

Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS Commissioners' Meeting

Meeting Called By:	Commissioners	Date, Time:	05/29/13 at 06:00 P.M.
Transcribed By:	Kathy Tobine	Place:	Northfield Town Hall, 21 Summer Street, Northfield

Commissioner Auger called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

Present: Commissioner Paul Auger and Commissioner Patrick Clark

Applicants Present: Jane Alden, Judy Tilton, Gretchen Wilder and Les Dolecal

Selectmen Present: Sandy Plessner, Tilton; Pat Consentino, Tilton; Kevin Waldron, Northfield

Reporters Present: Donna Rhodes

Meeting Purpose

Commissioner Auger stated the purpose of the meeting tonight was to fill the vacancy of the former Fire Commissioner. They have four applicants that turned in letters of intent. He read the ad they placed in the paper.

Commissioner Auger asked if the applicants if they objected to them reading their letters. Commissioner Clark read the letters of interest from Judy Tilton, Jane Alden, Gretchen Wilder and Mrs. Les Dolecal.

Commissioner Clark stated it is obvious God wants them to have a woman on the Board. They do have some very capable people that have applied.

Commissioner Auger asked if any of the applicants had any questions for the Board. Judy Tilton stated that all of them have been pretty involved with the Board so they understand what the position involves.

Commissioner Clark stated he has given some thought to some of the things that he thinks would be helpful for a commissioner to come on board. One of the items is developing a budget. Commissioner Auger stated they have to look out for both sides. Public Safety is number one. They want what is best for the firefighters to keep them safe. Commissioner Clark summarized being accountable to the firefighters and the taxpayers.

Commissioner Clark stated another is developing personnel policies. Commissioner Auger stated this is one of the best things to look at in the future.

Commissioner Clark stated another area that he thought would be good to have a strong background in is dealing with union issues from a management position. Next he had down knowing the Right to Know Law, municipal committee and volunteer work at municipal, county or State level. It would be very helpful to have somebody competent in Microsoft stuff like Excel spreadsheets and creating formulas to work within Excel.

Commissioner Auger stated that with all the letters that came in he was very impressed with everybody and what they had to say. There are a lot people in here qualified for the position; however, there is only one position.

Donna Rhodes asked the Commissioners if they have the same skills they are looking for. Commissioner Auger replied he doesn't possess all of them. His qualification is that he was on the fire department for a number of years. Donna stated she felt it was a fair question because when up for election they do not put out their qualifications like they are asking for now. Commissioner Clark stated some of these they both possess. Some of these are things that he thinks would be really good to have on the Board. They don't have them now. He also finds it amazing that they have broad depth and talent. Some of the applicants he has known for a long time and he didn't know this much about them until tonight. It is important that they move ahead. Another quality that is really important is to try to find somebody that can pull together and move forward in a positive light. They have had a couple of tough years and it has been in the paper.

Commissioner Clark stated these are some of the things above and beyond what they had in the newspaper article that it would be great to have people here. He requested that the applicants speak to these off the cuff. He stated there were many times in meetings they would have to speak off the cuff and he felt it was important to see that in action tonight. He requested they address some of the things they have there and other things they felt would be valuable to have as a Commissioner.

Gretchen Wilder introduced herself stating she has lived in the community for over 20 years. She has been on various committees and volunteer positions. Being clerical, she is comfortable with software, learning software, working with budgets. She works for the State right now. She does not do any of the budgets for the State. Being one of the founding members on the Budget Committee for the Fire District and learning the budget from the ground up, she is comfortable with it. Everyone that wrote a letter brings something to the table. The last couple of years have been unfocused and it's time to focus on the things we need to do. Seeing that are we are kind of a start up with our career being 24/7 our policies are fairly new and should be reviewed. She has talked with some of the other groups in the community and they review them once a year. We need to narrow in on things. Buckle down. There are things in that need to get done. She praised Chief Ober and prior Chief Carrier stating they are very good about communicating and planning their budget. Knowing what the need for capital improvements with equipment and personal protective equipment, making sure physicals were done. They do bring a lot into the meetings. She feels it is time to focus and be productive in some of these meetings.

Judy Tilton introduced herself. She is very strong with word, excel. She has to write her own programs for a lot of things she does. She has worked in the community for many years, volunteering. She has good relations throughout the community. She agrees that focus is primary in getting everybody back together. They need to get the men together with the Commission as there seems to be a divide there.

