

## **Board Meeting Coventry Fire, Anthony District**

**Wednesday October 10, 2012**

**Board members in attendance Gary Cote-chair, Shirley Matthews-co-chair, Jim Beckman, Peter Pankowicz, and Louis Cote. Also Chief Labbadia, Deputy Chief Robert Warren, and Tom Lacolle.**

**1) Emergency evacuation procedures**

**2) Roll Call**

**3) Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting held on September 12, 2012.**

**Louis cote made a motion to accept the minutes, seconded by Peter Pankowicz. All in favor, motion carries.**

**Chairman's report: none**

**Tax office report prepared by Jeanne Lukowicz and read by Gary Cote. Taxes collected to date \$1,843,906.95. Interest collected to date \$80,310.03. Total tax and interest collected \$1,924,216.98. The fourth quarter is due October 31, 2012. There have been 71% of the 2012 taxes collected. The tax sale is tomorrow, Oct 11, 2012. We have 14 properties left on the sale list. There has been \$133,563.00 collected from legal letters to date. Shirley Matthews asked what time the sale would be held. Jeanne Lukowicz said 10 A.M. Louis Cote made a motion to accept the tax collector's report, seconded by Jim Beckman. All in favor motion carries.**

**Gary Cote mentioned he has a conflict with being the chair of this Board and Town Council President. Central Coventry asked the Town for fuel for the fire trucks. The request was denied because Central has no ability to pay and the taxpayers of Coventry would be on the**

hook for the money. According to the newspapers fuel cost are around \$12,000.00 a month. Jim Beckman asked how the trucks will be able to get to a house fire with no fuel. Gary Cote said that he had talked to Chief Labbadia and Chief Brown and they are able and willing to cover all calls. Robert Warren said that 2 districts city wide is normal. Gary Cote said that he received a legal opinion on the issue and was told that until Central gets a receiver they are considered an unsecured creditor. After they go into receivership the Town of Coventry would be considered a secured creditor with repayment and then Central would be able to get fuel. Shirley Matthews said that there would actually be more than 2 districts city wide with West Warwick and Western Coventry. Chief Labbadia said we will help however we can. Jim Beckman said that they need to have fuel. Gary Cote said that he can't put the taxpayers of Coventry on the hook for the fuel cost. Robert Warren said that he feels that it would not be very long and there will be trucks at every fire. The Chief said that he hopes it doesn't come to that but they could run our trucks if they had to. Jim Beckman feels that we might be saving money but losing crucial response time. Jim Beckman feels that we will be raising our fuel cost in this district instead of Town wide. Robert Warren said that we respond to almost everything anyway. Shirley Matthews said that we get reimbursed from insurance on the rescue runs anyway. Jim Beckman said that he can't speak about what happens on the town level. Shirley Matthews and Robert Warren said that this situation won't last for long. Chief Labbadia said either way it's not a good thing. Jim Beckman stated that

**\$12,000.00 not to burden the taxpayers but it's actually \$12,000.00 to save a life. Shirley Matthews said that it was group decision at the Town level, with all the Town council members not just Gary. Jim Beckman asked if we would exceed our fuel budget. The Chief said Central Coventry should be conservative with their runs and we will help and provide services. The Chief said we are over budget by around 3% already and that number will probably go up a little. The town is also working with tight numbers in their budget. Gary Cote said that if the town of Coventry gives Central free fuel where is the incentive to fix the situation. Shirley Matthews stated that it would just be a Band-Aid. Gary Cote said that he received a call from a taxpayer asking him why we were responding to mutual aid calls to providence. That is not the case, we do not respond to calls in Providence. Shirley Matthews received a call asking why we send our trucks out to be washed. That is also not the case, we wash our own trucks. Jim Beckman feels that the taxpayers are not protected. Gary Cote said that as he understands it Central needs fuel on a daily basis. Jim Beckman said that the trucks use a lot of fuel when it is at a fire and running the whole time. Chief Labbadia said that we fill our trucks before they get to half. Shirley Matthews said that Central is working on getting a receiver. Jim Beckman asked Gary how long it takes to get a receiver. Gary Cote said that if they were to file today they could have a receiver by Friday afternoon. Gary Cote said that as soon as they file their paperwork and get a receiver fuel will be supplied and the Town would then be considered a secured creditor and would get paid. Tom Lacolle said the amount is not actually**

