

# HARMONY FIRE DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING 6/7/2014

Present: Chief Stuart Pearson; Attorney - Fred Mason, Jr.;  
Board Members – Raymond Fogarty, Louise Michaels,  
George Kain & James Richards  
Tax Collector/Clerk - Kimberly Barber

Absent: Moderator – Milton Huston – excused  
Treasurer – Sandra Owens – excused

Also in Attendance: Deputy Chief Michael Segee, Lt. Kevin Farley, Private Bianca Mullen, Taxpayers – Richard Nadeau & Kacey Richards

**I. – Meeting Called to Order** at 10:00 am by the Acting Moderator, Raymond Fogarty. He took the place of Moderator Huston who was attending his daughter’s wedding.

**II. – Pledge of Allegiance**

**III. – Moment of Silence for Departed Members**

- Past District Tax Assessor Ian Sinclair

**IV. – Reading of Warrant** by Clerk Kimberly Barber.

**V. – Election Results Announced**

Acting Moderator Fogarty read the results of the voting for this annual meeting.

The results were as follows:

<i>Office</i>	<i>Term</i>	<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Votes Received</i>
Moderator	(1) year	Milton T. Huston, Jr.	6
Treasurer	(1) year	Sandra S. Owens	6
Exec. Committee	(4) years	James M. Richards	6
Exec. Committee	(3) years	Raymond W. Fogarty	6

*\*to fill term of Milton T. Huston Jr.*

+1 vote simply stated UNOPPOSED

Mr. Nadeau asked if a special notice could be sent, perhaps in postcard form, to inform the taxpayers of the Annual Meeting and the Agenda to be discussed. Although it is noted on the tax bills, they are mailed nearly a year before the meeting. Not all people read the Bargain Buyer and see the ad. Kim stated she would look into the cost and present it to the board.

**VI. – Swearing In of Officers** by Attorney Fred Mason.

**VII. – Approval of the Minutes from June 1, 2013 Annual Meeting.**

Acting Moderator Fogarty asked the board if there were any discrepancies to note on the minutes. If not, he would like to call for a motion to accept them.

Jim made a motion to accept the minutes. Mr. Nadeau seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**VIII. – Moderator Opening Remarks**

Moderator Fogarty stated the Overseers of the Voting Polls this year were Doreen Pierce and Bob Pierce. He thanked the overseers for assisting to make our election possible. He also thanked Gloucester Police Officer Chuck Entwistle for performing the detail to keep our crowds under control.

**IX. – Chief's Report**

The Moderator then introduced Chief Pearson. The Chief thanked everyone for coming and taking the time out of their day to be here. He then presented his 2013-14 Annual written report of the activities of the district to the audience. He explained that the report content is a collection of data explaining the activities, training and improvements made for the period of May 1, 2013 thru April 30, 2014, including reports from each individual officer. The Chief stated that it is hard to believe that the Harmony Fire District has now been incorporated for 90 years, it seems like such a short time ago we were just celebrating our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He went on to say that in the report he tried to reflect back on the changes that have been made here, from raffling a mule to buy our first piece of apparatus, to today's day and age where everything is so much more complex, including the services our fire department provides. Fire calls are actually down, but the demands for EMS have grown immensely. The Chief stated if anyone had any questions for him, he would be available after the meeting.

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

## X. – Treasurer’s Report

The Moderator stated that our Treasurer, Sandy Owens, was taking a well-deserved vacation. He said that we would be remiss if we did not express our appreciation for the many hours she dedicates to the district in an unpaid position. Sandy did prepare a written report for Kim to present at today’s meeting on her behalf.

Vote taken below, in conjunction with the Tax Collector’s report.

## XI. – Tax Collector’s Report

Next the Moderator asked Kim to present the Tax Collector’s report. She stated that the taxes receivable balance as of today’s meeting date is \$80,731.13. This figure is comparable with previous years at this time.

The 2013 tax levy was \$445,165.22 with 87% collected to date. In 2012 it was \$444,000 with 90% collected as of year-end. In 2011 it was \$441,000 with 85% collected as of year-end.

