

Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS Special Commissioners' Meeting Discuss the MRI Report

Meeting called by:	Commissioners	Date, Time:	September 22, 2008 at 18:00 to 19:10
Note taker:	Janine Vary	Place:	Northfield-Tilton Congregational Church

Attendees: Comm. Kevin Waldron, Comm. Bob Watson, Comm. Paul Auger, Chief Steve Carrier, and Deputy Mike Robinson Secretary Janine Vary.

Comm. Waldron called special meeting to order at 6:02PM Kevin stated this will be for commissioners to discuss their thoughts on the study done by MRI. This is for information only, no decisions will be made, no public input. Thanked members of public for coming.

Paul Auger. First, wanted to take the opportunity, on behalf of the fire commissioners, to thank the Chief, the full time firefighters and the secretary for what they do daily. Also a special thanks to the volunteers who work full time jobs or go to school that also help the TNFD. In the MRI report in his opinion, he sees 5 challenges.

1. 2 in 2 out rule. He believes it is a good public safety rule but as he was a member for 30 years at TNFD, he saw many building fires in his time here and his main priority was his safety and the safety of the firefighters working the incident. He used a lot of common sense. Chief and the fire departments in the surrounding towns agree to use automatic response for building fires and he supports Chief in this decision. Safety is the number 1 priority.

Response time. The average is 5.9 minutes for TNFD which is far greater than 8 minutes average. He doesn't see how we can do better than that.

Relocating the Center Street station and redoing the Park Street station. He supports upgrading the Park Street station to have sleeping quarters and office space and look at Winnisquam fire station with Belmont and Sanbornton to house apparatus and personnel. Believes would be beneficial for both towns.

On scene safety. Paul feels all communities face this problem. Maybe talking with other fire depts. to see how they cope with this problem. Maybe when hiring new firefighters, have them live closer radius to the station so they can respond quicker. Recruitment. Talk to schools, students who are graduating who may be looking for a career in the fire service. He would like to work with chief and surrounding chiefs to see if we could improve these issues. Sees his job as a fire commissioner and the other commissioners to work with the fire chief and his needs for the safety of his members and both towns. Also, we must be accountable for how the taxpayers money is being spent. The people who live in our towns and travel through our towns should receive the best emergency care. He has seen many changes in the past decade or so. A full time fire chief, full time fire inspector and secretary. He would like to think we have the newest and best updated equipment for the personnel working here. Regarding the statement that there is a lack of communication between fire district and the communities. He doesn't have a problem meeting with the selectmen from either town and having a public discussion. He does have a problem with some that believe the Fire commissioners should be criticized for what they believe is in the best interest for the communities. Bigger is not always better. He didn't have any questions for Chief or Deputy at this time.

Bob: agreed with some of what Paul said. As far as equipment goes, the problems with Center Street; we have a great Chief, Deputy Chief and fire department. Bob feels we have outgrown the Center Street station. It is not ADA compliant. No room for any more expansion. It would be a waste of resources to build or add onto that station. Need to relocate Center Street station should be east of here somewhere. Some of our response times have been over the 9.5 minutes. Usually at either end of Tilton or Northfield. Need to address the issue. They recommend adding more firefighters but that is costly. Volunteer firefighters, Chief has done a good job at getting more. If you get 50 volunteers and they don't come to the trainings and come to calls they are not useful. If adding firefighters, need to do something with Park Street so we can have people down there all the time. No questions for Chief or Deputy.

Kevin: this is not a fire district report but a town of Tilton report, funded by Tilton and only looks at so-called issues by town of Tilton. Identify and list current deficiencies in TNFD as how they relate to the town of Tilton. Although it has some valid points, he found it repetitive, contradictory and incomplete. Sees as a power play by town of Tilton. Town of Tilton has overstepped their authority: Talking with other towns to join our fire district. Seeing if authority of running the fire district could be removed from the commissioners. Neither town has jurisdiction over fire dept., it is the fire commissioners. Although Tilton indicates they don't want their own fire department, their actions indicate otherwise. No one from either town has complained to him about our response times. Our response times are better than the average.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the Commission on the Accreditation of Ambulance Services, (CAAS) If you ask what these groups are and their authority. They have no authority and cannot demand anything from anyone. Went to NFPA website and there is a spot where anyone can suggest new standards to be adopted. Based on national averages, study says we don't need a ladder truck. We don't only need one, we actually need a new one. Center Street should be abandoned. Bad for district but OK for Tilton if they went on their own. OSHA 2 in 2 out rule. Understands the meaning of it, we don't meet it, but who does? The proposal outlines in option A1, adding 3 firefighters and a part time administrative position, renovate Park Street and add a Quinn. It has been said that the commissioners don't care but someone has to watch the dollars being spent. He doesn't support hiring new staff. He has said we need to have more call personnel. \$2 million for a building doesn't work for him. At some point will need to reverse the roles of our 2 stations. Ladder truck, do we need or not? Does it have to be new? Look at what Belmont got for \$200,000. Kevin asked Chief Carrier if he had any comment on the report.