Jane Alden introduced herself. She grew up on a farm in a very small town and knew when she grew up she wanted to leave. She spent a career of 30 years working in downtown Boston. After she lost her husband she came to Tilton. She visited for many years and said to herself that should she ever decide to move to NH she wanted to move to Tilton. There is something about Tilton that reminded her of where she grew up. Everything went full circle. She had to get away from the farming community and small town and go to the big city. She had to get away from there and go back to where her roots are. It didn't happen to be in the same State. It happened to be in Tilton, NH. The reason she came back here was people care about each other. People care about their neighbors. You don't see that in Boston or southern NH. You see it in the Lakes Region. She has seen it with the policemen, the firefighters, the Commissioners. She is sure the two Commissioners feel that she has given them a real hard time. That is what the public has the right to do when they elect someone. It doesn't mean that she doesn't like them. It doesn't mean that she can't work with them. It means that she has had questions and as Commissioners they have invited questions. If she was to join them she would invite questions. She knows all about excel, access and word. She has not done a lot with it as she sees that as a clerical function. Understanding it is important. Even more important than understanding a piece of software is understanding the process of what we are asking taxpayers to do and what we are asking our employees to do. Sometimes there are issues there. She would like to see them focus on the future of the community, of the taxpayers and the employees of the Fire District. She doesn't think that in any town they can find a better fire department, a better EMS, than what we have right here in Tilton-Northfield. We have a great group of guys, and in some cases, gals. They work very hard. Their future is not to go out and find a lot more. They need to cultivate the ones they have. They need to make sure they have the very best training. It has been brought up in Commissioners meetings. A fire department and EMS department doesn't make a widget. The product is to protect the community. Protect the citizens. She would like to move forward in that respect. She would like to move forward with the same staff they have now. It is very costly to go out and employ new people. She would like to see us work together to make the atmosphere a little more open. She has worked a union member and she has worked across the table in negotiations with the union. She thinks as they move forward they need to put themselves in both those positions and do what is fair. Commissioner Auger wrote it down, we have to look at the firefighter and we have to look at the taxpayer. She would even throw in that we have to look at our community and the people of our community who need so that they feel safe and they need to feel comfortable in their own homes. We need that. That is the most important thing that the Fire & EMS has to offer. She

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addressed the stress and pressures the firefighters are under when they go to a call stating they never know what they will run into or whether they will return.

Les Dolecal introduced herself. She has been in Tilton for a little over 11 years. As a consumer of Tilton-Northfield Fire Department she is very impressed with the men and women who work in that department. They are fabulous people. Her expertise is in corrections and law enforcement. She also has a level of sensitivities, as Ms. Alden mentioned, to the stress and pressures the firefighters are under when they go to a call. Some of the things she has done over the years as a resident is serve on a couple of committees for selecting people. The most recent one was the interview panel for the Chief of the Northfield Police Department. Her expertise with excel is fair to medium, access she is not familiar with. She has created budgets anywhere from a few hundred thousand dollars to multi-million dollar budgets in State and county environments. She has worked with unions. They just negotiated a contract recently with Merrimack County for the jail. In State service with corrections she has had the opportunity to work with Right to Know requests. There are certain things they have to share with the public and there are certain things that are private and confidential. Knowing which is which could be very helpful and keep an agency out of deep, deep trouble. She has had a great deal of experience with that.

Commissioner Auger stated Les had said she lived in Tilton about 11 years. He asked Gretchen how long she has lived in Northfield. Gretchen replied over 20 years. He asked Judy, she replied 23 years. He asked Jane, she replied 4 years.

Commissioner Clark stated he personally feels that it is extremely tough. All of them, both in written word and being able to come up and talk to people, have described themselves in a way that makes them very competent to fill the position that is open. They do have personnel policies to deal with, goals to set, the budget coming up and all the things they talked about touched on those, One of the things moving forward, he feels is really important, is pulling the District together in a positive fashion as they move ahead is very important. Picking a person that can do that that does not appear to be divisive on the different sides of argument is very important. They all seem to have skill sets and background to be able to handle everything they have talked about. They just need to make up their mind as to which way they want to go.

Commissioner Auger stated he would like to take the letters home and go over them again. He is very impressed by everyone. No matter who gets it, they are all qualified.

Discussion ensued about when the Commissioners would make their decision. It was decided they would meet Wednesday, May 5th at 6:00 PM to announce their decision.

Les Dolecal asked about long term plans. She wanted to know if there is any strategic plan for the department at this point. Commissioner Clark stated not in any major way. One of the areas we have been working on is facilities. An overall strategic plan with 9 or 10 major things to focus on, to his knowledge, they don't have. He feels the problem is that they only meet once a month.

Kevin Waldron asked if the Commissioners remembered the Facilities Review Committee. He was on that committee with Sandy Plessner and others. They formulated a strategic plan for the District. Commissioner Clark responded that was shot down at District meeting. Kevin replied they shot down setting \$100,000 aside every year for the building not the strategic plan. He still has the plan. Discussion ensued.

Adjournment

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

The meeting adjourned at 6:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Tobine
Administrative Assistant

Next Meeting Date, Time, Place: 06/05/13 at 18:30. Meeting to be held at Northfield Town Hall, 21 Summer Street, Northfield