The next Tax Sale has been tentatively scheduled for September 26<sup>th</sup>, with 90 day notices to be mailed June 26<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Nadeau asked Kim what the interest rate was on unpaid tax bills. She replied that it is 12% per annum.

The Moderator stated that Kim would be available after the meeting to answer any questions regarding the Treasurer’s or the Tax Collector’s reports.

Louise made a motion to accept both the Treasurer’s and Tax Collector’s reports. Deputy Chief Segee seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

## XII. – Budget for Fiscal Year 2014/2015

*Administration: Proposed \$81,674*

Motion to open for discussion made by Jim. Seconded by Louise.  
The motion carried unanimously.

*Personnel: Proposed \$321,074*

Motion to open for discussion made by Jim. Seconded by Louise.  
The motion carried unanimously.

The Moderator noted that the Chief's Salary (G/L #60210) was increased 2% according to his contract and Administrative Salary (G/L #60200) was increased by 3%.

Another category that has been updated is the Grant Incentive. Since the Chief came on board some 15 odd years ago, he has raised over \$500,000 in grants for the district. He used to get paid an incentive based on each grant, now it will be a set amount included with his salary for that service he actively performs. Salaries of other comparable Chiefs in the area were also taken into consideration when this decision was made.

*Fire Protection/Equipment/Operations.: Proposed \$68,150*

Motion to open for discussion made by George. Seconded by Louise.

The motion carried unanimously.

*Emergency Maintenance: Proposed \$36,100*

Motion to open for discussion made by Jim. Seconded by Louise.

The motion carried unanimously.

The Moderator noted that this category has a 12.5% increase. This is mostly due to the rise in fuel costs. This past year we had been over budget and have raised the Fuel account (G/L #60420) from \$10,000 to \$14,000. We feel this should be a sufficient increase for the coming fiscal year.

*Building & Grounds: Proposed \$40,500*

Motion to open for discussion made by Jim. Seconded by Louise.

The motion carried unanimously.

The Moderator noted that this category has an 18% increase. This again is due to the rise in fuel costs and a really cold winter. This past year we had been over budget and have raised the Heat account (G/L #60510) from \$16,000 to \$19,000. We have locked in at the lowest possible municipal rates with our supplier and feel this budget should be sufficient.

*Other: Proposed \$39,000*

Motion to open for discussion made by Louise. Seconded by George.

The motion carried unanimously.

The Moderator noted that this category has an 18% increase. This is mostly due to a \$3,500 increase in the Life Insurance account (G/L #60610) from \$22,500 to \$26,000. This is to cover the added expense of Term Life Insurance for the Tax Collector and changing the Chief's policy to a Term policy as well.

The Moderator noted that the total Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2014/2015 is \$586,498, a 7.2% increase over last year. George made the motion to accept the proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2014/2015. Jim seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

He also pointed out that we are clearing out our unfunded liability. He apologized that he had failed to point this item out when discussing the Personnel category. But according to the Chief's contracts there have accrued amounts over the past 15 years that we are liable for and the board has chosen to pay out over the next 3 year period. The major reason we have decided to do this is that the state has been examining fire districts very closely and examples that have been in the news are Coventry and Cumberland. We have chosen to be proactive and are probably one of the only fire districts in the country who are paying our unfunded liability up front. We also have a zero pension liability, opting by taxpayer vote to pay the volunteers call pay.

Kim mentioned that another item that needed to be mentioned is the \$1.00 raise for the call system, as well as \$1.00 hourly raise for per/diem employees. Ray thanked her for reminding him about this item. The tremendous service that these individuals provide for the very minimal amount they receive is just incredible. He stated he had been first on-scene for a motorcycle accident near his home and was amazed at the professionalism displayed by our department. Being a board member he doesn't believe they should be chasing fire trucks, but being a witness to this event first hand was something. This raise is a small thank you, but by no means nearly enough for the appreciation for everything our crew does.

