



## **Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS**

### **12 Center Street, Tilton, NH 03276**

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The Tilton-Northfield Fire District Meeting was held on Monday, March 14, 2011. It was held at the Winnisquam Regional High School in Tilton. Moderator, Kent Finemore, opened the meeting at 7:08pm. Chief Ober led the Pledge of Allegiance. A moment of silence was taken for our Troops. Round of applause for the fire fighters. The Fire Commissioners were introduced – Chairman, Tom Gallant, Pat Clark and Paul Auger. The District Clerk, Katina Lemay, was introduced. The Budget Committee was introduced – Chairman, Don Stevens, Dennis Allen, Kevin LaChapelle, Vicy Virgin, George Flanders, and Peter Fogg.

Moderator's rules were stated. Jim Lamanuzzi from Northfield and Kevin LaChapelle from Tilton were appointed Assistant Moderators for counting votes. Moderator Finemore will read each article before voting on it.

**Article 1:** To choose a Clerk for the ensuing year (Actual voting to be by official ballot on Tuesday, March 08, 2011 at the annual Town voting sessions in Tilton and Northfield at their respective polling places and times).

***Results of the vote – winner, Katina Lemay with 562 votes.***

**Article 2:** To choose a Treasurer for the ensuing year (Actual voting to be by official ballot on Tuesday March 08, 2011 at the annual Town voting sessions in Tilton and Northfield at their respective polling places and times).

***Results of the vote – winner, Roland Seymour with 569 votes.***

**Article 3:** To choose a Fire Commissioner for the ensuing 3 years (Actual voting to be by official ballot on Tuesday, March 08, 2011 at the annual Town voting sessions in Tilton and Northfield at their respective polling places and times).

***Results of the vote – winner, Paul Auger with 363 votes.***

**Article 4:** To accept the report of the Treasurer and the Fire Commissioners and pass any vote relating thereto.

Motion by Commissioner Gallant to move Article 4 to the floor. Seconded by Jerry Davis. Commissioner Gallant stated that this is a routine article with reference to the annual report, proposed budget and the balance sheet.

***With no questions. Vote taken, vote passed.***

**Article 5:** To see if the District will vote to change the term of the elected District Clerk from one (1) year to three (3) years, beginning with the term of the District Clerk to be elected at next year's regular District Meeting. (This article is recommended by the Commissioners.)

Motion by Pat Consentino to move Article 5 to the floor. Seconded by Jerry Davis. Commissioner Clark stated that in accordance with State law, the District can either have this position as a one (1) year or a three (3) year term. Both the Clerk and Treasurer agreed that this would be a good idea so they would not have to be re-voted in each year. If this Article passes, it will take effect after next year's election.

***With no questions Vote taken, Article 5 passed.***

**Article 6:** To see if the District will vote to change the term of the elected District Treasurer from one (1) year to three (3) years, beginning with the term of the District Treasurer to be elected at next year's regular District Meeting. (This article is recommended by the Commissioners.)

Motion to move Article 6 to the floor by Commissioner Gallant. Seconded by Jerry Davis.

***With no discussion. Vote taken, Article 6 passed.***

**Article 7:** To see if the District will vote to raise and appropriate Ninety-Four Thousand One Hundred Dollars (\$94,100.00) for the purpose of purchasing Fire, Rescue and EMS Equipment, and paying the costs associated with collecting the Ambulance Charges, with said funds to be withdrawn from the Apparatus and Equipment Special Revenue Fund established under RSA 31:95-C (ADOPTED March 7, 2005). (This article is recommended by the Budget Committee and the Commissioners.)

Motion to move Article 7 to the floor by Bill Isensee. Seconded by Katherine Dawson. Commissioner Gallant stated that this is an expenditure from the Apparatus and Equipment Special Revenue Fund.

