

Exeter Fire District

(August 18, 2005)

Call to Order

Chairman Peter Lacouture called the August 18th meeting of the Exeter Fire District to order at 7:02pm. Present were Commissioners Vergano, Lacouture, Wilbur, Nievera, Reed, Swanson and Walker. Also present was district tax collector, Ms. Jean McMahon. There were eleven members of the public in attendance.

Public Comment

Ray Warner (Nooseneck Hill Rd.) voiced his displeasure with the minimum bill of \$20.00 for a piece of land that is under water for about one third of the year. He wants a change to the by laws where the minimum bill would be \$10.00. Mr. Warner was directed to the town tax assessor for the disposition of his particular problem.

Jodi Lisberger asked if the fire taxes were tax deductible. They are. She also asked about the ISO timeline and why the town tax did not decrease by the amount of the fire tax. Mr. Lacouture explained the ISO requirements with some input from Chief Franklin. He also described the process whereby more was added to the town budget by the town and, to a greater extent, by the EWG school committee

(their increase was 13% over the prior year) than was removed to create the fire district. She also suggested that the minutes and a copy of the budget be available for public viewing at the tax collector's office. Ms. McMahon concurred, stating that that information would have been helpful during the first quarter's tax collection. Mr. Nievera will arrange this.

The \$30,000 administrative budget was also questioned, as was the fire department's watering of plants at the library. Ms. Vergano explained the costs associated with the start-up of the district including the collector's salary, advertising costs, insurance for the board etc. Mr. Nievera explained that the watering of plants might have been in conjunction with testing/maintenance of underground water storage tanks or another form of training. Chief Franklin offered that it was not unusual to perform some public service while training. Mr. Wilbur explained that the fluctuating budgets were threatening public safety and that they had to be stabilized.

Scott Gordon (Ten Rod Rd.) also voiced his displeasure with the \$20.00 minimum bill set forth in our charter and by laws. He claimed to have donated \$4,000 over the past three years to the fire department. He then destroyed a check that was to be this year's donation. Mr. Gordon then left the building.

Mr. Warner then asked where the budget came from, "Who voted for this?" Mr. Lacouture explained the budget process and the annual meeting that was held in April of this year.

Previous Month's Minutes

Ms. Vergano moved (Mr. Walker second) the acceptance of the minutes from the July 14 business meeting. The minutes were unanimously accepted.

Treasurer's Report

Ms. Vergano reported that the starting balance for the period was \$1,434.89. Collected tax receipts totaled \$117,504.53. Checks totaling \$1,154.66 were written, leaving a reconciled (as of 08/08/05) balance of \$117,784.76. A short discussion on the format of the report took place and it was agreed that a starting balance, amount deposited, amount spent and ending balance would be reported. The reports generated from the accounting software should not become part of the record unless the entire board had reviewed the report.

Communications

Ms. Vergano reported that she had received the account number from the Rhode Island Division of Taxation. She also reports having received the workman's comp. insurance policy from Beacon Mutual Ins. Co. This policy is effective from 07/21/05 thru 07/20/06.

Mr. Lacouture reported receiving a "thank you" letter from VFIS for the district choosing them as our insurance carrier.

Old Business

Ms. McMahon was presented with a somewhat low tech, but highly effective “pest control” device for use in the tax office, to which she offered her thanks and appreciation.

Ms. McMahon reported receipt of \$219,898.81 from 1,176 payments. With the 500-600 yet to be posted payments in our possession, the response rate is nearly 64%. Mr. Nievera recommended a moratorium on setting penalties and interest on the remaining unpaid accounts provided they be made current by the end of the month (August). He also suggested a press release informing taxpayers of this moratorium. Ms. McMahon recommended that interest should not accrue for the month of August since this is a new item for the taxpayer. Mr. Wilbur was opposed to advertising. The outcome of this discussion was a motion by Mr. Walker (Mr. Reed second) to accept the recommendation of the tax collector to forgive any interest charges accrued in the month of August. The motion carried unanimously. Interest will be added to the delinquency letters that will be mailed on or near the first of September.

Ms. McMahon also wanted a dollar amount after which she would refund overpayments. Mr. Nievera moved (Ms. Vergano second) setting the dollar amount at \$1.00. The motion carried unanimously. Overpayments of \$1.00 and above will be refunded to the taxpayer.

Mr. Swanson wanted to know if all postings would be finished by Aug.31, so that delinquency letters could be initiated. He was told by Ms. McMahon, Ms. Vergano and Mr. Nievera that every effort would be made to accomplish this.

Mr. Nievera also requested the authorization to announce future meetings on the crawler on the public access channel on the cable as well as in the South County section of the Providence Journal. There were no dissenting opinions.

Mr. Lacouture has received a letter from Chief Kettelle recommending the hiring of a consultant to help lower the ISO rating in town. Mr. Nievera asked if it would be beneficial to have ISO in to explain what they are looking for and the best way to achieve that end. Chief Franklin said that ISO only visits to evaluate an organization, not to assist with an evaluation. Chief Franklin suggested working on records now and doing what we can to comply with ISO before paying a consultant. One of his main problems is the lack of computer literate members to help with the creation and maintenance of databases and records necessary for ISO. Ms. Vergano inquired as to the likelihood of one side of town improving their rating while the other prepares. Chief Franklin did not see that as feasible. Ms. Vergano again stated her desire to comply with the statements made during the campaign to form the district, that we would lower the rating of the town and save the taxpayer money on insurance

premiums. Mr. Walker recommended a separate meeting to deal with ISO. Chief Jordan agreed that a separate meeting would be beneficial and that a consultant would also be beneficial; ISO will not come out to “help us along.” The topic will remain on the agenda for next month.

Mr. Nievera stated he has contacted two members of his grant committee and hopes to have a meeting completed by the next regular business meeting. Ms. Vergano is looking for members to her cost savings committee. Mr. Wilbur says he has one budget and is still looking for members to serve on his capital improvement committee. He will try to meet by the next regular business meeting.

Discussion on the “freeze” ordinance was continued until next month; the final language has yet to come out of the town council.

New Business

There was no new business discussed.

Next Meeting

The September meeting will be held at the Exeter Public Library on September 8, 2005. All regular business meetings will be held at the library, on the second Thursday of the month, unless moved for special circumstances. Meetings start at 7:00pm.

Adjournment

Ms. Vergano moved (Mr. Walker second) adjournment. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Nievera, Clerk

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