Chief: without getting into details of report. It spoke complimentary of department and himself and he appreciated that. Obviously it has created some controversy between the two towns selectmen and fire board. It has opened lines of communication that will set out a path that could be used to work out short term and long term planning. He discussed possibility 5 years ago of having 4 people on and have them decentralized - 2 at Park Street and 2 at a station east of exit 20. If possible, it would be best interest of communities. Where Comm. Waldron states he hasn't seen anything about response times in the 14 minute range. We were asked to provide those figures to MRI for their study. There were multiple 14 minute plus response times for the calendar year MRI studied. All responses, except for a few, had extenuating circumstances such as weather or multiple calls. Multiple calls occurring at the same time does restrain us from responding timely. We do believe in automatic aid and practice that especially with Franklin to our west. That is our way of attempting to meet 2 in 2 out rule. Basically states you cannot operate in an atmosphere of immediate danger to health of the 2 people inside without having 2 people on the outside. Can he say we haven't sent two people in without the two on outside, he cannot. As far as comment saying no one can meet that rule, at the staffing levels in local depts. in the area with less than 4 people on, except for Laconia and Concord, no we can't. However with the call company and mutual aid, we strive to meet two in-two out rule. NIOSH website has reports that explain what went wrong when there are firefighter fatalities. What corrections need to be made so it wouldn't happen again. Usually they all start out saying issues with incident command and in top few an issue with the 2 in 2 out rule not being followed. We are not an OSHA state but if a line of duty death occurs, we will be held to that standard if not criminally at least civilly. Many have asked Chief about Business Park Drive location with the Tilton Police Department. Obviously if we were given a fire station or land, that is better position than where we are today. But, he doesn't like not being accessible to the general public; here we are almost on Main Street. Best case scenario is to get a place right on Rt 3 somewhere. Not a lot of affordable property on that Rt 3 corridor. Right now all prime real estate. Call firefighters. We did have one period of time when we culled down the roster based on activity levels on training and responding to calls. We lost probably 16 call FF at that time. Since that time we carry a roster of about 32 call FF. May have been mid 40 when he started. Since then we have continued to hire call members and lose call FF. Quality call FFs should come from word of mouth from the membership. Students from NHCTC that live in the community are much better call FF's, even if here for 2 years, than someone we could get from an ad in the paper. We need to make them clear of our expectations. They have to take 140 hrs of training on their own time, only reimbursed if they passed. Have to be a certified ff or certified EMT within first year. Have to attend some calls and our training meetings. A lot of responsibility on them and a tremendous amount of training on their part. We must use caution and be prudent when looking at the call membership.

Mike Robinson said he is proud to sit here and glad that this meeting taking place isn't because there are huge deficiencies. After reading the report, he sat proud to hear the report being presented by MRI at Tilton's meeting. He feels we got an A- on our report card. We have a few minor corrections to make in the administrative end. Thankful we are not dealing with issues relating to personnel. He did take part in the survey and has been with the dept. over 30 years. We never knew boundaries in this dept. and hopes that river never determines a boundary. To go forward he would rather see the 3 entities pursue what direction this dept. needs to go in. Would like to see 3 entities communicate and discuss options. We talk about \$700,000 for a ladder truck. We have purchased a used ladder truck in the past, but maybe upgrade to the \$200,000 figure that Belmont used; that is a real option we should look at. Minor deficiencies we have already started to react to within the dept. We have taken the information and started to make improvements already. Training records, inspections of vehicles after use, fortunately minor issues. We look at vehicles after every time used and we can improve records. He would like to see the 3 entities to get together. Learn more about where our calls are, what are our response times, where are the good locations. He was on the committee that put in the Park Street station. It wasn't the optimal thing to do to put one so close but we needed more room and this property became available. Let's talk about the 2 station location. Look at the mileages, look at how improvements can be made. Look as one entity, 3 entities in one, let's research our options.

