

Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS

Commissioners' Meeting

Meeting Called By: Commissioners

Date, Time: 09/08/2020, 6:00 PM

Transcribed By: Beth Joslin

Location: Park Street Station
149 Park Street
Northfield NH

Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 6:03 PM

Attendance

Present: Commissioner Paul Auger, Jon Cilley, Eric Pyra; Chief Michael W Sitar, Deputy Chief Tim Joubert, Admin Asst Kathy Tobine

Public: Captain Jonathan Powell, Kevin LaChapelle, Firefighter Daniel Leathers, Firefighter Nicholas Baker, Scott Lewandowski, Lieutenant Travis Gosine, Firefighter Brian Dumka, Captain Matthew Gilman, Adam Sattler, Paul Blaisdell, Tim Lynds

Commissioner Auger read the following:

Tonight's meeting may be attended by the public either in person or by calling 1-603-370-3071. Conference ID: 253 740 743#.

Public comments may be made either in person or via email.

If you are present at the meeting, please wait to be recognized by the Chair. Once recognized, speak into the microphone, state your name and address then make your comment.

If you are joining the meeting by conference call and wish to comment, please email your comment to comments@tnfd.org. For your comment to be read during the meeting, be sure to include your name and address in your email.

Old Business

Safer Grant

Commissioner Auger commented that they talked last meeting about the SAFER grant and a lot of questions were brought up. Those questions have been answered by Chief Sitar. He asked if there were any other questions.

Kevin LaChapelle, 57 Chestnut Street, Tilton commented that he was going to wait till after discussion, but would like to make some comments based on his past history as a fire chief and as a tax payer and not based on other discussions. He does not generally speak publicly on his past position, but wanted to make the public aware of the years of work that it took to get grants like this. He spoke of his time on boards and working with politicians, how he and others fought years for funding like the SAFER grant and making politicians aware that the towns are having trouble doing it on their own. He commented that he was so proud to hear the grant was awarded to TNFD because he felt that all those meetings

were worth it. He also commented that he feels it's one of the greatest gifts Chief Sitar could have fought for and an amazing reward for the community, but also understands the other ramifications as a taxpayer. Understands it's a difficult decision but also knows they have 3 years to figure out a way to make it work for the community. He stated that he would also like to address their responsibility in community risk reduction. 4-man crew is the national statistic that is proven to make a difference. He discussed the difference it made when he was fire chief.

Commissioner Auger commented that nothing is free in this world and asked can we afford it. It is a great gift but there are other things that go along with it that do cost, that we are going to have to pay for. Not to mention at the end of 3 years it will cost over half a million dollars, that's going to hit and we want to build a station as well. There are other things that we will pay for like overtime and sick time that isn't mentioned.

Commissioner Cilley commented that he has really been on the fence about this since the beginning. He commented that the call force is not what it used to be and he likes the idea of additional day people when the call force isn't as available. He stated that unfortunately, this grant is all or nothing. He discussed the costs to the district and public opinion of tax rate versus the safety.

Chief Sitar stated that both the commissioners and the budget committee voted in favor of 2 additional personnel and if you look at the numbers, the cost of two additional personnel over two years far exceeds if they were to use the grant for four personnel over three years. Discussion ensued regarding public opinion.

Commissioner Pyra commented on District meeting, stating he believed that it wasn't that they didn't want the personnel but that they didn't want to pay for the personnel. He stated that they have a way to pay for it for three years and likes Mr. LaChapelle's idea of a committee. Discussion ensued regarding a committee and benefits of the grant.

Chief Sitar commented on the overall cost over the 3 years. In order to figure it he had to make some assumptions, one of those being regular pay raise and the other being a 5% increase in health insurance costs. Over the course of 3 years including everything in worst case scenario the cost to the district would be about \$154,000. In the event that they all take a single person plan or the insurance opt out the district would have a surplus of \$58,000. The main variation is what insurance plan is chosen by the employee.

Scott Lewandowski, Northfield, commented that he was at district meeting and there was a lot of support for 2 additional members at the first meeting but failed the second time. He discussed the fire station and how some feel money is better spent on personnel than a building. Scott asked if the commissioners were to pass up the opportunity what would be their plan to hire more employees without effecting the tax bill? Commissioner Auger expressed concern over rising costs and would like to look at options to save money and mentioned private ambulance services. Scott commented that if they were to pass on it there would be no benefit.

Commissioner Cilley stated that the benefit of grant is additional people, if they do not accept it there is a risk running the crew they do have into the ground. Discussion ensued regarding benefit of additional person on shift and the con of the cost.