***With no discussion. Vote taken, Article 7 passed.***

**Article 8:** To see if the District will vote to raise and appropriate One Hundred Eighty-Five Thousand Dollars (\$185,000.00) for the purchase of a new ambulance, with said funds to be withdrawn from the Apparatus and Equipment Special Revenue Fund established under Statute RSA 31:95-C (Adopted March 7, 2005). (*This article is recommended by the Budget Committee and the Commissioners.*)

Motion to move Article 8 to the floor by Commissioner Gallant. Seconded by Jerry Davis. Chief Ober stated that this ambulance will replace the 2002 Ford ambulance that currently has 85,393 miles and 8,199 hours. A committee of five (5) studied various options. They found that the Chevy 4500 with a Duramax Diesel engine has the same chassis. If approved, it will not be until almost the end of the year before the District gets the new one. Within the last three years \$22,977 has been spent on maintenance for this ambulance,

and there was approximately a \$10,000 revenue loss while it was in the shop during multiple calls.

Pat Consentino asked what the balance in the Apparatus and Equipment Special Revenue Fund will be after taking out the ambulance and the expenses from Article 7. Commissioner Gallant stated that the current balance in the fund is \$526,755.74.

Tim Pearson asked about the write off percentage and if collections were increasing or if there are still significant write-offs. Commissioner Gallant stated that write-offs are approximately 12%. It was a little over 16%, but with a change to a more aggressive system, they were able to revamp the ways money was being collected. Tilton and Northfield residents are not billed unless they have insurance and then it is billed to their insurance company. They are more aggressive with out of State residents. Instead of one (1) letter, they now send three (3). Instead of one (1) phone call, they now make five (5).

Gretchen Wilder asked if the revenue loss of about \$10,000 was due to the ambulance being in the shop and mutual aid getting the call instead of us. Chief Ober confirmed that this was indeed due to multiple calls at the same time and having to use mutual aid.

Don Stevens gave the answer to Pat Consentino's question about the balance that will remain in the Apparatus and Equipment Special Revenue Fund after these purchases. The amount will be \$247,655.

Jim Clemens from Tilton and Tilton School is in support of this Article. He is in favor of quality equipment for quality firefighters. He acknowledged extraordinary professional and effective efforts of four (4) firefighters who responded to Tilton School and saved a life. His special thanks to Bob, Greg, John and Ian. He supports our firefighters having the latest and best equipment possible.

Scott Davis asked what will be done with the old ambulance. Chief Ober stated that the trade in value was not high, and it will be put up for sale for around \$10,000.

***With no further questions. Vote taken, Article 8 passed.***

**Article 9:** To see if the District will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of the One Hundred Twenty-Five Thousand Nine Hundred Eighty-Eight Dollars (\$125,988.00) to pay for Pressurized Hydrants (This article is recommended by the Commissioners. This article is not recommended by the Budget Committee).

Motion to move Article 9 to the floor by Commissioner Gallant. Seconded by Jerry Davis. Kevin Waldron wants to know why the Budget Committee does not recommend this article. Peter Fogg stated that after checking DES reports from 2004, 2006, 2009, the price we pay is exorbitantly higher than any other municipalities in the state. Other municipalities are paying a lower price per hydrant. Franklin and Laconia are not charged. Looking through PUC, there was no price per hydrant fee set. He feels that \$1,800 per hydrant per year and the fire department shoveling out the hydrants is far too high. They recommended \$50,000

last year and the Commissioners were supposed to have a discussion with the Water District. Commissioner Gallant feels that this is Peter's perspective and he respects it. He would like to hear from a representative from the Water District, Scott Davis. Mr. Davis stated that the increase is in regards to the completion of the West Main Street project. This was six (6) new hydrants being brought on. In 2007, a letter was sent to reduce the bill by eighteen (18) hydrants due to inadequate flow levels. With the West Main Street improvements, Jenson's Park and West Main Street are now flowing with much higher pressure. The PUC website does have a rate set for hydrants and this rate has never been changed.

Commissioner Gallant says the Commissioners and Water District did meet. Scott Davis has on their warrant to allow the Commissioners to set a fixed cost for years 2013-2014. Gretchen Wilder stated that when the Water District was formed and came before the 900+/- users they thought things would be different. The Town of Northfield lost revenues from taxes but the Water District continues to gain revenues as we pay for it. She realizes that they have a debt from when they bought the District. But, why is it that we have to pay this year after year forever because they need to pay their bills. The Town has lost revenues and the Water District is making revenues. She would like to see a flow test done every year. She is not optimistic that this will go anywhere because there were less than 10 people at the last Water District meeting.

