

Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS Commissioners' Work Session

Meeting Called By:	Commissioners	Date, Time:	May 25, 2011 at 17:40
Transcribed By:	Kathy Tobine	Place:	Tilton School, 257 Main Street, Tilton

Commissioner Auger called the work session to order at 5:40 PM.

Present: Commissioners Tom Gallant, Paul Auger and Pat Clark, Chief Brad Ober, Deputy Chief Mike Robinson, Administrative Assistant Kathy Tobine, Northfield Town Administrator Glenn Smith, Tilton Selectmen Katherine Dawson, Joe Jesseman, Pat Consentino and Sandy Plessner.

Formula Review

Commissioner Auger stated the Town of Tilton requested the Commissioners review the formula for Tilton-Northfield Fire District assessment. He asked what they are looking for?

Selectman Jesseman asked how the formula was arrived at. Commissioner Gallant explained that is how the tax rate is arrived at. It's been done that way since 1991. Selectwoman Dawson stated with the way the equalization is they are up to almost 64%. Selectman Jesseman is curious how that becomes a fair thing.

Commissioner Clark stated when he was talking to Tim Pearson and Tim said he would be here to explain. Selectman Jesseman said Tim was very sick and would not be attending the meeting.

Commissioner Clark asked for the Select board's thoughts and how they would like to proceed. Selectwoman Dawson explained that Tim was the one that first noticed the formula and realized the equalization ratio. It doesn't take much to skew them off. They talked with ORA. Tilton pays the higher portion. They pay 64% of the Fire District. They all get the same service. Commissioner Gallant explained that in the first five months of this year 56% of the 575 calls 323 of them were for Tilton, 37% were for Northfield and 7% was mutual aid to seven communities. Historically it has always been about 60/40. Based on the calls and where they are, you are right. Many of the calls are at Exit 20. These are actual numbers of actual incidents and 56% of them were responded to in Tilton with 37% in Northfield. If you take the mutual aid and add 4% to Tilton and 3% to Northfield you are back to the 60/40.

Selectwoman Dawson said there are two other things that concern her. She brought up the fire hydrants. It is killing her paying the hydrant fee for the Water District. The fee should be going down as the debt goes down. The other is the billing from Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid. Commissioner Gallant said these are separate and distinct issues. Commissioner Clark said they have mutual aid on their docket because Northfield Selectmen have asked them to talk about that. Commissioner Gallant stated they will be discussing them separately.

Commissioner Clark stated that relative to the unfairness of the equalized valuation or equalized ratio, these are three of them that were included in the letter the Selectmen sent. They are great examples. One of them was from 2008, 2009 and 2010. On one Northfield is favored, on another Tilton is favored, on the third one it is right in the middle. Essentially that's what it shows. When you get your property assessed, it's going to affect it but it goes back and forth. Selectwoman Dawson said it hasn't gone back and forth for a while. For the past couple of years it has been climbing up for Tilton. Commissioner Gallant stated that was correct.

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Commissioner Clark stated that is based on equalized valuation. They have had a lot of construction going on. Most of the people he has talked to haven't complained too much because they feel that the split on the equalized valuation is similar to the split on calls.

Selectwoman Dawson stated she knows what makes up a call. No matter what you call in you usually get a fire truck, ambulance and police cruiser. Commissioner Gallant said lets address that. Chief Ober explained they currently respond to the severity of the medical call. Medical calls are divided by severity and start at Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo. They respond with the engine and ambulance to Delta and Echo. For Alpha, Bravo and Charlie only the ambulance goes. Typically the police department responds to all calls. A lot of times it is a required response. Depending on the type of call, the police walk in in front of us. Deputy Robinson gave an example of how the 911 system works. His wife was in an accident and called 911. She told the operator no one was hurt, they just need the police. 911 called them to a motor vehicle accident. Nobody wants to interpret what the call is until they get there. Selectwoman Dawson understood. She feels they should meet more often to discuss this type of thing. Communication on both sides is needed. What are they getting for services they pay for? If they knew more about what was briefly touched on tonight, it would help.

