

MINUTES OF THE SELECT BOARD
Monday, November 4, 2019 – 7PM
Macomber Room

Present: Damon Frampton, Chair, Tom Maher, Selectman, Bill Stewart, Selectman, and Bette Jane Riordan, Secretary.

Also present: Fire Chief Ted Hartmann, Pam Cullen, Administrative Assistant to Select Board, Christiane McAllister, Accountant, Ken McDonald, TAPC, Tom Smith, Jim Cerny, Marcia Cronin, Alan and Sally Gayer, Jim Rini, Dave McGuckin, Peter Rice, Lorn and Rosalie Buxton, Dick White, Nancy Jackson, the Rettstadts, Katie Murray, John Ireland, Reggie Whitehouse, Margaret Sofio, Dr. Jim Zuckerman, Richard Marcks, David Borden, Mike McAndrew, Bill Kingston, Mary and John Rauh, Mark and Elise Lacasse.

1. Approve Minutes of October 7th and 21st.

After review, Selectman Stewart made a Motion to Approve the minutes of October 7 and 21, 2019 Select Board Meetings, as amended. Selectman Maher seconded and the Motion carried.

2. Public Questions and Answers. None.

3. New Business.

a. New Castle Fire Department with Chief Hartmann.

Chair Frampton stated that tonight's meeting is a public informational meeting and open forum for residents of New Castle and members of the public on the new plan for the department, and how it is presently run. He stressed this not a forum for employees. Employees need to take up their issues with the Department with the Chief. He invited Chief Hartmann to begin his presentation and dialogue. Chief Hartmann provided copies of his Executive Summary of the Department's Plan for Change, and encouraged members of the public to contact him, stop by his office, call, Email or text him, with any comments or suggestions. He explained his mission and that of the Department to provide the absolute best coverage for the Town. He will also make the full detailed plan available to anyone who would like to review it.

Chief Hartmann read through and explained his Executive Summary, a copy of which is attached to these minutes. The principal areas of the summary include:

Mission of Change
Assessment of the need for change
Decision for Change
Implementation of change
Evaluation of change to date.

Chief Hartman stated that after review, he determined that the median skill, certification and coverage level in New Castle were below expectations of a department of similar size, complexity and service demand. Lack of emphasis on formal training and adherence to best practice as well as a nonconventional use of resources provided in the budget were listed as causes. He stated progressive and professional leadership-led change will bring skill certification levels up in concert with expanded coverage. He stated this must be undertaken without delay.

Chief Hartmann addressed some of the effects of change which have taken place. Among them are that shift coverage has already been expanded; reaching out to other communities and doing joint training with the goal of attracting new members and generating new interest. He is advocating for funding of a third full time firefighter/EMT. He stressed that he is working for each and every resident of New Castle, and noted that here has already been a reduction in response times. He again encouraged residents to speak with him. He also noted that they are welcome to review the more detailed plan for change which is available at the Department.

At the conclusion of his presentation, Chair Frampton opened up the meeting for public questions.

Marcia Cronin expressed her displeasure with many items, but in particular questioned the 24 hour coverage, and her belief that the Chief was disrespectful. The Chief responded by detailing the extent of 24-hour coverage and also responded to her question about a perceived gag order on members of the Department. He encouraged her getting information directly from the Chief. He noted that the community partnerships have helped to assure 24/7 coverage for New Castle. When there is not someone on duty certified members can respond, including those from surrounding neighbor communities. He explained there is a policy in effect to get factual information directly from the Fire Department. This was put into effect because of numerous statements made in town which were not factually correct. Selectman Stewart stressed that factual information needs to come directly from the Department. Communications need to come directly from the Fire Department through the Chief. There is no gag order on opinions, but factual information must come from the Fire Department, otherwise the public can get confused.

John Ireland stressed the need to work together, and commented on the divisiveness of the mass mailings (Communications not from the department). He believes the Chief's letter of October 24, 2019 resolved many misunderstandings. He encouraged better communication and the need for the public to get behind the necessary changes. He related his positive discussion with the Chief who answered his questions and clarified the coverage issue along with other items of concern.

Dave Borden stated he totally agree with Mr. Ireland, in that change is hard but needs to be dealt with positively. After speaking with Bill Kingston, he wanted to know, as a business property owner if there could be regularly scheduled inspections by the Department. He believes there are approximately 9 buildings which would be subject to these inspections. He also addressed the former Monday night trainings held by the Department which he felt

were important for the Fire Department. The Chief responded that regular inspections are part of the new plan, and then he addressed the training issue, and his new approach to enhance training. He hopes to be able to increase more ad hoc trainings in accordance with best practice.

Mark Lacasse was interested in the full cost of a full time employee. The Chief could not pinpoint the cost at this time but is working to get the best person for the best cost. Ideally, he would like two more FTE's supported by on call and part time folks. It will be a hybrid model as volunteerism is declining. Assessments will be made as the plan is rolled out. The Fire Department needs to grow with the Town.

Bill Kingston had questions about "certification" and asked the Chief who are the certified people the Chief is referring to. He believes certain members are already certified. The Chief responded that State and Federal government regulations and administrative rules require formal training, and the Department will work to get the non-certified people on board as soon as possible. The budget constraints require that currently they can't subsidize the non-certifieds. We also rely on the mutual aid response.

