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Fire Services Study Committee

July 12, 2018

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present:

Douglas Erb, Kathy Parsons, Richard Sagar, Bruce Ulricson.

Don Beaudin (Installed as a new member)

There were 8 people in the audience.

Meeting opened at 6:00 pm.

- Doug read Warrant Article 5, as amended at Town Meeting. He reiterated that this committee was a fact-finding, not a decision-making entity.
- The minutes of the June 21, 2018 meeting were discussed and approved as written.
- The Committee was informed of the resignation of Michael Ball due to his engagement in a full time firefighting training course at the Fire Training Academy. Don Beaudin was presented by the Fire Department as a replacement member. The Committee was unanimous in accepting Don's appointment and welcomed him.
- Landaff Fire Chief Jason Cartwright presented information that had been requested by the Committee. He had been requested to express his opinions on a number of areas of concern regarding the Landaff FD. He had also been asked to provide information on the current roster, training levels, and call history. The questions and Jason's written answers are included here. In some cases Jason elaborated more extensively in answer to specific questions from Committee members and the audience; those comments follow in these minutes. In addition to the written answers to the questions, Jason also provided detailed handouts including the FD roster with training levels, call records for 2016 and 2017, and training records.

How does the town benefit by keeping its own fire department, rather than contracting with Lisbon? Do you feel that coverage for Landaff would be better or worse without the Landaff FD?

Answer: Quicker response time, local residents as FD Volunteers, familiarity with roads, locations, residents names, local history of incidents, and locations of drafting sites, ponds and other water sources. "Better" is not a term to be applied to this situation. Landaff VFD has always operated with reasonable costs, community support, and citizen interest.

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“Worse” is a strong term as Lisbon, Bath, and other Mutual Aid towns are very capable. There is “Risk” that they are tied up with their higher volume call level as well as unknown cost impacts, and as all departments I’ve observed over the years, membership count as well as quality has varied by town. In some areas and some instances, response time will be slower due to increased distance and cold weather will have an impact; i.e. climbing Jockey Hill unplowed in winter could be more of a challenge.

From a “coverage” standpoint, it will have an effect, but there are so many things related to coverage; when there is a storm affecting all towns, roads blocked by trees or debris that needs to be cleared, monitoring downed wires, answering calls from citizens, etc.

Another benefit is ongoing growth of the town. With an active and supported fire department, new home sites and existing real estate values will be more likely to maintain. I don’t have any research on this, but I do see town summaries by the State identify towns with various assets (schools, fire, police, etc.). I’m also not a real estate expert, but I would expect that the short term value of real estate could be affected (albeit possibly only slightly) so this should be considered since all ideas and input are being sought. If the town vision is to wisely grow our tax base thus lowering overall tax burden on existing taxpayers, having all assets available to attract home purchasers and potential land buyers/new home builders should be considered. As I understand it, the town and planning board have options to prevent extreme growth, multi-family facilities, and businesses, so to attract the narrow homeowners/landowners that the town seeks would be supported by maintaining a FD.

The town/community has “benefited” by the LVRA/LVFD organizing and running the annual Old Home Day for many years now. Maintaining this long running tradition will be challenged if Landaff no longer has its own fire department, and another town entity or volunteer group would likely have to pick up this effort.

What particular skills and assets can Landaff contribute to Twin State, and what effect on Twin State would you expect if the Landaff department is disbanded?

Answer: Landaff VFD, because of the nature of fires in the area, has often been second-on-scene for fires in Lisbon, Bath, Lyman, and other towns. Our strength has been our ability to provide a water supply to the scene, quickly and efficiently. That was the case in Lisbon at the recent Perch Pond Road, and South Main Street fires, in Bath on Porter Road, and other incidents. In all cases there was severe damage, but Landaff was able to supply water where other Departments had difficulty. It’s sometimes unappreciated, when everyone thinks of firefighters running into buildings with a hose, but they need water, and it’s a basic skill that we train for regularly, and are good at and have been routinely recognized for this service in mutual aid situations. We’ve provided traffic control for Bath when they were dealing with major road blockages (accidents or other), and support for Lisbon on various calls.

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If the VFD were to be disbanded, local Fire Departments would have to make major adjustments in first-on-scene assignments, shifting manpower and equipment to meet their needs. Now, when Landaff shows up, they get water, and extra manpower to help, whether it's dragging hose, or providing fans, setting up scene lights, providing equipment, or just directing traffic.

A bigger issue might be the effect disbanding the LVFD would have on the Town's overall civic reputation. Neighboring Towns, like Bath, Sugar Hill, and Woodsville, even if they are getting paid for Mutual Aid Response, won't always be happy about having to respond to Landaff. They didn't sign up for this and will be vocal about it. Try finding any New Hampshire town that has dissolved their Fire Department over the past 20 years. Yes, there have been consolidations, and geographical adjustments for coverage, but no Town has abandoned their Fire Department.

