

Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS Commissioners' Meeting

Meeting Called By: Commissioners
Transcribed By: Courtney Palmer

Date, Time: 11/6/23, 5:30 PM
Location: Tilton Town Hall
Downstairs Meeting Room
257 Main Street
Tilton, NH

Call to Order

Commissioner Auger called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

Attendance

Commissioners Paul Auger, Eric Pyra, Tim Sattler, and Chief Michael Sitar

Budget

Chief Sitar stated that Attorney Fitzgerald will be at the November 7th meeting to discuss the Water Department lawsuit.

Line 4220 Salaries and Wages

Commissioner Auger read \$1,470,727. Chief Sitar stated that the proposed salary for the SAFER guys for next year would be \$259,767.94. That number did not include insurance or overtime. Chief Sitar proposed a 10.8% increase to bring starting pay from \$21.10 per hour to \$23.38 per hour.

Commissioner Auger commented that he has an issue with the 10% raise and picking up the 15% increase in insurance. Discussion ensued about the importance of having competitive pay.

Commissioner Pyra asked what percentage of insurance personnel pay. Chief Sitar responded 12%.

Chief Sitar mentioned that they could do incentive pay instead of a big raise. There was discussion on this. Chief Sitar stated that every time they turn someone over, it costs them \$55,000-\$60,000.

Commissioner Auger said that if they do the 10% raise and pick up the 15% insurance increase, they could be looking at only being able to have two SAFER guys.

Commissioner Sattler mentioned that it may not be fair to ask the career firefighters to sacrifice their pay to keep the SAFER guys even though they want them there. Commissioner Auger suggested a 5% increase and paying the 15% insurance.

It was mentioned that there is nowhere to take the 10.8% increase from within the budget. Chief Sitar mentioned that the training budget could possibly be the only option.

Chief Sitar stated that a 10.8% pay raise is almost a \$400,000 hit on the budget. A 5% increase would be \$182,000. Chief Sitar mentioned a compromise of an increase of halfway between

5.4% and 10.8%, and then do incentives for degrees or certifications. He mentioned a longevity plan. After 5 years, you get a 1% raise on your base salary for every year you stay afterward or after five years you get a 3% raise. After ten years, it goes up another 3%. Both options would max out at 20%.

The 10.8% increase of \$393,120 would be for the four guys and all employees. The insurance is unknown for the SAFER guys currently.

There was a discussion about collective bargaining agreements.

Commissioner Auger stated he would be willing to pay the 5% pay increase and hopefully keep the four guys. Chief Sitar stated that if they had to go down to only two guys, it would dramatically change response times.

Chief Sitar mentioned that they probably won't spend all of what was budgeted for call personnel because of availability and qualifications.

Commissioner Pyra mentioned that the call department responses are going down year by year. Commissioner Auger added that there is always mutual aid as a resource as well. Commissioner Sattler mentioned that you can't rely on them all the time because of everyone else who uses mutual aid as well. Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Sattler asked for the status of appropriate reimbursement for ambulance calls from the State Insurance Department. Chief Sitar responded that on October 1st, the State raised their Medicaid payment for ambulance service to equal Medicare, which is about \$500 per call. 19.09% of the payer mix comes from commercial insurers. The legislation right now states that all insurance companies will have to reimburse the provider of the insured regardless of in-state or out-of-state coverage.

Commissioner Sattler clarified that it looks like they are years out from getting properly compensated for ambulance service. Discussion ensued about ambulance services and billing.

Commissioner Pyra asked how far away they are from having a fifth person on staff. Chief Sitar responded that it depends on what level of service they want to provide. He added that he would want to hire two more people, not just one.

Commissioner Auger reiterated his suggestion for a 5% pay increase and paid 15% insurance increase. He added that they could do a 10% pay increase and have personnel pay the 15% insurance increase as an option as well.

Commissioner Sattler asked what is missing in the Chief's budget. Chief Sitar said that he is missing the amount to have the sign redone at Park Street, which was a request from Captain Ames and Deputy Chief Robinson. He said that he is still waiting on an estimate, but it will be skipped for this year and added to next year's budget.

Commissioner Sattler asked if the revenue side of the budget reflects the loss of the SAFER Grant.