Tim Pearson asked Scott Davis what percentage of their budget the \$125,988 represents of their revenue. Scott Davis stated that it is 10%. Tim Pearson asked what would happen if this Article was not funded at the full amount. Would hydrants be turned off? Scott Davis stated that when the Water District was formed and PUC reviewed the revenue structure. They looked at municipal, commercial, and residential revenues. They then factored in the \$9.1 million loan. Using this information, a fee structure was put in place so they could generate enough revenue to operate the District and pay back the loan. They have listened to the concerns of Fire District about the flow pressure. They have since color coded each hydrant by flow. They have made many improvements without increasing the rate structure. If the Fire District does not pay this amount, they may not be able to continue and be forced to sell to Penachuck who definitely would increase rates.

Kevin Waldron asked what percentage of the West Main Street project was covered by federal grants. Scott Davis says it was about 50%. Kevin Waldron feels that since that is the case, we should be charged \$900 and not \$1800 per hydrant. He feels the Water Commissioners continually refuse to look for other sources of funding. If the users own the District, then the users should be paying the bill. The two boards (Fire and Water) are getting together to cap the rate, not reduce it. In the last 10 years, we have paid over \$1 million for water we don't even use.

Joe Demello reminds us how this room was filled last year because of the fear that the District was going to dissolve. That's why there was such a big crowd that year. He feels that we do use the water through the usage at the schools, doctor's offices, and stores that are used by everyone, not just those who pay on their bills. It is a system required by utility

and is necessary. Granted the costs are high because the Fire District wanted the bigger pipes. This water is also used by mutual aid and he totally supports this Article.

Peter Fogg read a letter from the PUC regarding Peter's January 3, 2011 letter. It stated that the Water District is no longer regulated by the PUC. The PUC approved the purchase back in 2005. The TNFD was only looked at when approving the Water District's revenue, but it does not mention fire rates (or hydrant rates) at all.

Pat Consentino would like to know the answer to Tim Pearson's question about what would happen if this Article was not funded at the full amount. Roland Seymour, Water Commissioner, states that the water rates were set to maintain operations and debt. The Water District adopted the rates that were enforced by the PUC. What would happen if the bill was not paid is unclear. It would be up to the users who will be meeting on April 5, 2011. He assumes the same procedures would be followed as if you don't pay a bill at home.

Commissioner Gallant would like to add that the Commissioners of the Water District can not just change their rates. Rate changes would have to be approved by the governing body. Anyone could submit a petitioned warrant article that would be placed on the ballot allowing the Water Commissioners to negotiate or alter rates.

Don Stevens asked to call the question. A 2/3's majority vote necessary to pass.

***Vote to call the question passed.***

***Voice vote taken, vote unclear to Moderator.***

***Hand vote taken by Assistant Moderators. Yes votes 36, no votes 20. Article 9 passed.***

**Article 10:** To see if the District will vote to raise and appropriate the Budget Committee recommended sum of One Million Four Hundred Forty-One Thousand Nine Hundred Seventy-One Dollars (\$1,441,971.00) for General District Operations. **This article does not include special or individual articles addressed.** (This article is recommended by the Budget Committee and the Commissioners.)

Motion to move Article 10 to the floor by Commissioner Gallant. Seconded by Jerry Davis. Gretchen Wilder noted that we passed \$1.5 million dollars in less than an hour with less than 100 people showing up.

Tim Pearson asked about our ISO rating (that could impact our personal home property liability insurance). Chief Ober stated that the process was started late last summer, but when Chief Carrier retired, the process stopped. It will be resumed in the spring.

Kevin Waldron stated that \$1.4 million dollars without the ambulance and hydrants, etc is a great concern for him because within the last few years, the average person is going with less and less. He would like to know how many line items within the budget have been

reduced. Commission Gallant claimed that there were quite a few line items that have gone down and the budget is almost completely level funded.