Paul: asked Chief about the Winnisquam station. Chief: the article in the paper, comments made in Sanbornton, he doesn't remember the meeting going like that. The 3 fire chiefs discussed possibility of using the Winnisquam station. Only way to get

that to happen is to staff it with full time people. Threw some numbers at it what it would cost to staff that station. There was a wide range of cost. \$32,000 or \$36,000 for TNFD for 8 hrs a day. Over \$100,000 if staffing over 24 hrs a day. We don't know that Belmont would want to do that at all. Some sentiment Belmont doesn't want the station at all, maybe sell it. However, when Selectman Dawson met with them, they left the door open. If the Chiefs met together and could work out some agreeable operational plan, they may agree with it. Expenses were divided like old formula: 25% Sanbornton, 25% Tilton-Northfield and 50% Belmont. Other options: If Belmont wants to sell the station, does Tilton and Sanbornton want to buy it? If you continue to look at Belmont owning it, would they want that expense? He has concerns that it would be Belmont FF running the station. Run under Belmont rules, etc. who are you more loyal to. Just let Belmont run the station. If that is the case, they will be in Belmont more often than the other communities. How many times will they be running back to other areas in Belmont, or covering the Belmont main station. Would they be able to give Tilton and Sanbornton the coverage we are looking for? What value are we receiving for the money we are putting in to the Winnisquam station again? Paul asked if he thought it would be beneficial to us if all 3 towns supplied personnel and apparatus to that station. Chief said he could "live with it" but there are inherent problems with that. Which fire dept.'s rules will they operate by? If Chief wants to talk with his FF, do they all come down to the Tilton station? Not the perfect working situation. Have discussed per diem help in Winnisquam station like Sanbornton is using. If we use per diem coverage and their response area is Sanbornton, Belmont, Tilton and Northfield, that would disqualify any of our full time personnel to cover because we would have to pay them overtime. Kevin asked if this applies if mutual aid comes in from another town and they work here full time. Chief responded that doesn't usually happen. But, if they put a pay slip in, then it could be looked at as overtime.

Paul asked about 4th person on. We used to use call members to cover. Chief said none of the call FF, except for those who are working full time elsewhere, meet the requirements for a FF. Could we use a call ff to fill a shift? Legally if they make less than \$20,000 a year, yes; but once they make that amount, the rule kicks in and they have to meet the FT FF requirements. Chief feels why use a volunteer FF when they can't meet the requirements that we are making the FT FFs meet. Not only physical fitness requirements, passing physical ability test, base line test. no oral interview, etc. Paul said his biggest problem with that is we could use them as call FF but can't use them to fill in. Chief said all of the full time FF are cross trained as FF and EMT's, mostly EMT-I. FT FF are trained to a level that is far greater than the call members, other than those who are full time elsewhere. In the past we had 2 people that were qualified to cover a shift. They have driver/operator licenses and CF2 training. Both of those people have activity and training issues. Chief feels it is all in the level of service we want to provide. It would be a drop in level of service to the community. Paul feels we are just using one person. We can use them when we need them. If it's a structure fire, that's OK, but to cover, they aren't. Why shouldn't they be qualified to help out in a shift? If you need that fourth person to help fill it out. Chief said it is recommended in the report to use the call FFs that are available to fill that fourth position until we can hire a fourth person. We don't have a lot of cross trained FF and EMT personnel on the call payroll. We can't send a non-EMT to a second medical call, our level of service drops down. If we have an EMT, but when the fire call comes in, you don't have someone that can stretch your hose line for you. Chief said there is another side to it. The guys need to have confidence and trust in the people they are working with, knowing their level of training. If you work with someone different every day, it doesn't make an efficient team. So then someone could say rotate all the call people, but not everyone has the skill level and you need to build the skill level over time.

Kevin: Winnisquam staffing. Does Chief view that as a plus for the entire district? Chief, he said it would be for the east side of Dodge Hill in Tilton. We'd be putting the people right at the edge of the town. It just benefits that small area. The good thing about that area is that our response time to get there would be reduced. 6 minutes to Dodge Hill on a good day. Dodge Hill was the meeting point for Winnisquam and cut off for automatic responses. Would improve response times while the Winnisquam station is staffed. There is a large property value base up there and population base is low except in summer. Traffic can be tremendous. It would benefit that part of town. It would lessen the coverage anywhere west of Manville Road. If we staff Park Street and they are out on medical call, then it would take longer for second due to come from Winnisquam. At least on Business Park Drive we would be centrally located, it would increase the response to the middle of the district. Problem he has with that, the largest percentage of calls are here, downtown. Future may hold that it spreads out a little bit. The report says that east Tilton will continue to grow. However, that side of Northfield will continue to grow too. Down Shaker Road, etc. He has heard from people on the street that there is a lot of sentimental feeling to the Center Street station.