To take this out of the "local issue" arena, I would suggest the Fire Study Committee invite Jack Anderson, Bethlehem Chief and President of the Twin State Mutual Aid Fire Association, as well as Sugar Hill Chief Allan Clark, and Bath Chief Willie Minot to appear before the Committee to share their thoughts. I know the Fire Study Committee already has a commitment from the Lisbon Fire Chief, Greg Hartwell, to appear and provide information, but having these other three chiefs offer their thoughts would be helpful. At present, Landaff VFD enjoys a solid reputation within the Twin State Association. This was attained thru hard work and many members are frankly puzzled about why Landaff's citizens are questioning the value of reducing or contracting out a basic public safety service.

Our contributions to Twin State are also members attending Blue Mountain School Training annually that helps keep those programs going by supporting attendance. Offering fresh ideas and younger blood as we get members engaged in Twin State (within last 2 years Jason Cartwright – one of the "younger" attendees and Mike Ball's interest in engaging more). Pat Webb has served on various committees updating policies and offering his insight into the structure and service based on his years of federal government experience.

What is the current active roster, levels of training, and average age of firefighters?

Answer: Ages are not provided because of Privacy and HR discriminatory considerations. Age has not been, nor will be, a requirement to serve, and there are many roles to serve on scene or in various situations that formal training nor certifications are required. We continue to maintain the required number of SCBA (self-contained breathing apparatus) and internal crew for Twin State Mutual Aid membership. All members have received monthly training and depending on length of time served have attended various training opportunities offered by Twin State, Eversource, and other training opportunities as they are able to attend.

What are the long-term plans for recruitment and retention? If the town invests in maintaining a fire department is it reasonable to expect that an adequate number of qualified volunteers can be found?

Answer: This is a constant concern, but all Volunteer Departments have a natural ebb-and-flow of members. All of our members are always alert to new people moving to town, and often approach them directly to solicit their interest in joining the LVFD. Some members even live in Lisbon, but prefer to work with Landaff, because of the more “informal” atmosphere (being an unpaid Volunteer still has an appeal, as well as other strictures imposed by other Departments, such as who gets to respond, and/or a loyalty or other affinity to the town (ie. Former resident) etc.).

Recruitment can be improved by a supportive Select Board and stronger engagement from the overall town committees. We have had various efforts for recruitment over the years at various levels of success. This is an ongoing topic at Twin State Mutual Aid meetings on how to improve and execute recruitment and retention, so we will always have support. I personally believe that if the town SUPPORTS the department, the town will always have members to serve at various levels of skill and commitment.

How can the town assist the fire department in its mission?

Answer: Be more demonstrable in support. We’ve done two training burns in the last 4 years, with Lisbon and Bath assisting, and not one Select Board member came by to watch the practice in action. Verbal and strong support from the Select Board will go a long way in helping the department. Town members can suggest volunteerism as well as seek to be engaged at various levels. Sometimes we just need paperwork tracking, ordering, or research support. Placing posters and flyers constantly at the town hall and providing new resident packets that talk about the department are also ideas that would help.

Also, seek to support a basic improved facility that has running water, toilet facilities, improved storage and accessibility. We know this will help with recruitment, member morale and make responding easier when one or two are able to get to the station and respond without having to navigate entry stairs in the dark or have to back the trucks up icy inclines or through narrow doors. These are just a few of the concerns and challenges with the current facility.

Please provide a call history for 2016 and 2017 showing the number and type of calls, response time, and number of responders and equipment. If possible, please provide in a format that is easily understood by the average citizen.

Answer: See attached. Note that while initials of members seen at station or on scene, this doesn’t represent all that were responding and called off once situation was determined that more manpower wasn’t needed or call was cancelled.

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Training for 2017 is also attached. Note that of the 24+ training sessions we had with the various attendees and an on average 3 hours per training (some more, some less, some all day), we had roughly 400 hours of training. It is all volunteer, there was no cost to the town other than the fees for some training sessions provided outside of our own internal efforts. In 2017, there is an estimate of roughly 300 man hours expended on calls based on documentation.

Also, note that there are various type of calls that do not require SCBA or entry into a burning structure, but skills and knowledge and support by members that we train on frequently and repetitively.

How much is invested in FD assets, including specialized hoses, air tanks, personal protective equipment, and other tools.

Answer: Rough estimates: but Engine 1, @\$110,000 (we got a bargain when we bought it, the total invested from memory was around \$85K, but this number would need to be verified); Tanker @\$40K, Radios, \$25K (the majority obtained through a grant); Pagers \$10K, 8 SCBA sets and extra tanks, @\$20K, Hose \$15K; Tools \$20K, other gear \$25K (scene lights, generators, fans). Total FD investments perhaps totaling about \$270K; with significant portions obtained through grants or supported through fundraising efforts and individual donations including bequests.