*Capital Improvement Fund for fiscal Year 2014/2015: Proposed \$47,375*

The Moderator stated that there is one item that we would like to discuss that will not be budgeted for this fiscal year, but we would like to let the taxpayers know about for the future. The Chief then explained that the three Gloucester Fire Districts are researching the development of a new radio system for the town. Motorola engineers are doing a study and putting together a cost analysis to bring us into compliance with Federal regulations. We have run into some problems over the past several years due to them reducing the output [wattage] that we can use in our towers. We used to have 100 watts and we have been reduced down to 40 watts, which has reduced our coverage. We are working diligently trying to come up with a plan and we should have one in place within the next few weeks. But this is something that we will be moving forward with for next year's budget. Ray asked if there was someone looking into the potential for grants for this project, since it is for three districts. The Chief replied that a grant has become available for municipalities through the RIEMA. However it would be due by Friday and we have not had enough time to gather all of the information required. He said that they will look for other available grants. Another option the three Chiefs are

looking into as another option is a lease program. He said he will bring more information to the board as the project progresses. Ray asked if this was something that was mandated. The Chief said no. This is something the three districts are doing collectively to ensure the safety of all of our members, to get better coverage, service and quality. Ray asked when the last time was that we had an upgrade to our system. The Chief said that it has never been done to this magnitude. We have done upgrades over the years, but nothing like this. Mr. Nadeau asked how much this project was going to cost. The Chief said the cost to the three districts would be somewhere in the range of \$300-350,000. Ray said for the lease program it would cost our district \$26,000 per/year for 5 years. Mr. Nadeau commented, what about the current system that the police use? The Chief stated that the police operate on a totally separate system from the fire departments. They use an 800 MHz system developed by RIEMA. It has not been offered much to the fire side yet. He said the feedback he has heard about the 800 MHz system is that it does not have the penetration into the buildings, like this new system we are looking into. The other point is that right now municipalities using the 800 MHz system are being provided this system through a federal grant the state of RI received. Once this grant money runs out they will all be receiving bills for their usage annually. They will be billed for every individual piece of equipment: portable radios, mobile radios, pagers, etc. With the system we are working on we pay for it once and that's it. Mr. Nadeau asked if our system was one that the police might want to use also. The Chief said when the Motorola engineers come back with their proposal they will be actually be bringing two versions, one with police and one without. If the police do come on board it will reduce our cost. Ray said we are not asking to approve any funds at this meeting, we are just bringing it forward to keep the taxpayers informed.

Next, before discussing the upcoming fiscal year capital proposals, the Moderator noted that there will be a carryover of an unfinished Capital Improvement item from fiscal year 2013/2014. The Chief has proposed that the \$2,000 originally appropriated for *Risk Insurance Analysis* (G/L #61121), be reappropriated for the purpose of *Energy Review*.

Louise made the motion to reappropriate carryover Capital Improvement funds of \$2,000 for *Risk Insurance Analysis* (G/L #61121) to *Energy Review*. Jim seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

As for this year's newly proposed capital items there are two.

First, at the budget workshop a quote was presented, and discussed, for purchase of a new Chief's vehicle, Car 1. The quote was for \$41,025. The vehicle currently has

about 80,000 miles and is declining in value. There are two schools of thought: 1 - run the vehicle as long as it is safe to do so and 2 - trade or sell it while it still retains some value and apply these funds to the purchase price of the new vehicle.

Second, it is proposed to replace/upgrade expiring Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA's) over the next 3 years, with each year's cost totaling \$6,350.

The Moderator asked the audience if there were any questions on these 2 items. With no comments made, he called for a motion to approve them.

Jim made a motion to accept the total proposed capital budget at \$47,375 for fiscal year 2014/2015. Louise seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Louise made a motion to accept the total budget amount proposed at \$633,873 for fiscal year 2014/2015. Jim seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

### **XIII. – Tax Rate for fiscal year 2014/2015**

The Moderator stated that the proposed tax rate for fiscal year 2014/15 is One Dollar and Fifty-Four Cents (\$1.54) per thousand dollars of evaluation. This is a six cent (\$.06) increase per/thousand dollars of assessed value and a 4% increase in the tax rate. A statistical revaluation was done in Gloucester this past year and the new figures are not yet known by the Tax Collector.