Commissioner Clark stated after this they will be working on Goals & Objectives. They will be as open as they can. They are committed to working on that. He agrees they need to get together more often to share information.

Selectman Jesseman stated the explanation of the call volume answered his question.

Commissioner Gallant brought up Chief Ober's Goals & Objectives. It is 20 pages long.

Based on what he wants to accomplish it's all broken down into sections. It talks about the objective, the task and the status on every one of them. The first one is new station; evaluate the 8-year plan, identify staffing levels per shift, identify how many staffed stations are desired, identify station locations and identify funding options. This is the very first thing he has on his agenda for 2011. Selectwoman Dawson stated as they build out they are building further away from 1-93. Further and further away from the stations. It also causes the traffic to become more congested.

Commissioner Auger stated in the future they will see more departments going to regionalization because of the money. Selectwoman Dawson stated her problem on regionalization is if the county gets involved. Commissioner Gallant brought up the by-laws. They are clearly set up for a Selectman from each town to be a liaison. They are no longer meeting at Tilton School; they are meeting in Tilton and Northfield. They are not meeting on Tuesday or Thursday when there are conflicts with both boards meetings, they are meeting on Wednesday.

Selectwoman Dawson explained equalization. Commissioner Clark asked if it can be changed. Selectwoman Dawson said no. It would have to be done legislatively. Discussion ensued about the School District and the Aughenbaugh formula.

Commissioner Gallant read the memo from Shelley Gerlarneau at DRA.

Since 1991 the standard practice for apportioning a village district has been to use the prior year valuation and equalization ratio to calculate the percentage of current year assessment among municipalities. Once we have the net assessment for each town within the village

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district that assessment is then divided by the current district assessed value (as reported on the MS-1) to arrive at the tax rate needed for that town.

Speaking with the other Advisors and looking at my own village districts that are made up of more than one town, all are apportioned the same way and it is not based on an agreement between the entities. That being said, maybe you should ask your attorney if the provisions of RSA 53-A, intergovernmental agreements, could be used for this purpose.

Deputy Robinson stated we need to keep an eye on this. Right now we have been running 60/40. Commissioner Clark stated that whenever that comes up people are satisfied that the calls are equaling out. As far as looking at population, they do that in the school formula. The difference between the school formula and the District formula is you actually have 100% of the kids from both towns attend the school. For purposes of the Fire District you look at calls.

Deputy Robinson stated you have to educate the residents, we have to provide services. Commissioner Clark asked where we go from here. Selectman Jesseman said go home. Commissioner Gallant said they are happy with explanation. Selectwoman Dawson said the board will vote on this at their next meeting.

Commissioner Gallant asked Glenn Smith if he had any questions or concerns. Glenn replied no, he was here to observe and report back to the Selectmen.

Hydrants

Selectwoman Dawson said several people have approached her since the District meeting regarding the hydrant charge. The issue hasn't been resolved. She wanted to know if the fee was supposed to drop as the debt is paid. Commissioner Gallant stated they use a portion of their revenue to pay down the debt. Commissioner Auger stated the rate has not gone up. Selectwoman Dawson asked the last time it decreased. Commissioner Gallant asked if the debt has been paid off. Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Clark asked Chief Ober to share the code with them. Chief Ober asked for clarification of the question. Selectwoman Consentino wanted to know if the Fire Commissioners has the power to deny new hydrants. Commissioner Gallant stated no, not by law. Commissioner Auger stated they did deny it though. Selectwoman Dawson asked if they have the right to expose the Fire District to that kind of liability.

Chief Ober stated there is a two part answer. If development goes in then there are fire codes and building codes that dictate that every so many feet there needs to be a hydrant. If the Water District wants to put a hydrant on any of their water mains, that is their deal. The Fire Commission does not have the right to say don't put in a hydrant. This is typically driven by fire and building code.

