



New Castle Fire Department

43 Main Street New Castle, New Hampshire 03854



Ted Hartmann
Fire Chief

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Official position of Chief Ted Hartmann, New Castle Fire Department

Re: Mass mailing of October 18/19, 2019

October 24, 2019

Dear resident:

You may have received a letter in the form of a mass mailing over this past weekend. This letter contained opinions of Fire Department operational methodology, in addition to an individual assessment of circumstances absent factual basis. This letter did not contain the official position of the Fire Department, nor a consensus of the body, but rather was the vision of an individual.

Many great things have been accomplished in the last few months at your Fire Department, and I am pleased to report we are making great strides in advancing the deliverable service to you the residents and all the wonderful visitors to town.

It is my hope that these brief, factual, responses will help to clarify any confusion or questions you may have. Please contact me directly at Firechief@Newcastlenh.org, or stop by the station should you want any more information.

Thank you,

Ted Hartmann

Fire Chief

“Coverage is not even close to 24/7”

Coverage is at an all-time high and more certified members are working more scheduled shifts than ever. In addition to the shifts we have added since May, coverage continues to be supported by certified, on-call members during hours when there is no one in the station. This coverage paired with our mutual aid agreements is legal, appropriate and best practice. Our current shifts are listed below.

Monday through Friday- Two firefighter/ EMTs on duty 7am to 3pm.

Friday night- One firefighter/ EMT on duty 7pm to 7 am Saturday.

Saturday- One firefighter/ EMT on duty 7am to 7am Sunday, one firefighter/ EMT on duty 9am to 7pm.

Sunday- Two firefighter/ EMTs on duty 9am to 7pm.

Additional shifts are added to provide coverage in anticipation of major storms, busy travel holidays, town wide events and other historically high demand times.

“Citizens are no longer welcome on our own fire department.”

The doors to your fire station are always open and everyone with an interest in serving has a place here. The New Castle Fire Department will always accept, encourage, foster and be better having community members as a part of the department. The strength of our organization depends on many to weave the fabric of success. No immediate actions to employ a large number of solely full-time firefighters are being planned nor do I believe this is the solution. The national downtrend in volunteerism cannot be denied and it is factual that the department will need to add more paid firefighter/ EMTs in the future. As the town develops an appetite for additional services and coverage increases in staffing that combine full and part time members will be vetted and made in a responsible way.

“We are limited to one training session a month.”

Since May, opportunities for training have increased to levels that far exceed previous offerings. The quality and direct benefit of that training to the town has risen to an all-time high. It is true that there are less in-house sessions on a monthly basis than in years past, but this has given the department the ability to send members to classes that result in certification, state licensure and the ability to legally operate at emergency scenes. Members are encouraged to seek out training in addition to what is offered in town: at the hospital EMS education center, with other area agencies, such as Rye who holds a monthly session, with the on duty crew during the week and to make request to train anywhere so as they can show direct benefit to the town. I am pleased to announce that already under this new system, a firefighter has been enrolled in an EMT program concluding in December, and that an EMT will conclude firefighter certification training before the end of the year.

“Members have never seen the two-year plan.”

Over the last six months intensive sessions detailing the need for, and details of, organizational change have been held with the membership lasting many hours. As implementing the new plan began opportunities for polishing some of the details became apparent and additional meetings were held to hear concerns while

gathering feedback. These sessions also included discussions about creative solutions to operational issues and that this plan was living and evolving with the needs of the town. In addition to these efforts the plan was read into the record at a Board of Selectmen's meeting on August 23rd so as to make it public. Many members of the Fire Department were present at that meeting and provided feedback about modifications.

“A gag order has been placed on the Department membership.”

There have been several new orders issued since May, but none are or were intended to merely silence those that have an opinion different from the administration or town. I have and will always welcome healthy, productive and constructive feedback. In August, I issued an order that in one paragraph did seek to remove the dissemination of factually incorrect information that could lead to residents being placed in fear for their safety but this was not a gag order. As your Fire Chief, I want all residents and guests of New Castle to be safe, feel safe and to have an accurate depiction of the facts and circumstances surrounding the capacity of the Fire Department. It is through this unobstructed view and the dialog that follows that we can improve things together to best suit the needs of the town.

“Vehicles critical to public safety are being removed.”

Efficiently operating the Fire Department and the managing the resources allocated to it, are powers vested in the Fire Chief not only by the Board of Selectmen at swearing in but by New Hampshire State Statute. Change is hard and at times difficult decisions must be made for the benefit of the department as a whole. The associated changes are certainly not always popular. In an effort to eliminate waste and limit costly annual maintenance liabilities, several single purpose vehicles were removed from inventory. A condemned small fire boat not providing any benefit to public safety was sold under sealed bid in keeping with past town practice. The large fire boat was transferred to the City of Newburyport, Massachusetts after a cost benefit analysis, personnel tenability study and formal approval by the State. The aging rescue truck, without patient transport capability and carrying minimal equipment, required thousands of dollars in maintenance and was consolidated into an existing vehicle. This redesign of our fleet has not changed our capacity to provide care or fire suppression, and allowed the department to better allocate resources to staffing and training.

I am excited to tell you that a new smaller, budget and personnel friendly town safety boat is being pursued with funds already allocated in Capital Improvement. The ability of the large fire boat to deliver water relied on large amounts of manpower, ideal tidal conditions and that the need for water was in the area immediately adjacent to town hall. In its place a new, zero cost, system of community mutual aid from surrounding fire departments brings massive amounts of water to any part of town, 24/7/365 and with it many capable hands to assist in quelling any emergency.

“Fire Inspections”

We continue to work and address all of our inspection related duties. Regular and ongoing inspections of target hazard properties, planning for emergencies, and working with the building department to ensure code compliance are daily tasks for the fire department.

“The selectmen still continue to expect NCFD to do more with less.”

The Board of Selectmen have made a tireless effort to ensure the functionality of the department and that it has the resources required to provide service. No line item for maintenance has been eliminated and the size of increases made to the budget reflect the seriousness with which the board views public safety. An excellent dialog about the future of the department, challenges and how the department will provide response is open.