

Western Coventry Fire District

1110 Victory Highway

Greene, RI 02827

(401) 397-7520

Moderator

Vacant

District Clerk

Jean Pomfret

Treasurer

Glenn Underwood

Tax Collector

Joan Smith

Board of Directors

Ch. Earl Mann

Members

Jon Mitchell

Richard Holt

Kent Novak

John Humble

April 17, 2010

WCFD Board of Directors Emergency Meeting

Present:

Kent Novak, Jonathan Mitchell, Richard Holt, Earl Mann and John Humble

Absent:

None

Also present:

District Clerk Jean Pomfret, Tax Collector Joan Smith, Senior Officer in Charge Bob Mann, Taxpayers: refer to hand written list.

Meeting was called to order at 10 am by Chairperson Mann who read the following:

“This Emergency Meeting has been called under the OMA rules, after consultation with Counsel, to address/resolve the Public Safety issue the Chief, Deputy Chief and seventeen (16) WCFD Volunteer

Fire/Rescue personnel signing and taking an immediate "Leave-of-Absence" at the 4/15/2010 WCFD BoD meeting, after the Chiefs request for the resignation of two newly elected Board members and an apparent erroneous assumption that the Taxpayer vote at the Annual meeting to hold the 2010/2011 budget at the 2009/2010 level would cut various volunteer compensation levels and off-hour manning of the Station.

This Emergency meeting was called to bring together the Fire/Rescue Personnel in Coventry and adjacent communities, who have offered their assistance, and the Western Coventry Senior Officer-in-Charge, due to the absence of the Chief, to set scheduling of off-hour manning along with scheduled Mutual Aid to maintain the Public Safety in Western Coventry, until the WCFD is re-organized, beginning with the two (2) full-time and three (3) Fire/Rescue personnel."

Chairman Mann and Attorney Harsch are requesting a meeting with the counsel; they are also requesting the return of district property and want the members to stay off the property until the meeting.

Mr. Mitchell asked who covered the station last night. Chairman Mann answered that no one was officially on duty last night.

Some one questioned the presence of Officer #22 at the meeting. He

said he is on regular duty with his ride along and is present on his own.

Mr. Mitchell said there was a police detail at the station last night hired by the district; they were turning fire fighters away.

Captain Mann asked if the members were still on leave. The answer was yes. He said there are only 5 members not on leave and they can't cover the 12 hour shifts. Chairman Mann asked if temporary provisions have been made for coverage. Captain Mann answered that Chief Labbadia (Anthony) offered his assistance.

Mr. Mitchell said he is aware of an email from Hopkins Hill recruiting EMT's to fill shifts. It said to contact Captain Guastini for salary and additional information. He asked who gave the authority to pay Hopkins Hill. He asked if it was correct that the district has mutual aid but still contacted Hopkins Hill for volunteers to staff coverage in the district. Captain Mann answered technically yes. He (Captain Mann) said for the record he finds himself in a very precarious situation. Mr. Mitchell said a leave of absence doesn't mean stop communicating with the Chief.

Mr. Novak asked what action the BOD took regarding the leave. Chairman Mann re-read the statement by the members and said who signed. Chiefs Labbadia and Seltzer said they couldn't guarantee coverage all the time but said they would do what they could. Mr.

Novak said a recommendation was made at Thursday's meeting to contact the members but it wasn't done. Mr. Holt said the attorney (Mr. Dumas) said he represented the members so they attempted to contact him but were unable to. It was asked what the scope of the leave was; what does it require? Mr. Mitchell asked if anyone just asked the Chief. He said as a BOD member out of the loop anything the district's attorney said is hearsay. He said the Chief was at the station yesterday for 2 hours and no one asked him. Chairman Mann said counsel recommended that this not be done until Mr. Dumas could be reached. Mr. Humble said he believes there is room for negotiation.

Open Forum:

Chairman Mann said Open Forum is open.

Taxpayer Patricia Morris, 480 Cahoon Rd asked why they were considering taking the members back; she said it didn't make her comfortable.

Taxpayer Ken Jackson, 2799 Harkney Hill Rd asked if it wouldn't be better to tell the taxpayers everything the attorney said. He also doesn't believe Mr. Dumas said he was representing the members, he said he was speaking for them.

Taxpayer Bernie George said the first thing that should be considered is whether or not to accept the leave. Before going on a tangent the

BOD must vote yes or no.

Robert Hevey, 607 Weaver Hill Rd said there must be a reason with it. He said it appears to be a blackmail situation; he said to look to the internet for the source of it.

There was discussion back and forth as to whether Mr. Dumas is representing the members.

Chief Pomfret said he has some concerns as a taxpayer. He asked if it was mentioned that the daytime staff is working overtime. He asked if they were being compensated at 1 and ½ time their normal rate. Captain Mann answered no. The Chief also asked when they reached out to other districts did they ask them to man the station and whose insurance are they being covered under? Chief Pomfret said the only contact anyone has made with him since Thursday was to request his keys. Mr. Humble said the leave was read and then people left. Taxpayer Amy Brown said “That is wrong, people stayed and talked. No one ever asked, there was no effort made, you sat there with grins on your faces.”