Commissioner Gallant wanted to review the request for ISO review. It is a lengthy process and they require a lot of information before review. Much of the information has been forwarded to them and an official request has been filed. He expects this project to be completed by the fall.

Don Stevens stated that one of the biggest increases is insurance benefits and the new pay structure. Tim Pearson is in support of this budget article. He read that several firefighters have left due to health and pay benefits. He feels that the firefighters should be cared for as much as they care for us. He asks if there is any movement by the Commissioners towards looking at the ratio between Tilton and Northfield. There could be an even greater difference in this ratio due to some upcoming Town evaluation changes. Commissioner Clark stated that they have received a letter from the Tilton Selectman but are still waiting to hear from the Northfield Selectman. Due to the time spent on the wage and benefit study and Chief Carrier leaving, they needed to put this off, but will address this issue. The Fire District lost at least one firefighter due to health insurance and this prompted them to look at the surrounding towns. Chief Ober mentioned that we were previously paying 100% for single insurance. The firefighters agreed that there should be single, couple, and family plans available, but also agreed to kick in 10%. There were retirement increases that we have no control over. Don Stevens wanted to address the ratio between the two towns, not criticizing, but if Northfield keeps building and building, they will keep paying and paying.

Commissioner Gallant explained that the increase in retirement contribution is significant, about \$41,530.96. The State budget is creating a continuing shift back to the towns and instead of a split between the Town and State, the State will pay nothing. If the State budget fails, we will be paying \$148,573.48 for the upcoming year. If it passes our contribution will be \$190,104.44. This is not unique to the Fire District. The towns face the same thing. If we assume that things will continue and the Fire District will only pay a portion and the State paying the balance we could be faced with a \$41,531 deficit. By being prepared, if the Governor's budget passes, we would be covered. If the Governor's budget does not pass, we will have \$41,531 that can go back into the General Fund. They are taking a conservative way of looking at this.

***With no further discussion, vote taken, Article 10 passed.***

**Article 11:** To see if the District, in accordance with RSA 33:7, will vote to authorize the Fire Commissioners to borrow money in anticipation of taxes. (*This article is recommended by the Commissioners.*)

Motion to move Article 11 to the floor by Tom Gallant. Seconded by Jerry Davis. Tim Pearson would like to know on what schedule the two towns are paying the District. Commissioner Gallant stated that the two towns are supposed to be paying 1/12<sup>th</sup> of their portion on a monthly basis. The Town of Tilton has been making these payments. The Town of Northfield has been paying on a quarterly basis in arrears. This has necessitated

the Fire District to borrow money on anticipated taxes to meet payroll. 62% of the interest on this loan is being paid by Tilton, even though they have contributed their share. Commissioner Gallant agrees that this is not fair.

***With no further discussion, vote taken, Article 11 passed.***

**Article 12:** To transact any other business that may legally come before the meeting.

Moderator Finemore thanked the Supervisors of the Checklist. He also thanked Kirk Young for doing the audio.

Lisa Swancott reminded the Commissioners that they agreed to meet with both towns and Lakes Region Mutual Aid to discuss rates.

Kevin Waldron asked if we are charged by the high school for the use of the room tonight. Commissioner Gallant said he does not think so.

Commissioner Gallant thanked Chief Ober and Deputy Chief Robinson for picking up the reins for approximately six months while they searched for a replacement for the Chief. They stepped up to the plate and shared responsibility, including Secretary Kathy Tobine, putting together a team effort. It was refreshing to promote from within. It was interesting to know that one of the key factors the Commissioners were stressing was the integration of call firefighters and full time firefighters. There used to be a wall between them but are now working as a united partnership and this has made a big difference. When they are working as a team on top, he feels that there will also be a team working below.

Moderator Finemore would also like to thank the Commissions, Budget Committee, Assistant Moderators, Firefighters and Katina Lemay.

***Motion to adjourn by Tim Pearson. Seconded by Jerry Davis. Meeting adjourned 8:25pm.***

Respectfully Submitted, Katina L. Lemay, Fire District Clerk

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_