Chief Sitar mentioned that the tax rate in Northfield for the firefighters last year was 4 cents per thousand and in Tilton it was 7 cents per thousand.

Discussion ensued about the overtime budget.

Chief Sitar stated that he takes the average hourly overtime rate to calculate how much will need to be put in the budget.

Chief Sitar stated that each full-time staff member gets vacation time, 1 floating holiday, and sick leave. Liability for sick leave is 4,176 hours.

Discussion ensued about the costs for different insurance plans and buyouts.

Commissioner Pyra asked what the percent increase was last year for pay. Chief Sitar responded that it was 7.5%. Commissioner Sattler stated that he would like to see what 5% would do to the numbers. Chief Sitar stated it would go from \$393,120 to \$182,000. Commissioner Sattler asked what the number would be with 7.5%. Chief Sitar responded that it would be \$254,800. Commissioner Sattler stated that a 10.8% increase would cause a \$100 increase on his taxes, roughly.

Commissioner Pyra and Commissioner Sattler agreed that TNFD must be competitive in terms of pay.

Commissioner Sattler asked how many people are opting out of the insurance at this time. Chief Sitar responded that seven are opting out. They get about \$10,000. That is based on the district's cost for a single-family plan. He stated that the district cost for the family plan next year is \$33,803. A two-person plan will cost the district \$25,039.

Commissioner Sattler questioned the amount to be raised by taxation as Chief Sitar's numbers show \$363,000. He believed it should be more than that because of the roughly \$393,000 in wage increase and the loss of the SAFER grant. He noted that \$298,000 is in the Chief's budget for a SAFER grant. Chief Sitar responded that it is in there because he applied for the grant, but he wasn't sure they would get it. Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Sattler wanted to think on this until tomorrow, November 7th, 2023.

4220 Line 120 Call Salaries and Wages

There was \$59,742 for the call salaries and wages last year. Commissioner Sattler questioned the amount spent, as it keeps going down. Chief Sitar stated that he would like to give the call firefighters a raise to help try to keep some of them. He stated that he increased the budget to account for the raise. The amount for the 2024 budget is \$65,000. Commissioner Sattler asked if the \$59,742 would be too much as only \$36,000 of the \$59,742 has been spent so far this year.

Commissioner Pyra made a motion to fund line 120 call salaries and wages at \$50,000. Commissioner Sattler seconded the motion. There being no discussion, a vote was taken. Motion passed.

Warrant Articles

Chief Sitar stated that the new ambulance won't come in for two years, but he needs to put the order in now. He stated the price would likely stay the same. He mentioned that the last ambulance they purchased was around \$300,000 unequipped. He stated that the new one will

come fully equipped. He added that they are going to get rid of the rescue as well. Over the past 10 years, EMS incidents rose by 63%. He continued, TNFD lost \$52,000 in ambulance revenue in the last two years due to lost ambulance transports. The maintenance for the rescue is roughly the same as the maintenance for an ambulance. Discussion ensued on what equipment would come with the ambulance.

There was discussion about the frequency of having to replace ambulance equipment.

Chief Sitar showed the Commissioners graphics he prepared related to incident numbers and trends.

Commissioner Pyra made a motion to approve a new ¾ ton pickup with plow equipment, not to exceed \$79,950. Commissioner Sattler seconded the motion. There being no discussion, a vote was taken. Motion passed.

Commissioner Sattler made a motion to approve a new ambulance at \$405,500. Commissioner Pyra seconded the motion. There being no discussion, a vote was taken. Motion passed.

Commissioner Sattler wanted Chief Sitar to ask the DRA whether the new ambulance and the pickup should be one warrant article with the two amounts totaled or if there should be two separate warrant articles. Discussion ensued. After discussion, Commissioner Sattler believed it should be one warrant article.

Commissioner Sattler made a motion to have the \$154,020 for equipment added to the warrant article to go with the new ambulance. Commissioner Pyra seconded the motion. There being no discussion, a vote was taken. Motion passed.

Adjournment

Commissioner Auger made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Pyra seconded the motion. There being no discussion, a vote was taken. Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Courtney Palmer

Courtney Palmer
Administrative Assistant

Next Meeting Date, Time, Place:

November 7th, 2023, 5:30 P.M.
Tilton Town Hall
Downstairs Meeting Room
257 Main Street
Tilton, NH