated. Reggie Lavoie objected to that particular statement, saying that the monies were improperly moved into accounts that were not under Town control.

- Don said that there were two sides to the story, and that both sides thought that they were doing the right thing at the time. He said that the Fire Association was concerned with protecting donated and raised funds for the intended purposes. He felt that it was never clarified during the process that the funds would be protected for Fire Department uses. He also pointed out that the Fire Association had responded to the Committee's request for information with a fifty page document, which Committee members have read, but which was not presented at this meeting.
- Doug suggested that the Committee research Town Audit Reports for the period covering the transfers of funds and the eventual forming of the trust fund. The general consensus of the Committee was that it would serve little purpose, as the matter has been resolved. They felt that it was more important to move forward, trying to create transparency and understanding, while letting the healing process continue.
- Don also reported recent changes in the leadership of the Association, and said that members were excited to move forward. There were suggestions that more frequent communications from the Association regarding their activities would help to keep the community involved. Don thought that the suggestion was useful.
- Kathy questioned the need for an association separate from the Fire Department. Mary Beaudin explained that many other towns have a similar situation, with associations formed to provide support for the volunteer departments. One function is to assist in the raising of donations to provide for extra costs not provided by taxpayer funds. Our Department is also instrumental in the organization of Old Home Day events, and, through the annual auction, they are able to provide significant additional funding to the Department.
- Claudia Lavoie felt that there would have been full support of the Fire Department if the entire process had been more open to the taxpayers. She said that discussing and acknowledging mistakes helps in the process of moving forward. She feels that the Committee's work has greatly helped in that process.
- Jim LaPierre said that the Fire Department, Select Board, and Fire Association have all been working together, in a cooperative manner, since 2014.
- Mary Beaudin said that it hurts to hear bad things said about the Fire Department. She feels that recruitment may be adversely affected, with young people staying away due to the controversy. She hopes that all this drama and gossip will stop. She said that the firemen work hard, and if the people will stop the disrespect, things will improve.

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- Doug will contact Chief Hartwell and invite him to attend the next Committee meeting to share any concerns or input that he may have. Another goal for the next meeting will be to continue with showing how to calculate impacts on the tax rate of any proposed changes in the fire service.
- The meeting adjourned at 7:37 PM. The next meeting to be announced.

Respectfully submitted, Heidi Sagar