

# HARMONY FIRE DISTRICT

194 Putnam Pike  
Glocester, R.I. 02814

The regularly scheduled monthly meeting of the Harmony Fire District Executive Board was held at the Harmony Fire Station on **Thursday, March 20, 2014.**

Present: Moderator – Milton Huston; Chief Stuart Pearson;  
Treasurer – Sandra Owens;  
Board Members –George Kain, James Richards & Raymond Fogarty;  
Attorney – Fred Mason, Jr.

Absent: Tax Collector/Clerk – Kimberly Barber – excused;  
Board Member – Louise Michaels;  
Association Representative – Linda Ferragamo, President

## **I. – Meeting Called to Order: 7:08 pm** by Moderator Huston.

At this time Ray Fogarty addressed the board. He thanked everyone on the district board and in the association for their well wishes and support during his illness. He stated he was happy to be back and was looking forward to staying on as a board member and letting someone else take the helm as Moderator. Sandy said his expertise is indeed valued in a great way.

## **II. – Approval of the minutes from the January 16<sup>th</sup> meeting:**

Milton asked the board if they would like to take a few minutes to review the minutes from the January 16<sup>th</sup> meeting. If there are no corrections, he would like to call for a motion to accept them. Ray noted that he would abstain from the vote due to his absence from the meeting.

Jim made a motion to accept the minutes. George seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

Milton also called for a motion to accept the minutes from the January 30<sup>th</sup> Emergency meeting that had been held.

Jim made the motion. George seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

## **III. – Approval of Bills:**

A check register of bills was provided to all board members in their folder. Milton asked if there were any comments or questions on these expenses. If not, he would like to call for a motion to accept them as presented.

Sandy commented that most of these bills listed are actually paid before this list is presented due to the bi-monthly meeting schedule. Therefore she was not sure how useful the “approval of bills” actually was. She does not want Kim delaying payments in order to wait for payment approval, because we are getting charged interest and finance charges on our credit card bills and such. Milton agreed we do not need that. Sandy feels this is an obstacle. There is a treasurer’s report presented and we have always had dual signatures on the checks. Ray agreed stating that it isn’t very professional to keep our creditors waiting either. Sandy proposed abolishing this report all together, she just did not feel its merit. George said he thought the bi-monthly meeting

schedule was on probation for awhile to see how it would go, so we should also put any changes to this report on hold too. Milt said that even monthly though you're still going to get into trouble. It depends on billing cycles and our meeting date, they'll get you every time. Sandy agreed stating bills need to be paid more than once a month, she and Milt are available all the time with them both working from home. The Chief then proposed simply re-titling the report to "Review of Bills". Then a report of all the bills paid since the last meeting would be presented to the board for review purposes only.

Ray also spoke up on behalf of George's thoughts on the bi-monthly meeting change. Ray had sat on several boards and committees that had changed to this meeting format for various reasons. However here in Harmony he did not think that the monthly meeting was an issue, but was actually necessary in order to keep the flow of information going. Sandy agreed that we should actually meet monthly. He made a motion to revert the meeting schedule back to the monthly version we used to follow. The board agreed that these subjects would both be discussed later in the meeting under New Business.

Jim made a motion to approve the bills. George seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

#### IV. – Treasurer's Report:

The December and January treasurer's reports were e-mailed in advance by Kim and February's report was presented tonight.

Beginning balance December 1<sup>st</sup> \$668,710.04 and ending balance December 31<sup>st</sup> \$582,492.18. The biggest outflows of cash in December were for the building loan payment and call pay and incentive checks.

Beginning balance January 1<sup>st</sup> \$582,492.18 and ending balance January 31<sup>st</sup> \$559,294.19. There is a slight type-o at the top of the second page. It should read January, not December. The expenses were routine for this month.

Beginning balance February 1<sup>st</sup> \$559,294.19 and ending balance February 28<sup>th</sup> \$543,784.28. Again a routine month, with the exception of the heat which was \$5,318.

Ray made a motion to accept the December, January and February Treasurer's reports as presented. Jim seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

#### V. – Tax Collector's Report:

Sandy stated, in Kim's absence, that \$424,862.15 in taxes have been collected year-to-date. She stated that this figure looked very good, since we had only budgeted for an anticipated \$445,000 to be received for the entire fiscal year.

Sandy asked if anyone could remember if Kim had reported on the tax sale last time? Milton did not think she had, but he would check the minutes.