The Tanker is now 14 years old and has a metal tank. If it develops a leak on the body, it could be difficult to repair. The Engine, on the other hand, had a poly water tank, which should have a longer life. We might need to consider replacing the Tanker in the next 5 years as the major capital equipment and there are ongoing upgrades to turn out gear, etc.

As the cost of a new fire station, or renovations, is of considerable concern, how are those costs going to be paid for while maintaining a minimally adverse effect on the taxpayers?

Answer: The Fire Station Committee that has been working on the issue (in 2015, and again in 2017) has included funding research as part of their project. There are federal grant opportunities (USDA Rural Development Grant), state-based charities (NH Charitable Foundation, Tillotson Fund), and other sources which could aid in deferring costs imposed upon the Town's taxpayers. The overall goal would be to utilize a portion of the "trust fund" established to pay for a significant portion, seek donations from contractors and local community members (some have already pledged support). As it has been stated many times, the goal would be to keep any town funded expense at the absolute minimum. If done appropriately, and we could have a serious discussion about it, we could also incorporate a meeting facility for town meeting to accommodate the attendance and handicap needs recently highlighted versus spending money on elevators and other accessibility ideas for the town hall saving the town tens of thousands of dollars and accomplishing many of the future

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needs for the town. The property was purchased with solving these needs in mind and we need to execute (or at least allow plans to get on paper). If allowed to spend money from the trust, I believe the department members have ideas to accomplish the goal of a new facility with minimal impact to the town budget and offer a facility that meets the aesthetics and needs of the community beyond fire service.

Looking ahead, what would you see as major capital investment expenditures; what is the time frame, and estimated costs?

Answer: Tanker will need replacing eventually and maintaining NFPA-Compliant gear is always an issue, budgeting for new people and making sure they have reliable equipment. Following our historical strategy of \$13K-\$21K annual “expense” and saving \$10K per year for major capital purchases and tapping the trust fund appropriately, we believe we can continue growth and support as we have the last 20+ years (which have had a few years where expenses are slightly higher than normal, but easily justified and explained).

- There was an ongoing discussion, including the Committee and audience members, as Jason presented each of the answers.
- Phil Finkle questioned the effects on real estate values relating to maintaining our FD. He said that perhaps we should look at values in Lyman (which does not have its own FD). Jason replied that since Lyman has never had its own FD, it would be difficult to determine any effects on the values.
- Kathy asked if the Landaff FD is considered an offensive or defensive department. Jason replied that he would consider it to be both. He said if a life is in danger the first priority would be to save the person. The next priority would be any adjacent structures that can be protected from harm, followed by containing the fire and saving the structure.
- With regard to coverage, Jason added that in wintery conditions all towns would be affected. In this, or other extreme conditions, there was the possibility of an overload of calls. He sees a value in having equipment stationed in town and available.
- Discussing the Landaff FD roster, Jason explained the codes. Bruce asked how many firefighters can be relied on to show up when toned. Jason said that the members listed with a HE code can be relied upon; he expected that in most cases six to nine could be expected to respond. The roster shows which members have Level 1 firefighter training and are trained on SCBA. He said that the number of firefighters able to enter a burning structure varies slightly as regulations prevent men with beards from using SCBA.
- Regarding training, Jason stated that generally four to nine members attend the bi-weekly training sessions. He said that the level of participation in the training sessions was as good as or better than many towns in the area. He said that the members are well qualified

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on the equipment. He said that the capabilities of each firefighter are considered when assigning tasks. Those with less training are assigned to traffic control and other duties within their capabilities.

- Bruce expressed concern with liability in case of injury, and the safety of the firefighters. Jason stated that it was his understanding that they are covered by the Town's insurance policy. Jason said that as a volunteer, and new to the duties of chief, he is still learning details regarding the insurance coverage. Doug suggested that the insurance issue is worth further study, and will make it an area of inquiry for the Committee.
- Kathy asked if the Landaff FD followed the two in, two out rule. The rule states that at least two firefighters are needed to enter a burning structure, and an equal number with the necessary training are standing by for a rescue if needed. Jason said that they do follow that rule. In some instances the back-up is provided by another mutual aid department. There was concern expressed regarding the possibility of loss of life while waiting for the proper number of qualified responders. Jason said in his opinion, in such a situation a rescue attempt would be undertaken provided that it could be accomplished without undue risk for the firefighters.
- Phil commented that his impression was that the FD has a contentious relationship with the Select Board. Jason maintained that there is a good, and improving relationship. He seeks to move forward from past difficulties that preceded his appointment as chief. Michael Ransmeier added that there is better communication now, but that there are still answers that the Board is awaiting from the FD. He said that he didn't think that Jenn or Errol were opposed to the FD, but admitted that he is somewhat skeptical of the success of our FD. Jason explained that some of the issues that the Select Board is awaiting from the FD had been delayed due to his recent business travel. He explained some of the difficulties involved in providing a roster with driver license numbers, but said that he was making progress and would be able to comply with the request soon. Michael Ransmeier indicated that the Select Board had received a letter from Dale Locke regarding the driver's licenses. The Select Board will send Dale an up-to-date personnel policy when it is finished. Michael is curious as to the average age of fire fighters. Doug asked, do we want the number of people in each of certain age brackets? Jason stated that, as a town, we need more structure, such as designing an application form with all the needed information. We also need to develop a privacy policy and safe storage of information.
- Reggie Lavoie questioned what the Select Board could do to help with recruitment. Jason said that the town clerk, tax collector, planning board, and other town committees could pass on information about new people in town and perhaps encourage them to volunteer.
- Kathy stated that, as of June 28, 2017, the State requires that all fire departments provide an updated roster. She asked if the roster that was presented to the Committee would be the