Commissioner Gallant said in this particular situation, those hydrants were laid out by an engineer to meet code. The RSA's are clear. We don't have the right to change that. Selectwoman Dawson stated she talked with the Fire Marshall. They were very surprised the commission denied hydrants. Fire suppression is fire suppression. Discussion ensued. Chief Ober stated the general attitude should be that wherever you can put a hydrant you should put one. Wherever we can extend fire suppression we should do it.

Chief Ober explained in the case of MB Tractor they are putting in their own water supply. They would not be connected to the municipal system. Hampton Inn and the hydrant across

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from Walgreens are connected to the water system but they are responsible for the hydrants. They are considered privately owned but connected to water system. Jenson Mobile Home Park was discussed.

Commissioner Clark asked about new growth at Nickerson Industrial Park. He wanted to know if those hydrants are going to be attached to buildings as they go in and paid for by them as part of the permit process. Chief Ober explained that depends if a developer built a building there that required fire suppression. A perfect example of why it is bad if they don't have fire suppression is three of four years ago PSNH had a fire loss. That building was built just under the required square footage on purpose so a sprinkler system wasn't required. That company had a \$5,000,000 loss. This was caused by pickup truck fire inside their building. He's not talking about major burn down building and have to rebuild. This is a good example of when the Fire District and Water District should do it for the good of the community. This is good example. PSNH customers are paying for that. It has a trickle down effect.

Commissioner Gallant stated it's important to remember that new lines were put in. Those lines were sized for hydrants because the Fire District required them to do that. Chief Ober stated the community dictates that. It is community risk issue. Commissioner Gallant stated those lines have to be paid for somehow. That is the place to have it. If those lines were not sized for fire suppression the line wouldn't need to be as large as they are and would have been a lot cheaper. That is the place to have it.

Deputy Robinson stated we are unique as District. Commissioner Gallant stated we are the largest contributor yet we don't have a vote. Selectwoman Dawson said you need to be domiciled within the District in order to have a vote. It is State law; you need to be domiciled to have a vote. It's not the users. Everyone who is a registered voter in the Town of Tilton and lives within the Water District has the right to vote in the Water District. If you are not hooked up to the Water District, you don't vote.

Chief's Evaluation

Commissioner Clark stated one of the things they talked about last time was Goals & Objectives. They kind of got blended into their goal of evaluating the chief. There are similar things in both. They overlap. What he did was put together some information to evaluate the Chief. He made copies of a couple pages of forms Chief Ober had given him that they might want to use in evaluating the Chief. He took anything within Chief Ober's Goals & Objectives that met their criteria. That was improving relationships and performance of full-time and call firefighters, maintenance of facilities and vehicles by the full-time and call firefighters, improving community and municipal relations and the residency requirement they had on the Chief. These are the four areas they talked about during the hiring process that they were going to look at for reviewing the Chief maybe on a quarterly basis. All of the things from the Chief's Goals & Objectives that were in those four categories he picked up and put over there. The Chief got hired in December. We are five months into it and they haven't got the review criteria down to review the Chief. They owe that to him. They need to go through and figure out how they are going to do it. This is not the end product. This is a rough draft. He didn't feel he could do that. It needs input from the other Commissioners and people who work with the fire department on a daily basis.

Commissioner Auger asked Deputy Robinson his thoughts. Deputy Robinson said they talked about the team approach. They will be evaluating the team. They started talking about goals

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a few years back. He thought there were some smaller housecleaning goals that are realistic. There were a lot of items we felt we needed improvement on. A lot of them we have a good jump on; The Open House; The Info Blast. The team is already producing. There is more work to be done. They need to sit down, dice it up and assign responsibilities. The goals he has seen haven't been stretched way out. Real them back in in dealing with little things that are huge.