**\$12,000.00 a month for fuel it is actually much less and feels things will be worked out quickly. Chief Labbadia said this situation could actually fall under EMA. Gary Cote said that Chief Baynes never called him directly to discuss the situation. Gary Cote talked to Police Chief Brian Volpe who is acting Town Manager in Thomas Hoover's absence and Mr. Tobin and in his legal opinion it was suggested not to supply fuel until the receiver is appointed. Shirley Matthews reminded everyone that the next meeting will be held on November 7, 2012. The Chief said it would be a work session and nomination papers should be in by November 11, 2012.**

**Louis Cote made a motion to adjourn into Executive Session for financial, seconded by Peter Pankowicz. All in favor, motion carries. Gary Cote asked if the reason needed to be listed in Pursuant to R.I. general laws with a specific number. After a short recess Gary Cote returned and was informed by legal counsel that financial must be discussed in open session unless there is legal action pending or is in litigation. Jim Beckman made a motion to come out of Executive Session, seconded by Louis Cote. All in favor, motion carries. Jim Beckman made a motion to reconvene into open meeting, seconded by Peter Pankowicz. All in favor, motion carries.**

**Chief Labbadia spoke to Arthur Capaldi about the legal dispute going on in the Albion fire district. They are having a dispute over the legality of the fire tax increases. They are arguing that any tax increase must be across the board commercial, industrial, residential, and tangible should all be raised. The Chief wants to make sure that our charter allows for a 3 tier tax system. Jim Beckman, Shirley**

Matthews, and Gary Cote all feel that the charter has been changed to allow for the 3 tier tax system from the year 2000 and up. The Chief just wanted everyone to know about the issue and he is not sure how any changes in their rules or laws could affect our district. Robert Warren suggested that someone call State Representative Scott Guthrie for clarification. Chief Labbadia said that Arthur Capaldi is looking into the issue and researching the legality and will let us know. Jim Beckman said that is the problem in Central, they didn't raise taxes for a while and then tried to raise the taxes too much all at once and doesn't want to get caught up in a situation like that in our district. The Chief said that we asked our taxpayers about a 3 tier tax system in a resolution at the annual meeting and it was approved. Shirley Matthews said it was changed when there was some confusion about how apartments should be taxed. The Chief said he is unsure how the laws in Albion could affect our district, a 3 tier system might be fine as long as we raise the taxes across the board. Gary Cote said that our charter states or addresses at least a two tier system but there is only a few cents difference between commercial and industrial, so it's implied. Jim Beckman asked if we can change our tax rate at any meeting. Robert Warren said it has to be advertised and voted on by the taxpayers at our annual meeting. Gary Cote said that every commercial property owner or representative has the right to vote on the tax rate even if they don't live in our district. Jim Beckman asked if it was 1 vote per owner of any property. Robert Warren said 1 vote per each commercial property. The Chief said that any building over 4 units is considered commercial and the owner or

a representative for the owner has the right to vote even if they don't live here. We bring the tax role to the meetings to prove ownership.

Jim Beckman asked about the budget. The Chief said that we were over budget by \$49,000.00, but we still have the fourth quarter to collect. Jim Beckman asked about the \$100,000.00 on line 20. The Chief said that he does not want to touch that money. Jim Beckman asked about OJI expenses. The Chief said \$250,000.00 in overtime, personnel and salaries will be over budget and there is still one man out who is getting paid. Jim Beckman asked about the \$5,500 in advertising and how it was being used. The Chief said it was for newspaper ads for the tax sale. Shirley Matthews said it was being used for legal ads which cost more, and to advertise the vacancies on the Board and the annual meeting. The Chief said the vehicle maintenance will be over budget because the rescue keeps breaking down. Louis Cote mentioned that we have borrowed rescues from different communities while ours was being fixed. Jim Beckman asked about the holidays which were originally a mistake. The Chief said it was because of the difference of fiscal year from the calendar year. Shirley Matthews said that the 11 holidays have been taken care of and the contract would be more closely reviewed this year so there is no confusion even if the meeting needed to be postponed. Shirley Matthews stated that she was upset about the holidays last year, to give up a holiday is to give it up not postpone. The Chief said he will have to ask the union for concessions this year. He said that they will not be able to give a 4% increase. Shirley Matthews said that