Taxpayer Jackson asked what the attorney said. Mr. Holt said the discussion was going beyond the agenda. Mr. Novak called a point of order and asked what the BOD did immediately after the packet was handed to the clerk. Chairman Mann answered he was not sure. Mr. Novak said we bought a bench, this shows a lack of respect, let's get

them back on duty.

Fire fighter Steve Autieri said he is speaking on behalf of the fire fighters. In the past few months he has see the department do many, many things. He said they appreciate the facility and the taxpayers for giving it to them. There hasn't been any contact from any one; no effort has been made to try to figure the situation out.

Taxpayer Robert Guastini said Kent Novak was the Chairman when the bench was purchased. Mr. Guastini said Mr. Mitchell met with the fire fighters when they met to discuss the leave of absence. He said "Shame on you Jon Mitchell". Mr. Mitchell called a point of order and said Mr. Guastini just got personal. He told Mr. Guastini that he resigned from the BOD because he tried to assault the Chief. Point of order was called.

Mr. Holt said based on the agenda they don't have the authority to speak about accepting the leave. He asked if a representative would be willing to meet with BOD members to talk.

Taxpayer George said again the BOD needs to accept or deny the leaves.

Mr. Novak agreed that he was Chairman when that was done (members walked out). He asked the BOD what they wanted to do hearing nothing he moved on.

Taxpayer Rick Pennington from Maple Valley Rd said he is losing track of the purpose of the meeting and asked for it to be re-read. Mr. Novak said he agrees with Messrs. George and Pennington and asked what the policy is on leaves of absence. Mr. Holt said he doesn't believe there is a current SAP covering this. Taxpayer Brown said the Board received the reason for the leave. Chairman Mann asked that the letter from the members be read again.

Chief Seltzer from Central Coventry said that several years ago Western was not covering its calls. In the last several years they have been covering all their calls. He can't stress enough that a major issue was fixed for very little money. He offered to gladly switch budgets. Mr. Novak agrees with Chief Seltzer 100 percent and asks that Mr. Humble and Chairman Mann exercise their leadership skills to get the situation behind us.

Mr. Mitchell apologized for getting personal with Taxpayer Guastini. Taxpayer Guastini accepted the apology but did not offer one of his own. Mr. Mitchell said he supports the fire fighters, the Chief and the taxpayers, he is also a taxpayer. He respects the BOD members, is not here to fight, it is not us (taxpayers) vs. them (fire fighters). He said the district gets the fire fighters at a great discount for the service they provide.

Attorney Steve Autieri Sr, 581 Victory Highway, said this is very short

sighted on every one's behalf, took a beating at the Annual meeting, if it means stepping aside the new BOD's members should do it. As Chief Seltzer said the district is getting great service for little money. People are being hurt by putting egos first. He said "Let's get the dedicated men and woman back on the job period".

Taxpayer George said the taxpayers have spoken; that is your current budget. You still haven't settled the issue; you haven't accepted or not accepted the leaves. Chairman Mann said under the agenda they can't accept or decline. Chief Pomfret called a point of order. He said because of the staffing issue if they agree to come back it would solve the issue. Captain Mann asked if based on Chief Seltzer's comments would it behoove the BOD to take a recess and speak with the Chief and a representative of the members. Chief Pomfret said we have an opportunity to take care of this right now. This option had never been presented to the members. Mr. Mitchell motions to have 2 BOD members meet with a representative for the members. Mr. Holt seconds. Lt Puckett calls a point of order; she believes the Chief should also be in the meeting. The motion is amended and re-seconded by Mr. Holt. Taxpayer Henry Arnold, Narrow Lane wants to know why the whole BOD can't meet. Mr. Mitchell recommends that if the whole BOD is going to meet that it is done in executive session, as required by law. Mr. Humble asks if the scope of the meeting is for an interim decision. The Chief said it is to restore coverage to the district until further notice. Motion carried 5-0. Recess taken at approximately 11am for a meeting between Messrs.

Humble and Novak, Chief Pomfret and Steve Autieri as a representative of the fire fighters.

12:56 pm recess ends. Mr. Novak motions the following:

“Motion Presented At Emergency BOD Meeting (4/17/2010)

I make a motion that the agreement between the parties is as follows:

- 1) Department members will withdraw the Leave of Absence and No Confidence paperwork**
- 2) The Board of Directors will accept the withdrawal of the Leave of Absence and No Confidence paperwork without prejudice.**
- 3) Department members will restore immediately Fire and Rescue coverage.**
- 4) The Board of Directors will schedule meetings (that may include Executive Sessions) in accordance with the Open Meetings Act to address District/Department concerns.**
- 5) All of these actions taken by the Board of Directors are without prejudice.**

Respectfully submitted,

Kent”

Mr. Mitchell seconded. Mr. Novak explained that the above motion was a result of the meeting during the recess. He recognizes there

are still issues on both sides. Mr. Humble concurs with the items on the list and agrees to discuss issues. Member Autieri is looking forward to working on the issues. Mr. Holt thanked them all for coming to a conclusion. Chairman Mann thanks the department and the members and says he has no intention to down grade. Motion carries 5-0.

Adjournment:

Mr. Humble motioned to adjourn, Mr. Mitchell seconded, motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 12:59pm.