

Tilton – Northfield Fire and EMS District Budget Committee

Monday, January 14, 2008 Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 pm by Chair Gretchen Wilder. Members present include Chip Barnard, Vicy Virgin, Gretchen Wilder, Donald Stevens, Bob Watson and Peter Fogg. Also in attendance were Chief Steve Carrier, Commissioner Kevin Waldron, and Gail Ober from the Citizen. Absent: Dennis Allen.

Old Business:

The first order of business was to review and approve the meeting minutes from the December 17, 2007 meeting. Vicy Virgin moved to accept the minutes as written any emails from Chair Wilder; seconded by Don Stevens. Motion passed with no dissenting votes.

Vicy Virgin moved to accept any and all communication from Chair Gretchen Wilder; seconded by Don Stevens. Motion passed unanimously.

New Business:

Chair Wilder informed the Committee that NH Department of Revenue Administration (NHDRA) Form MS – 37 for the Budget Committee will need to be completed. Chair Wilder stated she would start working on this form. Additionally the Chair stated that the Form MS – 37 requires signatures of all Budget Committee members. Once completed and signed the form is forwarded to NH DRA.

Chair Wilder reminded the Committee of the upcoming February 4, 2008 public hearing. After some discussion it was determined the public hearing will be held at the Northfield – Tilton Congregational Church's vestry.

Chair Wilder is awaiting the year – end figures and hopes to receive them at Thursday, January 17, 2008 Fire Commissioner's meeting. The year – end accounts payable report has not been received by Chair Wilder, however Chief Carrier thought Janine Vary was in the process of completing the report earlier in the day.

The Committee moved to reviewing the Chief Carrier's proposed raises. Chair Wilder expressed concerns of a possible recession and its impact on the taxpayers of both communities. It was pointed out that salaries and benefits take up the majority of most municipal budgets. Chair Wilder believes the salaries for all positions, over the past few years, have been more than fair for employees over two years with the District. Chief Carrier's proposed merit raises average 3.35 %. Don Stevens asked why salaries show a 5.3 % increase on Chair Wilders spreadsheets versus Chief Carrier's 3.35 % average.

Chief Carrier stated line 110 includes salaries, holiday pay for eleven holidays, and overtime. A general discussion ensued regarding the difference between the \$592,802 and \$717,062 totals on chair Wilder's spreadsheets. Chief Carrier stated the 3.35 % increase is from line 110 only. Chip Barnard noted that one reason for the discrepancy is the change of eight months salary to twelve months for one position as approved at last year's Fire District Annual Meeting. Chip also noted that increases in overtime will inflate the 3.35 % increase due to the time and a half factor.

Chair Wilder asked Chief Carrier about the number of call firefighter in the District. Chief Carrier stated we have approximately thirty call fire fighters down from approximately forty in 2005. The thirty call fire fighters appear to be stable over the past two years.

Line 140, Overtime, is generally for full time fire fighters covering other full time fire fighter's shifts.

A discussion on holiday pay followed. Chief Carrier stated that each full time fire fighter receives eleven holidays at twelve hours each during the year. Should the fire fighter work the holiday, the holiday pay is in addition to the regular salary paid. Don Stevens voiced concerns over paying the fire fighters for twelve hours as opposed to eight hours. Peter Fogg countered that some industries pay employees working holidays time and a half or double time on top of the holiday pay and therefore was comfortable with the current setup.

Peter Fogg voiced concerns that if we continue to pay our employees near the bottom compared to Franklin, Belmont, Gilford and Laconia compounded with the lowest benefits package we would become a training ground for other departments. Currently all employees with two years or less experience in the District receive full health insurance on the individual but zero percent additional for two – person or family plans. Of the aforementioned towns the next closest competitor pays 85 % on the two – person and family plans.

Chair Wilder asked fellow Budget Committee members their thoughts and feeling regarding Chief Carrier's proposed salary increase. Chip Barnard saw no problems with the proposed salary increase proposed by Chief Carrier, however Chip had concerns about morale if the wage increase was rejected. This is not an outrageous increase. Vicy Virgin also had no problem with the proposed increase.

Chief Carrier reminded the Budget Committee that while the salary increase is \$31,000 the overall proposed budget is down from 2007. Chief Carrier feels we have a well – trained group of individuals even though we remain on the low end of the salary schedule in the Lakes Region. In some cases like our top lieutenant, we are lower than any other department in the area. The Chief further stated that over time the Budget Committee will see salaries and benefits may take up to 90 % of the District's budget. There has been some talk by the Commissioners to use some of the \$290,000 in surplus to reduce taxes.

Don Stevens was outraged that the District has such a substantial sum in its reserves. Commissioner Waldron believes if the District used this \$290,000 we could pay off or come close to pay off all equipment leases and purchases. This would effectively help reduce taxes over many years versus a one – time tax reduction payment.

Chip Barnard motioned to accept salaries from lines 110, 120, and 130 as proposed in Chief Carrier's budget; seconded by Vicy Virgin. It was noted that line 140, Overtime is part of line 110. Motion passed on a 4 to 1 vote, with Chair Wilder voting against.

At 8:20 pm the meeting was opened to the public. Gail Ober asked Chief Carrier what is the basic cost is to fully train and outfit a new employee. Chief Carrier responded it is between \$42,000 and \$43,000.

Vicy Virgin asked why the District does not have By – Laws. No one in attendance could answer the question.

Since no public comment was forthcoming, Gretchen Wilder motioned to adjourn at 8:25 pm; seconded by Vicy Virgin. Motion passed.

Next meeting is on Monday, January 21, 2008 at 6:30 pm at the Northfield – Tilton Congregational Church.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Fogg
Secretary