she wants to make sure legal has a chance to overlook the contract before anything is decided. Shirley Matthews wants to re-evaluate the four man minimum. Jim Beckman feels that was an error. Peter Pankowicz said that the four man minimum was to cover overtime. The Chief said for 1 year only. Jim Beckman said the three man became a four man minimum. The Chief said the first year was manpower after that it was a four man minimum.

The Chief mentioned that we are in need of a new rescue. Gary Cote said to come up with a funding formula that would not raise taxes. The Chief said he would like to use the \$120,000.00 from the plan review of the mill project. Gary Cote and Jim Beckman question whether or not it is legal to use that money for a new rescue. Robert Warren said that the Chief wanted to buy rescue one with that money and use it for the fire marshal's vehicle and a backup rescue. The vehicle will also be used for fire safety in schools and to investigate fires. The Chief said he budgeted \$300,000.00 in rescue recovery and it was actually \$340,000.00. Jim Beckman recommended to stop increasing the rescue recovery and put anything above and beyond into a separate fund just for purchasing vehicles. Gary Cote said we could take the \$300,000.00 and divide it by twelve months and put anything collected over that amount aside for vehicles. The Chief said that he uses the overage to fill in the voids in the budget as necessary. Jim Beckman said we should stop projecting and just raise the rate to buy new equipment. The Chief said we are not allowed to show a profit. Gary Cote said that as long as we allocate the money for anticipated future purchases it is not considered over

or a profit. Robert Warren asked what if we asked for a new rescue at the annual meeting. Gary Cote said the taxpayers would not agree to that. The Chief said that the rescue is six years old already. Louis Cote asked how much a new rescue would cost. Robert Warren said \$200,000.00 and change. The Chief said that he would like to buy a demo. Jim Beckman said the demos are better because the bugs have been worked out already. Shirley Matthews said just explain to the taxpayers that the plan review money is in an account and we would like to reinvest it into a new rescue. The Chief said he will be upfront about the rescue and a 5 year lease would be around \$20,000.00 a year. Gary Cote said that's fine as long as there is no tax increase. Jim Beckman said that we should raise taxes in small increments every year so we don't have to have one large tax increase. The Chief said that is what happened in Central. The Chief said the \$100,000.00 line is for unexpected variables and knows we can't raise taxes and we have been maintaining within our budget. Jim Beckman said the truck replacement fund should have been there already.

#### **Public Comment:**

A taxpayer said that she wanted to thank Gary Cote for thinking of the taxpayers in regards to the fuel for Central. She feels that the taxpayers do not want to take on Central's problems.

Joe Hartman a firefighter and taxpayer in our district said that he is concerned about Central not being able to get fuel from the Town. If Central has no fuel and we are out on a call who is going to come to help, Scituate is at least a nine minute ride. Robert Warren said that

**operationally backup will be there. Mr. Hartman feels that saving \$12,000.00 is not worth losing a life.**

**Bob Carlow a fire fighter and taxpayer is also concerned about this issue. He said that Central covers the largest portion of the population and Coventry High School is also in that district. Everyone has children that go there and they need to be protected.**

**Jim Beckman said this issue should be re-evaluated at the Town level and he feels that it is a fatal mistake.**

**Shirley Matthews made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Louis Cote.**

**All in favor, motion carries. Meeting adjourned at 8:35 P.M.**

**Respectfully submitted**

**Mary Perry**