In response to a question by Margaret Sofio, the Chief stated there are currently 14 certified people in the Department who act in different capacities and take on different roles. The plan is evolving as to how many FTE's there will need to be. There is a national trend toward needing to hire employees as opposed to volunteers. He stressed that he will always work toward finding a place and duties for anyone who wants to serve the Fire Department.

Peter Rice addressed the public noting he has a fundamental disagreement with the Chief. He read a prepared statement and provided a packet of information. He represents a core group of officers, volunteers and EMTs, and noted that his expressed views are not those of all Fire Department members. He explained that he and others have been rebuffed in their efforts to communicate their concerns with the new plan for change. He expressed concern that the New Castle Volunteer Firefighters Association (NCVFA) can no longer meet in the Fire House, and must now take out liability insurance. He also referred to Captain Cronin's email from the summer to the Chief regarding training concerns. Mr. Rice said the low morale was adversely affecting the Fire Department. He concluded by stating how painful it was for him to address these matters, and thanked all for listening.

Lorn Buxton addressed the EMT calls and how response time is so critical, and questioned the Chief's emphasis on cost. He questioned the reliance upon other communities, as opposed to local people responding as has been the custom. New Castle deserves the best service and may be willing to pay more in order to get that service. Selectman Stewart asked the Chief to elaborate on what transpires when someone calls 911. Chief stated that when a 911 call goes out, the ambulance is on the road heading to New Castle, as per the agreement with the municipality. Certified responders from New Castle respond. Selectman Stewart asked :If no one is on duty, and a 911 call goes out, what happens? Concord sends the call to Rockingham County Dispatch, which contacts the Portsmouth

Fire Dept. for ambulance and calls New Castle Fire Dept. Certified EMTS from New Castle will respond.

Dick White commented that New Castle needs the best service, and someone from New Castle needs to respond, and should be there in 5 minutes. He realizes that change is occurring and will continue. He expressed concerns about doing away with the Monday night training. He believes fire-fighting skill sets get dull without that particular training. He also cautioned about burn out among the members.

Linda Patchett, with a background in nursing and administration, expressed appreciation for the volunteers and thanked the Chief for clarification. She stated the importance of having reliable hard data and is interested in finding out more to support the plans for change, and how the cost will affect taxpayers.

Selectman Maher asked the Chief for his comments. The Chief stressed that if there are certified staff on duty, they will respond to a call. If no one is on duty than of course all members are able to respond. He also explained further about training, certification and licensure. He indicated that he always accepts requests for additional trainings. Again, he stressed his invitation to come and speak with him. He stated there are so many good things to understand and view in order to shine through the current dark cloud. He encouraged the public to take advantage of their department and come to the building.

Selectman Maher stated that with respect to having data, the Fire Department submits a monthly report containing Department statistics for the previous month, broken down by incident types such as number of calls for service, and this report is presented at the Select Board meeting on a monthly basis. This report is attached to the Select Board meeting minutes. Ms. Patchett would like more information on how the proposed improvements are going to be measured.

Other questions from the public concerned the need for more details on response to a crisis and what to expect. Selectman Maher asked the Chief to go over the coverage for weekdays and weekends. The Chief said during the week coverage is 7AM to 3 PM, with 2 Firefighter EMTS on duty. Details are posted on the town's website. Selectman Stewart said the services are the same or improving from where we were. From 3 to midnight, Portsmouth is dispatched and a call goes out to NCFD for response. Christiane McAllister, accountant gave an explanation on how EMS regulates and documents the 911 calls, as well as certification for the responders. Rosalie Buxton asked about legality and best practice, and what is encouraging the changes? The Chief replied that both Federal and State regulations are the reasons for the change, and urged her to come and speak with him. Mrs. Doherty pointed out the importance of the philosophy of the long time residents and new residents of working together through these changes, and mentioned the effects on the annual budget.

Selectman Maher reviewed the fiscal situation of the Fire Department in order to show the response of the Select Board. Over the past three years, the Fire Department has underspent its budget by \$65,000. They were provided an 11% increase in their budget,

even though they underspent \$21,000 last year. The real dollars allocated were \$43,000 increase year to year. He does not want the public to believe that the Select Board is shortchanging the Fire Department in any way. The Board will continue to work with the Chief to help in any way they can with this transition. He reiterated that change is hard, and the Board is committed to a strong responsive department to maintain a high level of public safety.

Peter Tarlton stated that while there are gaps in understanding and communication, he suggested that more energy be directed to building trusting relationships. Dave McGuckin summed up the discussion by stating that change is a process, and the answers to the questions posed will come. He said the Chief's plan will take a while. Christiane McAllister, speaking as an employee pointed that countless hours the Select Board has spent on the Fire Department.

There being no other business to come before the Board, Chair Frampton made a Motion to Adjourn, which was seconded by Selectman Maher. Motion carried.
Meeting adjourned at 9:02 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bette Jane Riordan
Recording Secretary

Attachments:

Fire Department monthly report
NCFD Organizational Change Executive Summary