

TAMWORTH FIRE/RESCUE DEPARTMENT

Board of Firewards Meeting

May 2, 2019

Firewards Present: Jim Bowles, Harry Remick, John Hartley, Zachary Remick (arrived at 20:15)

Members Present: Chief Richard Colcord, Capt. Matt Baumann, Lt. Mike Dow, FF Eric Ames, FF Shawn Blanchette, FF Marsha Colcord

Public Present: Selectmen - Dan Poirier, Willie Farnum, Becky Mason, Aaron Ricker, & Melanie Streeter, Town Administrator Darlene McWhirter, Citizens – Bruno & Madeline Siniscalchi, Linda & Cassidy Cook

Meeting Opened at 19:30 by Chairman Bowles

Minutes: The Board reviewed the April 4, 2019 minutes. Motion to approve the minutes as amended made by J. Hartley, seconded by H. Remick. All in favor.

Public Comment: At the Firewards invitation, the Board of Selectmen attended the meeting. Jim Bowles opened the discussion by welcoming the Selectmen and expressing appreciation for the current Board's efforts. Jim advised that the Firewards invited the Selectmen to make them aware that the Firewards run the Fire/Rescue Department in a manner that considers and respects the impacts that policy and budgetary decisions may have on the volunteers. Whenever possible, policies are presented to the membership for input before being put into effect. Several incidents involving decisions by the Selectmen/Selectmen's office that inadvertently have negatively impacted the participation of several volunteers was discussed. It was discussed how similar incidents could be avoided in the future.

Becky Mason and Dan Poirier asked if it would help if they sent apology letters to the impacted firefighters. Chief Colcord did not think it would be necessary and that the firefighters knew that the holding of their checks was not intended to be a punitive action towards them.

The subject of how volunteers should be paid for specific hourly work assigned by the Fire Chief and for doing ambulance transports was discussed. It was decided that more research is needed and in the meantime the members time should be reported as it used to be and not on the standard town employees timesheet. Jim Bowles will contact the NH Department of Labor to get input from them. It may also be necessary to seek input from the IRS.

There was discussion about the difference between call firefighters and volunteer firefighters. Jim Bowles explained that the primary difference is that call firefighters get

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paid a set hourly rate. Call firefighters know that when they respond to a call or attend a department function, they will receive a set hourly wage for the time that they work. Jim Bowles and Chief Colcord explained that the volunteer incentive program that Tamworth Fire/Rescue is structured such that a fixed amount of money is budgeted each year and is divided up between members via a points system. The volunteers don't know how much money, if any, they will get when they respond to a call or attend a department function. Jim Bowles reiterated that the Department bylaws are very specific in that if there is not enough money at the end of the year, the volunteers will not get a stipend.

Mike Dow asked Jim Bowles why he is against the Department changing from a volunteer to a call department. Jim answered that the primary reason is that the Department has not budgeted for it. Mike advised that Moultonborough Fire/Rescue has a similar number of members and is a call department. Mike advised that Moultonborough budgets \$47,000 to pay the hourly wages of its call department members. He suggested that since Tamworth budgets \$40,000 for its Volunteer Incentive Program it may not cost much more to switch to a call department structure. Jim advised that \$47,000 does not sound like all of the related expenses because it is much less than what a smaller neighboring call department budgets each year. More research should be done to estimate the total cost.

Mike Dow asked what insurance covers the Firefighters when at calls. Jim Bowles replied that an RSA was passed many years ago, possibly in the early 1960s, that requires municipalities to provide workers compensation insurance for volunteer firefighters, ems, and police regardless of whether they receive any form of wage or stipend or not. Back when this RSA took effect there were few if any departments that had volunteer incentive stipends.

There was discussion about whether the Firefighters should be getting W2 forms to report income from the VIP stipend. Jim advised that the Department obtained an opinion from a Local Government Center staff attorney around 12 years ago. The opinion concluded that the fact that the volunteers receive a VIP stipend does not make them town employees. It also stated clearly that although the volunteers are subject to the Department's Standard Operating Guidelines, they are not subject to the Town Employee Personnel Policies. The opinion did not discuss the question of how to report stipend income to the IRS. It was decided that more research on how to report the stipend income is in order. Some at the meeting thought that form 1099 might be more applicable.

Darlene requested that that she be given a list of the Fire/Rescue Department's requirements for new members so that she and her staff will know what to do.

Becky Mason asked if the Fire Chief had a contract or not. Chief Colcord advised that yes he has a contract that sets the expectation that he work an average 40 to 50 hours per week and that he respond to emergency calls as necessary on a 24/7 basis. Becky also inquired as to whether the contract required that the Chief get regular COLA adjustments. Jim Bowles replied that the contract is silent with regard to COLA adjustments but that

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historically the Firewards have agreed to give the Fire Chief the same COLA adjustments that the other town employees received. Jim agreed that this should be written into the contract.

Dan Poirier suggested that an after action review be done regarding the purchasing of the new fire engine. All agreed that this is a good idea as it did not go smoothly. Dan also stated that the Selectmen and their staff need to be mindful of the fact that the Townspeople elect the Firewards to be responsible for the Fire/Rescue Department and that they should not interfere. Jim Bowles added that the Firewards are always open to input from the Selectmen and the public at large but are the elected officials who ultimately hold the fiduciary and general oversight responsibility of the Fire/Rescue Department.

The question was raised as to why the Fire/Rescue Department bills go through the Town Office instead of the Department having its own checkbook and paying their own bills. Jim Bowles commented that years ago the Fire Department had its own checkbook. From the Fire Department's perspective this was simpler and less time was spent on managing the Department's finances. At some point, the Fire Department was told that the Town could only have one checkbook so the bills would need to be paid through the Town Office. Becky Mason stated that she's not sure that it actually needs to be done this way. Several ideas were discussed but no decisions to actively pursue changing it back were made.

All agreed that the discussion between the two Boards was useful and the Selectmen departed around 20:30.

Old Business:

Chief Colcord said he would take the carburetor off of 6F2 and take it to Ossipee Auto to get a new one next week.

Jim Bowles advised that earlier tonight after the public hearing it was voted to accept the grant money from the Tamworth Foundation for the rescue tools at the hearing earlier tonight. He advised Chief Colcord to go ahead and order the tools. When the invoices come, we need to give a copy of the Marshfield Rescue Supply one to the Trustees of the Trust Funds and they will give us a check made out to the vendor. We then need to give this check and the invoices to the Town Office so that the Treasurer can withdraw all of the funds from the Huff Rescue Fund and the balance of the needed money from the Marshall Rescue Fund.

New Business:

Made a prioritized list of equipment to give to the grant writer to use in pursuing grants.

Chief Colcord reminded the Board that he would appreciate it if a couple members of the board would attend the next municipal building committee meeting on Monday, May 6, 2019 at 19:00.

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Training next week is intended to be forestry training. Chief Colcord advised that he would like to burn the former Scott Finman and Shanon Ruff field on Cleveland Hill Rd.

Chief Colcord again advised that he has a \$3,000 quote for a company to test up to 10,000 feet of hose. There were varying opinions on how high this should be on the priority list but due to budget cutbacks and an unexpected \$5,800 bill that didn't get paid last year as intended, it was decided to hold off on hose testing until later in the year.

Adjournment: Motion for adjournment at 21:58 made by H. Remick. Seconded by S. Bross. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Bowles