Ray commented that as a taxpayer himself he had asked Kim to do a quick analysis of his own account for the past several years. Personally he thinks assessed values and tax rates are too confusing, he just pays attention to his bill amounts. What he noticed was that his bill would be \$17 more in 2014 that it was in 2013, but \$17 less than what it was in 2007. He feels that a big part of our ability to have lower our tax rate over this period has been due to 3<sup>rd</sup> party billing revenue which was instituted approximately 10 years ago. This revenue now equates to 15-20% of your tax bill.

Mr. Nadeau asked if there would be any upcoming construction projects needed in the building over the next year. The Moderator replied that we have been keeping up on our building on an ongoing basis, paid as we go. So the answer basically is no. We are however working on the building property itself. Parking, training and safety issues due to the property size are items that George and Louise are addressing as a committee. Abutting properties are being looked at and foundation grants are being researched. Mr. Nadeau asked if the other fire districts would be involved. Ray said he doesn't know if that aspect has been considered. However he does know that our station is used by

neighboring departments for training and as a regional training location. The Chief commented that many departments, leagues, community groups and even the RI Department of Health have held events in the building. Commissioner Kain himself has held Tri-State League meetings here. As for the exterior of the building, the footprint of the property does not allow for much if any activity outside. Training is shared throughout Glocester and we do have a common training site. There are many more things that are being worked on together for the future as well. The Chief said one of his biggest concerns with the lot size is the ramp in front of the apparatus bays, the length is too short. Mr. Nadeau replied, yes it is too dangerous. The Chief said that another major concern is when we have a public event, for example our annual Christmas tree lighting. Each year we hire a police officer to help people cross the street. We have a good relationship with our neighbors who let us use their property for parking, but in order to do so we have to cross the street which is a great safety concern. Safety is our number one concern. The Moderator interjected that George and Louise have been working as a committee on this issue for about a year now. He asked if they would like to add anything. George stated that they have been working with one neighbor quite extensively. The size of the station has increased over the years, but the lot size has not and we are now very limited. Parking on this side of the street would be a priority, as well as gaining training space. Deed research has been done, as well as water testing. Now we are looking into funding opportunities.

The Moderator stated that he was also remiss to mention that our new apparatus will be coming in in June. He asked if Jim or the Chief would like to say anything about this. Jim said that basically what this new vehicle, a heavy rescue vehicle, would be accomplishing is following the rescue in to automobile accidents vs. rolling out an engine. This new "Squad 2" will have a light tower, carry all of our extrication tools and have a foam system for rapid use. Ray asked what the cost was. Jim replied that it is just over \$200,000. Ray also added that we are paying cash and assuming no new debt for the purchase. Mr. Nadeau asked what make the vehicle is. Jim replied it is a Ford.

Louise made a motion that the tax rate for fiscal year 2014/2015 be set at One Dollar and Fifty-Four Cents (\$1.54) per thousand dollars of evaluation. Jim seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Nadeau made a motion to transfer \$85,567 from General Funds to balance the 2014/2015 budget. Jim seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**XIV. – Resolutions/ Recognition**

The Chief formally recognized crew members who have received length of service awards to the Harmony Fire District this year.

15 Years	Lieutenant Paul Perreault
10 Years	Privates Kimberly Perreault & Andrew Noonan
5 Years	Privates Johnathan Detri, Bianca Mullen and Brenden Nichols

A round of applause followed and everyone congratulated Private Mullen who was in attendance.

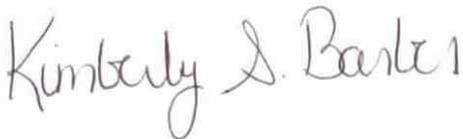
**XV. – Public Input** None

**XVI. – Adjournment**

Louise made a motion to adjourn the meeting. George seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

The annual meeting of the Harmony Fire District was adjourned at 10:52 am.

Respectfully Submitted,



Kimberly S. Barber  
Clerk