Ray made a motion to table the tax collector's report due to Kim's absence. George seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

## VI. – Chief's Report:

The Chief first mentioned to all the board members that there were enrollment forms for our VFIS insurance policy in all their folders. They should all fill them out and return them to Kim as soon as possible. It was brought to our attention during a meeting with VFIS a couple of weeks ago, that anyone working for the district in a volunteer or uncompensated capacity should be enrolled. You would then be covered while conducting business on behalf of the district.

Also in everyone's folders are updated copies of the district by-laws for their binders. These copies reflect the recently adopted changes.

A sympathy card was sent to the family of Ian Sinclair upon our learning of his passing. He had been a Tax Assessor for the district years ago.

The Chief informed that board that HFD had participated in the birthday celebration for Tyler Seddon. As everyone probably saw on TV, the "Tyler's Troops" event went viral and was quite incredible. Ray stated that both his son and daughter have received phone calls that they are bone marrow donor matches, not necessarily for Tyler, but for someone in need of a transplant. It is just amazing, because they would never have thought to get tested if not for hearing about Tyler. The Chief said he has heard that matches have been found for Tyler, but they are in the process of tracking those potential donors down.

An article was submitted by Kim to 1<sup>st</sup> Responder Magazine about the EMS Pride Awards. These awards were issued to Captain John Falco and Private Rick Waterman, as well as Lieutenant John Baccari, Chepachet Fire District, and Private Christopher Fusaro, Smithfield Fire Department. Ray said it was wonderful for them to get the recognition they well deserved. The Chief went on to explain that after hearing of the awards the Gloucester Town Council also formally recognized the group by issuing citations at their meeting on February 6<sup>th</sup>. George said he thought that was a very nice gesture by the town. He was also impressed by the delegation present from Smithfield Fire. Chief Robert Seltzer and several members in full dress uniform were there to support their own. It was very professional on their behalf. Ray asked about the status of the double amputee patient they had helped. The Chief said the last he had heard the individual's prognosis was very good.

Tonight is the last night of the 13 week Probationary Class that Deputy Chief Mike Segee has conducted. They are actually taking their written exam as we conduct this meeting. Sandy asked if these are all new people? The Chief replied yes, they are all new to our department. But, some have been in the fire service for many years and come to us with a lot of experience. Ray asked how many people? 13. The Chief also said he has had a few young men come in that are only 17 years old. He intends on contacting VFIS to see if we can have them come in the building to start some sort of orientation or training to keep their interest. The board agreed stating we wouldn't want to lose them.

Jim asked the Chief how many active members we actually have on the roster, besides the probationary people. The Chief said that is the key word, "Active." We usually have an average of 22-25 people on the roster at any given time. Ray asked if the active numbers are being affected because volunteers don't show up during the day while the paid staff is on? The Chief said no, that really has no bearing on it. The volunteers that are available during the day still show up and get credit for those calls. George said he has heard that most area volunteer fire departments are in the same predicament though. Ray said that's why it is so great to hear about

so many new people. The Chief said yes and no. He wishes they were closer. A lot of the new people are not your neighbors next door, most live a few miles away.

Ray made a motion to accept the Chief's report. George seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

**VII. – Harmony Fire Department & Improvement Association Report:**

Due to Linda's absence there was no report available.

**VIII. – Committee Reports:**

a. Broadband Work Team – Milton Huston, Chair

Milton did do some on-line research into broadband grant availability. He discovered that the RI Emergency Management Agency received a grant not that long ago for \$955,000. The Chief said that this money was for the research of cell sites in RI. However, he said that another one for broadband that they are putting a work group together for involves public safety and education people to do approximately a 1-1/2 year study on its needs and effects within the state. Milton asked to leave this item on the agenda for future review.

Ray brought up the fact that RI Hospital just got a grant from Goggle for the Goggle Glasses. Right now they are exploring the liability issues of using them. But Ray's thought would be for us to propose a collaboration with Goggle and RI Hospital on the project. Milton thought our size might make us a perfect prospect for such a project. Ray said he would get the Chief a contact name for someone to speak to about this.