Matt Gilman, Tilton, commented that he appreciates that they need a fire station, but the firefighters and EMTs are the ones who answer the calls. As a taxpayer he would much rather pay for people than for a building that doesn't do anything. He commented on the staffing problem. Commissioner Cilley replied

that he is definitely feels they need additional personnel. Chief eased some of his concerns regarding the housing. He commented that the department is growing in calls but they have to sway the public to understand that. The commissioners have to represent the public, though they may not agree. Matt Gilman stated that there was pretty strong support for it at the last meeting

Charles Broughton, 400 Shaker Rd, Northfield, sent a text message to Chief Sitar as he was unable to attend tonight's meeting. *"I Charles Broughton 400 Shaker Rd Northfield 455-8147. Support accepting the federal grant to hire 4 new TNFD firefighters/EMT."*

Kevin LaChapelle commented on staffing shortages. He asked that the commissioners if they choose not to go with the SAFER grant to get the kick start then come up with a plan for addressing the staffing problems. He commented on their part in community risk reduction. Commissioner Auger commented that he would like to find a way to lower overtime without hiring four people. Chief Sitar replied that as an administrator he looks at the numbers and it is cheaper to pay overtime than to hire but by doing that you are putting the crews you do have at risk by having them work all kinds of overtime. Discussed what they deal with and see on a regular basis, they deal with a lot. As a community and leaders, they need to protect them from reaching the boiling point. Kevin LaChapelle commented that the only way to pay less overtime is to have adequate staffing. He wanted to make it clear that he is not in favor of accepting the SAFER grant if administratively they don't find an alternative way to find funding. He discussed some potential opportunities.

Jon Powell commented that federal government is gifting the district \$975,000. And asked if the Commissioners decide not to accept the grant, how do they plan to return that value to the tax payers of these communities? Commissioner Cilley replied that the grant is there as an option, abut will cost more than what the grant covers. There are other options such as per diem. Jon again asked his question. Commissioner Cilley replied that he does not. Commissioner Pyra replied that he also does not have a plan.

Matt Gilman commented that at \$52,000 per year for four firefighters, you can't get a much better deal than that. That is worst case, could be even better than that. Commissioner Pyra discussed possibly using ambulance revenue to help defer the cost of additional personnel. Discussion ensued regarding taking money from the Apparatus and Equipment fund for personnel.

Dan Leathers commented that he is not a resident but he appreciates what they are doing, trying to protect tax payers. As a member of department, he can see the value of additional member and has seen overwhelming support for the grant.

Kevin LaChapelle asked what the deadline for the grant is. Chief Sitar replied that it is September 20 by 7 am. Discussion ensued regarding the deadline. Kevin LaChapelle asked they make a tough decision and vote in favor of the grant. He commented that they need to take an optimistic approach and they are more likely to succeed. It is a tough decision, but will need to go something beyond the vote. Government is setting them up for success.

Paul Blaisdell commented that it's been determined that there is a need for more personnel but there hasn't been an answer on how to pay for it. The Chief has gotten funding for three years we should look very hard into accepting it, determining how to utilize those personnel, and how to fund those personnel in three years.

Commissioner Cilley made a motion to accept the FEMA Safer Grant for four additional personnel for discussion. Commissioner Pyra seconded the motion. Discussion: Commissioner Cilley asked what

line the funding will come from for physicals? Chief Sitar replied that the money would be placed in next year's budget as they likely wouldn't be hired till after the new year. Extensive discussion ensued regarding the budget and budget season.

Auger commented on what Kevin LaChapelle had said, stating that he is right if they don't find a way to help fund this at the end of three years there are going to be some major changes. Discussion ensued regarding a committee to find a funding source.

Deputy Joubert really thinks the district gets a good bang for its buck, our personnel go above and beyond every day. Keeps hearing want, its perceived that the department wants this. But it is a need, not a want and that need is not going to go away. Yes, we keep asking for more because the demand keeps going up. Daniel Leathers commented on the quality of service they want to provide the community. Commissioner Cilley withdrew his motion. Commissioner Pyra withdrew his second.

Commissioner Pyra made a motion to accept the FEMA Safer Grant to hire four additional firefighters with the understanding that the four additional firefighters' positions may not be funded beyond the term of the grant. Commissioner Cilley seconded the motion. Deputy Joubert commented that if this goes through it will be a huge, huge win for the district and the Chief will likely put out a press release explaining how it works and trying to educate the public. Pyra commented that there is information about the grant out there but it's not all correct. There being no further discussion, vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Cilley made a motion to authorize Chief Sitar to be the authorized organizational representative for the FEMA GO Systems. Commissioner Pyra seconded the motion. There being no discussion, vote was taken. Motion passed.

Other Business

Commissioner Pyra asked where the water is coming from for the burn. Chief Sitar replied that they will be bringing tankers and filling portable tanks. Commissioner Pyra asked that that is communicated with the water department as they are concerned. Deputy Joubert commented they will have more than enough water on wheels and in tanks. Discussion ensued regarding water supply.

Brian Dumka asked if there was going to make a motion to set up a committee. Commissioner Auger commented that they will talk about it at the next commissioners' meeting. Commissioner Pyra commented that they need to determine what they want the committee to look like. Discussion ensued regarding potential parameters for the committee.

Commissioner Cilley made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Auger seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:06 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Joslin

Beth Joslin
Office Clerk