Commissioner Clark asked they look at the 360 Assessment. You will see there are major categories; communications, openness to learning, teamwork and peer collaboration. If you used as those headings the four headings we have here and assign it to their list. You could put a number score on it and have a comprehensive way to rate.

Commissioner Gallant said the first page is redundant. What he would like to do is go through the 20 pages and talk about each one as go they go through. Discussion ensued.

Deputy Robinson said he is already being evaluated. He is watched every day. He's doing well. Commissioner Gallant for starters there is good karma now. We are one department. The most important thing he has seen is that Brad being given the Chief's position has allowed him to come out of his shell and show what he is. He is encouraged by the fact Brad has come out of his shell.

Commissioner Clark said one of positive things about the Commissioners doing that evaluation is because they don't work with him day to day. They need to go in and talk to people about it. Chief Ober will give them names so they can talk to the call and full-time. They will get feedback. He thinks that will be real education process for them. When the Open House occurred the Chief took him around and showed him the equipment. It was a real eye opener. This is what they agreed to do and it is important that they do that.

Chief Ober stated the form titled 360 Assessment was taken out of the Public Certified Managers course he is taking. The other one is the Annual Performance Evaluation used by the officers. His only suggestion is to get a real snapshot of his performance is to either pick a handful, pick a form and have them put it to paper. Take own observations and put them to paper. He feels reluctant telling them how to evaluate him. Commissioner Gallant felt he didn't think he should. Everyone is part of the team. In his tenure here, the Commissioners have been viewed as they give us the yes, no, whatever. They don't get involved in the day-to-day stuff and they shouldn't. They shouldn't micro manage. They don't know anything about a fire department so to speak and they shouldn't be doing that. He certainly can say he would like Pat to talk with anybody he wants. He is going to find good karma. Deputy Robinson stated it is like any employer/employee day-to-day relationships.

Commissioner Clark stated the Open House was a pretty positive event. If anyone had any questions, someone popped up to answer them and showed them around. Everybody walked away feeling pretty good about that. Chief Ober stated they received four inquiries. Commissioner Gallant said the gentleman that spoke to Chief Ober at the fundraiser the other night is retired from a full-time fire department. He expressed a very positive interest in the fire department.

Deputy Robinson said he enjoyed listening to our people talk to people. It is still our home and we are proud of it. Nobody took anybody around and kicked our home into the dirt. We are proud of what we have. Commissioner Auger asked if this is something we should do in future

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down to other station to show people what's down there in three to six months. Deputy Robinson said anything you can do. People don't know what we do. The more opportunities you can give, the better off you are. Come learn who we are and what we are up against before you vote for us or against us.

Commissioner Clark stated he wants to get something together. We owe it the Chief so can use it at any time, put in file and move ahead. Commissioner Gallant stated Chief Ober's goals and objectives are going to be updated frequently. He feels he can't do the Chief's evaluation until he reviews the Goals & Objectives. Commissioner Auger wants to read through all the information before they do anything.

Commissioner Gallant suggested they go away with the three packets and assess them and come back at a special meeting to deal with nothing except this in the near future. Commissioner Clark asked if they can agree to come up with designing an evaluation tool. Commissioner Auger agreed. Commissioner Gallant stated as long as they all agree on it.

Future Meetings

The upcoming meetings in June were discussed. On June 1st they are meeting with Comstar and June 15th is the regular meeting. They decided to meet on June 8th at 5:30 PM on the Goals & Objectives and the Chief's Evaluation at Tilton Town Hall. This will leave June 29th for the Northfield Selectmen if they decide they want to meet in June.

Adjournment

Commissioner Gallant made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Clark seconded the motion. There being no discussion, vote was taken. Vote was unanimous to adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at 18:50.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Tobine Administrative Assistant

Next Meeting Date, Time, Place: June 15, 2011 at 17:30. Meeting to be held at Tilton Town Hall, 257 Main Street, Tilton.