b. Apparatus Review Work Team – Jim Richards, Chair

**Work Team: Jim, George, Chief, Deputy Chief Segee & Capt. John Falco**

Jim said that a couple of weeks ago the team went for an on-site visit at Tri-Star to view the skeleton of the truck before it went out to paint. They were very pleased with what they saw. The chassis should be in any day too. Ray asked about the story he heard on the news of a department that put a deposit down on a truck and then lost it. Could this happen to us? Jim said that could very well have happened to us, but we opted not to put down a deposit as part of our contract. George replied that our contract was bonded anyway though, so we would have been covered. Jim stated that everything is proceeding on schedule though. The next steps would be to go out for paint, come back to be mounted to the chassis, then shipped up to Auburn, MA for wiring. George said he was quite impressed by Tri-Star's shop. Jim said that the truck will be on display by Tri-Star at the NE Association of Fire Chief's conference in Springfield, MA. Delivery of the truck should be in May or June.

c. Property Review Work Team – George Kain & Louise Michaels, Co-Chairs

George had a packet included in everyone's folders of information he gathered on the property. Realtor Nathan Clark prepared a property valuation report. One of the properties referred to is another property that was owned by this same person and sold for \$129,900. A water test from Net Lab was submitted by the homeowner along with other old reports from Numa Well and H<sub>2</sub>O. George noted that since this was not done by an outside, independent party though, he was unsure of its accuracy.

Additionally, he brought Mulcahey's Well Service in to do a flow test and water analysis. The flow test showed the well produces 6 gallons per minute, but he has not received the results of the water analysis yet though. Attorney Mason arranged for a title search to be conducted by Attorney Tim Kane. The only thing he had questioned was an old right-of-way that is illegible on the deed. George had the deed blown up at Staples, but it was still illegible. Attorney Mason felt this would not be necessary because if it could not be read, it would not be enforceable. Some discussion followed about the bordering properties. Ray commented that there had been a lot of work done and thanked both George and Louise. However his concern is that in order to have something ironclad to present to the taxpayers at the annual meeting in June we would need to commission someone, an architect, to have a plan drawn up. This would show our design, the business plan, how much money would be going out, funding being sought, etc. Sandy said she had done quite a bit of research into the finance portion. Financing the project may be a difficulty. She spoke with Bank RI and they said we would not be able to get a regular mortgage since it is our intention to remove the house. Ray asked if we could keep the house as rental income? Sandy said she did not know if that would be in keeping with our mission or our Charter. George said he doesn't know if the Charter addresses it. She said that would be a Fred question. We were incorporated as a taxing authority, so she didn't know whether we would be able to own and rent it. Sandy said that there is the option of a business loan, but we would have to pay it off in 7 years. For a \$200,000 loan, that would be about \$35,000 per year, which is about what we budget for capital improvements each year. Ray asked what the rental income would be each year. George stated he thinks they pay about \$850 per month rent. Ray said that is \$10,200 rental income per year for each side of the duplex. Sandy stated we would have to hire a management company to take care of the property though, because no one here has the time to do it. Milton said that would cost about 10% of the monthly rental income, about \$170. Sandy said she also spoke with our representative from the USDA, whom was very knowledgeable. She said we should look into more like \$300,000, if we remove the house. That way we would have enough to cover the purchase, an engineering study, house removal, excavation, well, septic, etc. Ray said he didn't see us removing the house. He felt the only way we would be able to make that work, is if we were to obtain grant money, such as a Champlin Grant, to pay for it outright. Or, if it's legal, we buy it and keep it as rental income for the 7 years that we are paying the loan off. We would still be able to use the additional ¾ acre of land, which about doubles our size, for the parking and training that we need it for. Sandy went on to say that the USDA rep. also told her the only way we could obtain a loan through them, was to prove that it was prohibitively expensive for us to obtain the funds through a bank. Ray was also skeptical to go with USDA and be stuck like we are with our current mortgage. We pay 5% interest for 40 years and are not able to refinance at a lower interest rate. Sandy stated that her rep. assured her there would be no prepayment penalty on this loan. That rule must pertain to the old loan only. George stated that he feels we do need extra money when we get the loan, but not necessarily \$300,000. He said we can do what we need to do for less than that. Sandy said it would be extremely expensive to move a house. We would be lucky just to get rid of it, but not make anything on it. Milton said that if we were to advertise an auction, you would be surprised that there are a lot of people who would be interested. When they were getting rid of all the houses around the airport years back there were people actually bidding on them and moving them. Sandy said the