Kevin asked Chief if he had compared the drive time from Business Park Drive to the ends of the towns. Chief hasn't but knows we can respond to the outlet mall from Center St. in about 4 minutes. So driving from the lights off Business Park Drive, a minute and a half we'd be at the outlet mall. We might save 3 minutes of response time between here and Business Park Drive because you still have the minute and a half to get out onto Rt. 3. Also it has been discussed about having an emergency exit through Home Depot and 99 Restaurant. If that was improved upon and would allow for emergency response, that would cut down a lot of time. Could shave a minute off response time. So if you take 5 or 6 minutes off response time, it cuts it down tremendously. Kevin asked about the intersection of Sanborn Road and Business Park Drive. Chief feels it isn't a controlled intersection; visibility isn't that great. Here we do it everyday and causes everyone to be a lot more cautious. We used to have

a light here at Center Street but it was removed and not replaced. Mike said it wasn't a full stop light; it was controlled from the fire house and was ignored more than observed.

Kevin asked about access road at Home Depot. Chief said that it is his understanding that the town has continued in these discussions with Home Depot and they have been pretty favorable. Discussion on running a water line up to that building etc. so there are opportunities for that to happen. Chief Cormier said this road would be a gaited road. But if used as an emergency response road, it can't be gaited. He still feels it would be better than driving out onto Rt. 132 and accessing Rt. 3. Kevin asked where Chief's preference would be for the Tilton station. Chief stated his preference is route 3. where? We had talked about the East Tilton Village property, across from Home Depot. That project fell through. He would consider anything up to Grange Road or Church Street or as far back as Home Depot. Kevin asked not between here and Home Depot. Chief doesn't feel it gains much if we don't get to the other side of the highway. It would be good to have stations on both sides of the interstate.

Mike talked about call volume mostly happening in the village area. Stats say the incidents are going to happen downtown. Kevin asked about the geographical center of the district. Mike responded that looking at the maps of both towns, it comes out approximately in the Bay Hill area. We aren't too far off from that on either station. Kevin asked if it isn't a good idea to have stations in the center. Mike said having stations in the center where your call volume is important. At least with all the build up at exit 20, we have early warning systems. Sprinkler systems, new monitoring technology, etc. If you keep everyone well covered and get out on the outskirts of your core, but not too far from the core, then you can attack from two ways.

Kevin asked about the 10 examples of the extended response times, what was the geographical area. Chief said they wanted 10 from each town so a total of 20 were given. Tilton was mostly East Tilton and 10 in Northfield in the southwestern area; some at end of Shaker Road, Fellows Hill Road and the further areas of Northfield. Belmont is automatic for Fellows Hill Road which is their "Shaker Road". As far as Canterbury, they have issues with getting fire trucks out on the road. We can't depend on them to handle calls for us. We have changed our mutual aid tables; don't have them come in on a first alarm call.

Kevin asked what Chief's personal opinion is regarding new vs. used apparatus. Chief said he would always prefer new because you know that you are meeting safety requirements and all the standards that are current. The ladder truck doesn't have the safety features that newer aerial ladder trucks would have. Bought for \$30,000, refurbished for \$20,000. We bought a 1981 Thibeault that outlived its usefulness in Hartford, VT. It gets a fair amount of use for a town our size. It does make sense to have a truck that size. But you have to have confidence in your aerial. Most people that operate it say they don't have confidence in its ability to operate and stand up. It did pass the ladder test with some minor deficiencies. Laconia has a 1989 ladder that is way beyond the quality of our aerial. The company that made our aerial is out of business. There are some issues with buying used and where you get it serviced. Belmont did find a decent truck and it was refurbished. Mike said he had a discussion with folks from E One. If there is one that becomes available, you have to be ready to buy it right away. There has to be some latitude in being able to purchase. If a great truck goes on the market and we say we need to wait until March, well it will probably be gone. It just makes purchasing that much more difficult to do.

Kevin: back to Winnisquam. If it were staffed and it were a matter of paying Belmont for doing that, would that be fire district money or town money? Chief said it wasn't his decision to make. The staffing there would be for both communities. He felt it would be up to the commissioners to decide that. Kevin asked if the station is up for sale, Chief wasn't aware.

Paul: when talking about new fire station, if we have one on Rt. 3, what would happen to Northfield? Do you want some staff here and there? Split them up? Chief said yes - if we have 2 stations and 4 people. Paul asked about training during the day, if you had them all at one station, wouldn't that leave one area not covered. Chief feels it is practical and necessary to train together. If you have that type of scenario, you have to find a way to make it work. If they come down to a central location for an hour and a half each day for training, he didn't feel you are reducing the level of service. However, the value you will get from having them train together is much higher. We wouldn't be keeping them out of service for any length of time.

Mike stated that as we go forward with acting on this report, if there are questions about the study or how we do things, please ask. He feels this is the first time that Sel. Bluhm had questions for us. He encourages people to come down and ask the questions they have. Kevin said he knows that there is a meeting scheduled for October 2 for the selectmen from both towns to meet and discuss this report. He suspects that we will need more than one meeting. He heard a rumor that they may include TNFD in this discussion.

Kevin motioned to adjourn, Paul seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Janine Vary, Secretary