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same one that would be provided to the State of NH. Jason stated that it would be reviewed for accuracy and then provided. He further stated that, as a volunteer, he is learning and working to familiarize himself with all the regulations. He said that he as Chief, and the department are abiding by all Twin State regulations.

- It was mentioned that some firefighters are member of several department. Jason and Doug explained that this is a common and welcome practice. They said that individuals often provide different skill sets, such as EMT, to different departments. Some are involved in training.
- There was discussion regarding the fire station building. Ron Howard asked what was needed that the present building doesn't provide. Jason mentioned the need for running water and a septic system. He also said that a building, that could be efficiently heated, of sufficient size to accommodate the larger modern equipment was needed. It was suggested that the existing building could be updated to meet the requirements. It was suggested that Ron Howard look at the old building and provide ideas for making needed improvements. Jason said that the estimated cost of a new building would be about \$250,000. He said that the door could be widened, insulation installed, the mold problem addressed, plumbing installed, and grading improved for drainage and access, but that the cost might be almost as much as building a new structure. He said that they were not looking for a fancy building. There was discussion regarding the effects of building codes and other regulations on the cost of a new building. Jason said that he believes that smaller towns may be able to get exceptions from some of the code regulations which would help to minimize costs. It was suggested that Lisbon might be able to provide some insights into the process based on their experience in building a new station. Doug said that the Committee will address this issue with Lisbon. There was a discussion of what uses would be made of the old structure if a new station were built. There were various suggestions, including storage for the FD or Town.
- Claudia Lavoie asked whether our firemen are full-time residents. She wondered if any are part-time residents such as students or others who spend extended time away from town. Jason said that they are all full-time residents, but that there are a few who spend some time away from town, such as retirees.
- Michael Ransmeier was concerned that the training records didn't show enough detail. Jason indicated that he tries to keep the Select Board informed of the training activities. Michael also said that Jason was incorrect to say that no Select Board members were present at either of the two training burns. He said that he was present at the Hatch house burning, which he watched from his own property. His property adjoins the lot where the Hatch house was located which is being considered for a new fire station.

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- Bruce questioned who would be in charge in Jason's absence. Jason explained that all firefighters are assigned a number which indicates their rank. The first person on scene is in command until the arrival of a higher ranking firefighter, who then takes command and notifies Dispatch.
- When discussing training and equipment, Doug stated that Landaff was one of the first area departments to have a thermal imaging camera. The camera can detect slight differences in temperature enabling firefighters to see in heavy smoke.
- Don reported that they were recently informed that Lisbon is changing its requirement that firefighters become Level 1 certified. Jason said that this was a realization of the fact that with the increased number of hours required for certification it is becoming difficult to find people willing and able to make that kind of commitment. He said that many tasks can be done without Level 1 certification. He said that the Landaff FD is developing a list of various skills for each firefighter. The goal is to work with each firefighter to develop a level of confidence with certain skills and make assignments accordingly.
- Following a question from Phil, Doug stated that this meeting's ideas for further research would be insurance coverage and State regulations for the fire station. By the end of August we should have a good idea where we are.
- Ron Howard mentioned that Monroe had a "sub-station", and wondered if Landaff could become a sub-station of Lisbon.
- The Committee discussed the upcoming meeting with the Lisbon Select Board. Because of the late hour, it was decided to use email to put together a list of questions. Richard will coordinate and provide the list to Lisbon.
- The Committee will meet with the Lisbon Select Board on July 23 at 6:30 PM at the Lisbon Train Station. The next regular meeting will be Thursday, August 2, 2018 at 6:00 PM. At that meeting the Committee will work on summarizing the information that they have gathered and begin planning for the town hearing.

Meeting adjourned at 8:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Heidi Sagar