

Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS SAFER Grant Committee Meeting

Meeting Called By: SAFER Grant Committee Date, Time: 02/10/2022, 6:00 PM

Transcribed By: Beth Joslin

Location: Tilton Town Hall
Downstairs Meeting Room
257 Main Street
Tilton NH

Call to Order

Commissioner Pyra called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

Attendance

Commissioner Eric Pyra, Chief Michael Sitar, Captain Matt Gilman, Paul Blaisdell, and Scott Lewandowski

New Business

Annual Meeting Chief's Presentation

Chief Sitar shared his presentation for District Meeting regarding the benefits of the SAFER employees. He noted that the tax cost for the SAFER Employees would be \$0.36 for all four. The 2021 Tax rates for the Fire Department were discussed.

Commissioner Pyra commented that the fourth member has made a difference in terms of quality of service. Chief Sitar shared statistics regarding the benefit, including increased revenue because they have been able to transport on second medical calls.

Scott asked if there was any data to show that it has been beneficial to fire calls. Chief Sitar replied that there are no reports that will show it but having four firefighters respond on scene is better than three. Allows officer to oversee more easily as there are more hands. Matt commented that another intangible factor is that they aren't sending people to calls alone, it is a risk factor that has been eliminated by having the additional person

Chief commenting that though revenue has increased they cannot use it without changing the purpose of the account. Matt commented that he feels it would be a disservice to the district to indefinitely fund these positions with an alternative revenue source and that they should stretch the cost into the tax burden. Commissioner Pyra commented that if they had received a traditional SAFER Grant, they would have eased themselves into it because you are responsible for a percentage every year. Paul commented that they talked about alternative funding at the last meeting and thinks that if they look at the capital improvement plan and see what is available, they could use some of that to temporarily fund this program for a year, maybe two. He also agreed with Matt's points. Discussion ensued regarding capital reserve and keeping the public informed.

Scott asked about building committee's progress and how a new fire station may affect their funding sources. Chief Sitar stated that they do not have any solid numbers at this point but are looking to spend \$3.5 - \$4.5 million.

Matt asked if they should take set amount from Apparatus & Equipment Fund each year to offset cost? If they have a plan early enough than it won't matter what the building committee comes up with because this committee will be done before the building committee finalizes anything. Matt stated that last he heard there was a possibility that they will be going for a building the same year the SAFER committee's plan would go into effect

Paul commented that from what they have seen with voters is that the benefit always comes second to the cost. Adding that he feels the numbers show a benefit to community but also a financial benefit and they need to use that to their advantage to tap that fund. So along the lines of what Matt had said, they can create a piggy bank now to fund these staff members later and soften the blow to the tax burden.

Commissioner Pyra commented that it seems the unassigned fund balance is always getting tapped into at district meeting. Paul commented that he understands why they do that and doesn't feel they understand its purpose. Chief Sitar noted that the auditors were in recently and had them take a large amount from the unassigned fund balance because of the pending court case, the money owed to the water district has been set aside.

Matt suggested they do an exercise. They have a problem and a solution that they want to go for. If that solution was taken off the table, what other options do they have? Chief Sitar commented that they have the Tower Fund. Currently 50% of it goes to offset the operating budget and the other half is put into a fund for building maintenance and communication needs.

Matt commented that they previously discussed approaching businesses for funding, but didn't know what that would look like. Chief Sitar commented that Deputy Joubert has approached some businesses regarding trainings at their facilities and the business will contribute money to go towards equipment purchases. Matt commented that Franklin Fire made a deal with Clear Choice that they would pay for paramedic school if the department put a ClearChoice sticker on their ambulance. Discussion ensued if there is an ethical dilemma by approaching businesses.

Commissioner Pyra stated that the town can put impact fees, questioned whether that was something the district could do? Chief Sitar said it was a good suggestion and will see if that is something they can do.

Scott likes the stop gap idea but remembers from the initial SAFER grant meeting that there was a big push to find a way to pay for it so it wouldn't impact the taxpayers as much. Can they find a way to pay for 50%? Not forever but maybe longer than 2-3 years as they don't know how long it will take for industry to catch up. Commissioner Pyra commented that the school district will be hitting the tax rate pretty hard in the next few years.

Matt suggested that for the first year they cover 100% from the Apparatus & Equipment Fund/Capital Reserve Fund (\$380,000-\$400,000) and decrease it over 5 years, can know how much they are using from the fund and meter it down. Discussions ensued regarding timelines and deadlines. Matt commented that the sooner a plan is in place the better not only for the district but for the employees, so they aren't wondering if they will still have a job.

Chief Sitar commented that SAFER employees weren't in service for a full year so revenue may be increased even more. Also noting that increased mutual aid response is revenue for them as well.

Discussion ensued regarding the unassigned fund balance and what is proposed to be taken from it this budget season. Paul asked about the 17% that should be in the unassigned fund and asked if that was in the bylaws. Chief Sitar replied that it was not in the bylaws but that it was a policy recommended by the auditors that the commissioners have accepted. Paul asked if policies can be overridden by a vote of the public. Chief Sitar replied yes, policies can be overridden by majority vote and bylaws need 2/3 of votes to be overridden. Chief Sitar discussed how keeping the unassigned fund balance at the recommended level benefits them if they need loans and such.

Matt asked if what they need now is a number, the total dollar figure they are shooting for. Paul commented that that would be a good idea. If they have the projected cost of the personnel for the next 3 years, they should be able to set a number. Commissioner Pyra asked what happens

if they haven't used all the grant over the period. Chief Sitar replied that it will likely even out and its' not likely they will have any money left.

Scott asked if there was a way to extend the grant. Chief Sitar replied that they cannot extend it but can apply for a new grant that would prevent the employees from being laid off. Paul said that the Chief should apply for the grant regardless, if only to say they tried. Discussion ensued regarding ability to get another grant.

Paul commented that they should re-apply for the grant or a successor to the grant as well as any other types of grants that they can apply for, even if there is no chance of getting it. Commissioner Pyra asked if there was any chance the state would do anything, saw recently that the state revenues were up drastically so possibly some would come back to the towns. Chief Sitar feels they are unlikely to see that as the state has several things it will need to fund.

Paul asked if for the next meeting Chief Sitar could provide the committee with trends for benefits of additional members and cost projections of the four members for 2022, 2023, 2024

Adjournment

Matt made a motion to adjourn at 7:20 P.M. Scott seconded the motion. There being no discussion, vote was taken. Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 7:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Joslin

Beth Joslin
Office Clerk

Next Meeting Date, Time, Place:

February 22, 2022 at 6:00 pm
Tilton Town Hall
Downstairs Meeting Room
257 Main Street
Tilton NH