USDA rep. also recommended that before we make a bid on the property we find out if a new well and septic could be installed on the property. Further discussion followed about the water. Ray said for us to have something to propose to the taxpayers to vote on at our June meeting we have to be ready to answer their questions of: what are you going to do with the property, did you go to Champlin or the RI Foundation for money first, did you consider keeping the rental property. Sandy agreed, stating that we are not sure how quickly this person wants to sell the property either. Milton disagreed, saying he did not think that it should take an exorbitant amount of time. It just needs to get done by starting tomorrow and not wasting any time. Ray said he would hate to lose this property because it is really the only one that makes sense. The 2 on the other side would involve DEM, the state DOT for the road, etc. Sandy said she feels the next step would be to enter into a Purchase and Sales Agreement with very low money down, money we could afford to lose, and list all of the contingencies that we have discussed. She sees it going to at least the end of the year. George questioned, end of fiscal year? She said no, beyond June, the end of the calendar year, I don't think we can get all of this done. He said he thought so. Further discussion followed about the goals of acquiring the property.

At this time Ray got a phone call from home and had to excuse himself from the meeting (8:05 pm).

Milton said the next step should be for the committee to look into the Charter and By-Law stipulations for a rental property and get Attorney Mason's advice on the matter. George said additionally after he gets the water test in, he will get a price from Mulcahey for the pump differential and also a price for the excavation. Sandy said George needed to get specific cost estimates from engineers, excavators, etc. The Chief suggested that George have an architect come in and have sketches drawn up to illustrate his plans. Further discussion followed about connections for water and sewer between the properties. Milton asked the Chief what he thought the next steps would need to be on this project. George said we need to list the necessities first, then the extra "nice-ities" and what the cost ranges would be. Further discussion followed about the rental property and possible grant options. The Chief said he had talked with George earlier, and discussed taking money from our budget each year to do the needed improvements on the new property. But how much more can we really take from this budget? Sandy said you can't. You would have to go up on taxes if we purchased that land and intend to do anything with it from budget money. There would be the upkeep, maintenance, insurance, etc. We have held our taxes pretty flat, but this would change things, and we would definitely have to go up on taxes. The Chief asked if Sandy knew how much revenue we would generate if we proposed to go up 5¢ on the tax rate? She said Kim would be the one that would be able to generate those figures. Further discussion followed about the possible water and sewer uses of the property in the future. George interjected that worst case scenario, even if there was a high water table over there, with the grade differential we could build it up and make a conventional one work. The Chief said this is why he thinks we should have an architectural engineer, such as Aharonian, whom we used before, draw up a design and estimate the costs. Sandy asked if we would need a specialized septic engineer. Milton stated that an experienced architect would definitely know what would fly and what wouldn't. They have people on staff that specialize in all of the different aspects of design. Milt asked if there was anything else from the committee to report or were we ready to more on. After extensive discussion it was

decided that the committee should meet again, continue to gather the facts and work on the discussed items. Attorney Mason stated that he would look at the Charter, but he suggested that George contact Attorney Kane again on the issue of real estate owned by a municipal property and if it effects its tax exempt status. Having been the solicitor for Smithfield and Glocester in the past, he may know the answer to that question right off the top of his head. He does not think it would because we are non-profit and we would still not be gaining a profit. Sandy had questioned about the zoning, but George said that we are not building anything there. She said that the property is changing its use though, residential to public, so it should be looked into since there are abutting properties that may be effected. Jim asked if George has heard from the property owner. He said yes she calls all the time. Jim asked what kind of questions does she ask? Does she want to know if we are still interested? George said yes, she knows we are still interested. But he has told her that we have to do this through a process and she has to appreciate the fact that we have to do this legally. Jim asked, so she was understanding and she seemed willing to work with us? He said absolutely. Milton asked if she had given him a timeline. He said yes she wants to sell it, but they keep extending the date. It's month-to-month and she states that she has to move on it. He has told her there would be at least a couple of more meetings before he had any answers for her. Milton stated that there really wasn't anything to approve on this project at this time, this was just a status report. George said that there were a couple of bills, Attorney Kane and Mulcahey's, that will need to be paid. Sandy stated that any of the expenses for this project will be paid out of the regular budget.

