

The Exeter Fire District

(February 17, 2005)

Peter Lacouture called the February 18, 2005 meeting of the Exeter Fire District to order at 7:05PM. All seven commissioners were present. Also in attendance was Brad Preston from Volunteer Fire Insurance Services (VFIS) as well as ten members of the public.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of both the January 13, 2005 meeting and the public safety tour of January 29 were accepted, without correction. Both votes were unanimous.

Treasurer's Report

Ms. Vergano stated that all four loans from the Public Safety organizations had been received and deposited into our account. She also gave a brief summary of the costs that would have to be incurred should the board insist on a dual signature system for our checking account. The charges would be approximately \$500.00/yr. Ms. Vergano then moved (Mr. Walker second) to institute a single

signature system with monthly bank statement review by either the Chair or Vice Chair for verification. The motion carried unanimously.

Communications

Mr. Nievera reported he had received the budgets and cover letters from the four Public Safety organizations. He has also sent a letter to the Board of Canvassers (BOC) inquiring as to the possibility, logistics and cost of the BOC assuming the canvassing duties at our annual meeting. Their reply was to forward the letter to the Town Council for direction.

Old Business

Mr. Lacouture gave a brief report on the Public Safety tour of January 29. He has sent letter of thanks to the organizations.

Brad Preston from VFIS was on hand to advise the board as to the types of insurance available/needed for an organization such as ours. He recommended a management liability policy with coverage of \$1,000,000. Mr. Preston spoke of avenues the board might wish to investigate at a later date such as consolidation of assets and adjusting of deductibles for the four public safety organizations. The issue of bonding was also covered. Ms. Vergano and Mr. Wilbur will work with Mr. Preston on the bonding of the treasurer and tax collector. A motion by Mr. Walker (Mr. Swanson second) to obtain

basic liability insurance immediately, passed unanimously.

Mr. Lacouture read the previously discussed changes to art. VI, sect. 8 of the bylaws. Mr. Walker moved (Mr. Swanson second) that we provisionally accept the changes as corrected. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Vergano sought clarification of “personal property” stated in the bylaws for tax collection reasons. It was agreed that the Exeter Fire District would tax everything taxed by the town, with the exception of motor vehicles. The district will also honor all exemptions granted by the town. Ms. Vergano explained the reasons to originate and mail separate tax bills for the district rather than be included with the town. There will be approximately 2800 bills. The accounting alone would be extremely difficult. Ms. Vergano moved (Mr. Walker second) to create independent tax collection by the fire district. The motion carried unanimously. Ms. Vergano then moved (Mr. Nievera second) to contact Mr. Kettelle (Exeter #1 chief) with regard to the use of the food pantry’s current location in the fire station for the collector’s office. Mr. Lacouture will draft and send a formal request to Mr. Kettelle.

Mr. Nievera reported he had applied for and received verbal authorization to use the high school auditorium for our annual meeting on April 13, 2005. Written notification should be received within a week. The subject of nomination papers and where to obtain

them was discussed. Mr. Kettelle suggested that the district clerk should be the one to see for nomination papers. Mr. Nievera will ask the town BOC if they will distribute the papers to those requesting them and whether or not the forms drafted by Mr. Lacouture meet their approval. Statements made during the run up to the election concerning tax rates and the expected increases were discussed. Ms. Vergano stands firm on her understanding that a promise was made to the taxpayers to keep the increase under 5 – 5 ½ %, while Mr. Lacouture's position is that the 5 - 5 ½% only included the district's administrative budget and did not figure in any increases to the present public safety budget. After much discussion the agreement was to disagree on that matter. However, there was unanimous agreement that savings, particularly in the form of reductions in homeowners insurance, were promised to the taxpayers. Ms. Vergano explained the administrative budget and how the figures were compiled. Mr. Walker moved (Ms. Vergano second) acceptance of the administrative budget with an increase to \$2,550 for insurance costs. The insurance costs were previously estimated to be \$1,000. The administrative budget for FY 05/06 is \$31,505. Ms. Vergano explained the district budget and answered questions from the floor. Chief Caito (Exeter Rescue) inquired of the potential for a 100% tax collection rate and if shortfalls were or could be included in the budget. We are not legally able to plan for a shortfall. Mr. Lacouture introduced the subject of a contingency fund, their advantages and disadvantages, into the discussion. Chief Kettelle noted a decrease in the admin budget next year could be used to start a contingency fund for the

district. Mr. Swanson suggested using the individual organizations savings to make up the shortfall. Chief Franklin (Exeter #2) noted the ISO rating would possibly be affected by under funding the companies. “If programs are cut, it will take time to replace the money needed to reinstate them”. The contingency fund will be revisited next year. Future discussions will be needed to address cash flow challenges for the district this year and the effects of the district’s inability to meet quarterly payments due to insufficient quarterly collections.

Chief Kettelle stated his goal constructing this year’s budget was to stay under a 3% increase. He also urged the board to consider initiating a “plan review” fee for the district with the revenue to support a part time fire Marshall. The fact was stated that any revenue generated via fees of this kind would have to be solely used for future fire prevention services, as opposed to offsetting other budgetary expenses. Chief Franklin answered questions about station 2’s budget, as well as Mr. Morgan for the Dispatch Corp. Mr. Morgan also informed the board they had recently initiated an antenna replacement program. This is an attempt to replace antennae before they fail in service. Chief Caito answered questions about third party billing and his truck fund. The Rescue Corps has not been funding the truck replacement fund for four years, a byproduct of a previous administration. The rescue replacement fund is not being used and must be reinstated. He predicts we will see a line item in the FY 06/07 budget.

At the end of the discussion Ms. Vergano calculated the need of a \$22,000 cut to achieve a 6½ % budget increase over last year, which was estimated to result in a 5 - 5 ½ increase in the tax rate. Mr. Swanson again suggested to have the fire companies cut from their truck replacement funds. Mr. Morgan offered to cut his antenna replacement fund but warned the equipment is not new and will, at some point in time, need replacement. There was a discussion on the possibility of lowering the budget to a 6 – 6 ½% increase over last year. After which Mr. Walker moved (Mr. Reed second) presenting the district budget as compiled with a 9.3% increase. The motion passed with Ms. Vergano and Mr. Swanson opposing.

Ms. Vergano moved adjournment (Mr. Walker second) at 10:40PM. The remaining items on the agenda for tonight will be included in the agenda for the meeting scheduled for February 24, 2005.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Nievera, Clerk

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