#### IX. – Old Business:

There was a letter received from the RI DOT Director, Michael Lewis. Copies were included in everyone's folders. The letter states that he has submitted 3 plans to Glocester's Town Planner and all have been rejected. He's now waiting for the town to respond back. George stated he thinks they just feel the plans they have come up with are substandard for the future of the town. He also said that the letter still does not address the 2-1/2 year old issue of the crosswalk out front though. The Chief said that he had asked about the crosswalk and was told according to today's RIDOT rules, they would have to install a stop light due to the speeds on this 4 lane road. The Chief said that the town planner has meet with the state and they have talked about choking the road up or the state buying up property to keep it 4 lanes. The state does not have the money to buy any property, so that isn't an option. So the Chief said he is waiting to hear what the town council or planner has to say. Milton said with the traffic studies and all that, he thought the state determined it wasn't going to be a big congestion issue. Especially through Harmony, he didn't know why they would be worried about that. It does go down to 2 lanes in Chepachet. George said it's a congestion problem. Milton said that they thought it was going to be a congestion issue in Greenville also, but what it came down to was a speed limit issue. If people would just drive the posted speed limits there wouldn't be half the problem. George said another thing up here would be to put some slow speed lanes on the hills. Jim said so are they basically saying in order to fix this road they need to make it a 2 lane road? The Chief said no, what they are saying is where it is applicable they will choke it down to a 3 lane, 2 travel lanes and a turning lane. Where they can put 4 lanes they will. There was some discussion about the traffic signals and congestion issues in Greenville. The Chief said that he feels there is a solution, but both sides have to do some give and take. So discussion followed about previous plans presented years ago. The Chief said he told the Director that he would hate to see a serious issue

happen over here and to have done nothing about it. The Director said he understood totally and his people would bring it forward.

**X. – New Business:**

Due to the discussion earlier during the presentation of bills for approval, Ray had made the motion to re-title that section “Approval of Bills” to “Review of Bills”. Jim seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Also, was the issue of a monthly vs. bi-monthly meeting schedule. Jim stated that his concern with calling for a vote on this subject tonight was that we had really made this change to make things a little easier on Kim. Since she is not here tonight he really did not feel comfortable making any decisions. The board agreed. Therefore it needed to be discussed what would be done about a meeting next month, since the next meeting according to the bi-monthly schedule would be in May. The Chief suggested that a Budget Workshop be held in April, to prepare for presentation to the board at the May meeting. Sandy thought this was a good idea. She asked what about the land issue though? After much discussion George declared that the Property Review Work Team would also meet again in April. This would give them time to complete their committee tasks as well, to be ready to present to the board at the May meeting too. The Chief stated that if it is a committee meeting the public notice is not required either. Sandy said she thought this was the best way to go because it would give the committee more flexibility to get quotes and what not. Milton agreed saying it would give them a little more time. Jim said yes, they could actually call as many committee meetings as they wanted until then. George said he just didn’t want to let go of the opportunity. Everyone agreed saying they did not want to lose out either. There is just a lot of work still to be done.

George asked the Chief if he had seen an advertisement for a Community Block Grant the Town of Gloucester is applying for. The Chief said he believes we had asked someone at the Town Hall about this before and we were told we couldn’t be part of it. Sandy asked why. He said he would like to refer this to legal, but he thought it was because we are not part of the town, we are a separate entity. Discussion followed about eligibility for inclusion in the Block Grant application. The Chief said he could ask about it. He asked if George had contacted anyone at the town hall yet? George said no. Sandy asked if we could apply to develop this block right here? George said that fire districts can not apply directly for block grants through the federal government. We would have to apply through the town to get them. Attorney Mason says we would need to contact the town to see who is eligible to apply. George said that Sue Harris in the Town Clerk’s office would probably know who to talk to. He thinks it is worth a shot. The Chief said the ad says by April 3<sup>rd</sup>, so we have 11 days to submit for it. Alright, he’ll try. George said even if we only get a \$20,000 piece of equipment. Sandy agreed saying, leave no stone unturned. Further discussion followed about the block grant and the office that handles the application process.

Sandy asked if she could have a copy of the property deed George had presented earlier. Again, discussion followed on the topic of old handwriting.

**XI. – Public Input:** No audience.

**XII. – Executive Session:** None called

**XIII. – Adjournment:**

Jim made a motion to adjourn the meeting. George seconded it. The motion carried unanimously. The March meeting of the Harmony Fire District Executive Board was adjourned at **8:45 pm**.

The next meeting of the Harmony Fire District Executive Board is scheduled for **Thursday, 7:00 pm, May 15, 2014** at the Harmony Fire Station.

A Budget Committee Workshop will be scheduled in April, as well as Property Review Work Team meetings.

Respectfully Submitted,

Handwritten signature of Kimberly S. Barber in cursive script.

Kimberly S. Barber  
Tax Collector/Clerk