

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, October 23, 2014.**

Present: Moderator – Milton Huston; Chief Stuart Pearson;
Treasurer – Sandra Owens; Tax Collector/Clerk – Kimberly Barber;
Board Members – Raymond Fogarty, Jr., George Kain
Louise Michaels & James Richards;
Association Representative – William Vota, President;
Attorney – Fred Mason, Jr.

Absent:

I. – Meeting Called to Order: The meeting was called to order at **6:33 pm** by Moderator Milton Huston.

II. – Auditor Geoff Malo was present, per the Treasurer's request, to address the board regarding new legislation and reporting requirements for fire districts. He explained from an auditor's perspective the changes that will need to be made. He had received a letter from the state saying that for fiscal year end 6/30/2014 they would like us to keep our audit procedures the same. Thereafter, according to their "Tier" system, as of 6/30/2015 we will be classified as a "Tier II" entity for reporting requirements. Some discussion followed about the states Tier classification system and GASB Audits. The only item they noted from our current audit format, is that we will now need to post accounts payable and accounts receivable (taxes receivable) figures in the year-end audit. We have always used the Cash basis of accounting and now it will be more of an Accrual basis. Geoff stated that the first year changing basis's will make our books look off, but after that it will level off. Journal entries in our General Ledger will track any adjustments made. Sandy will submit quarterly reports and Geoff will submit an annual report, at an added expense to the district. In his opinion Geoff said that the state should give us a gold star for how prudent we are with our financial reporting. The state also mentioned to Geoff that Section 7, Paragraph 3 of the district by-laws which requires the district to have an audit, but "... in any such manner as they [the board] see fit." They feel that this is an out and needs to be reviewed and amended by our Attorney. Kim suggested that we make a by-laws change to add "... pursuant to RIGL." at the end of that sentence. She said that is how Fred had recommended they amend other sections within our by-laws in the past. The Chief asked Geoff if now that we are required to report to the state as municipalities are, do we now qualify for "Block Grants". Geoff did not see any reason why not. Ray suggested that we inquire to the Auditor General's office about this. Ray asked Geoff when we should expect the audit to be complete this year? He said he would be done before 12/15/14. The board thanked Geoff for attending this meeting, as well as the state meetings, to make sure we are in compliance.

III. – Approval of the minutes from the September 18th meeting:

Moderator Huston asked the board if there were any discrepancies to note on the minutes from the September 18th monthly meeting. He noted that they had been e-mailed to the board on

10/13/14 for review. If there are no corrections, he would like to call for a motion to accept them.

Jim made a motion to accept the minutes from both the September 18th monthly meeting. George seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Moderator Huston and board member Louise Michaels both recused themselves from the vote, due to their absences from the last meeting.

IV. – Review of Bills:

A check register of bills paid since the last meeting until today's date was provided to all board members in their folder. Moderator Huston asked if there were any comments or questions on these expenses. The Moderator stated that this is an informational report only and no vote is necessary.

V. – Treasurer's Report:

Beginning balance August 1st \$407,096.02 and ending balance August 31st \$616,749.13. Tax revenue collections were good.

Beginning balance September 1st \$616,749.13 and ending balance September 30th \$491,179.59. The balances have gone down this month due to the new truck being paid for in the amount of \$205,453. This was paid for in cash with no financing needed.

Ray made a motion to accept the August and September Treasurer's reports as presented. Jim seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

VI. – Tax Collector's Report:

Kim first addressed the agenda item "Addition of Credit Cards as a form of Tax Payment." She stated the company providing the service is called Point & Pay and it works in conjunction with our tax software, Vision. The service is zero cost to the district. We have a 3 year, 0 dollar contract with them. We have already received the card swipe unit and have done a test deposit for \$1. Customers will be able to pay with either Visa or MasterCard and they will be charged a 3% fee. On-line payments will be activated with the next billing, a PIN number will be printed on each taxpayers bill. In office payments will be activated after the training Webinar next Wednesday afternoon. Kim invited Sandy to sit in on the Webinar with her.

The taxes receivable balance as of today's date is \$158,878.51. 75% of the 2014 Tax Levy has already been collected. In 2013 at this date it was 77% and in 2012 it was 73%.

Taxes collected in the month of August totaled \$247,141.90.

Taxes collected in the month of September totaled \$98,299.21.

Third party billing collected in the month of August was \$9,107.76.

Third party billing collected in the month of September was \$8,357.76.

The Tax Sale is scheduled to be held tomorrow at 10:00 am. Kim stated that there were 68 parcels on the list when the 90 day notices were sent out and she is now down to 15, of which 5 are vacant land. She also commented that this is the largest list she has ever had, more than double any other list.

Kim proposed to the board moving up the tax sale process from 2 years delinquent to only 1 year. After talking to other tax collectors in the state she found that most hold their tax sales either immediately after accounts become delinquent or at the 1 year mark. She believes this may actually help our taxpayers in the long run, because it will not allow them to get so far behind and build such a large balance due. At the point they go to tax sale they try to make written payment arrangements, but most people default because they cannot keep up with the monthly payments. Ray asked what Chepachet and West Glocester Fire Districts do? Kim said that she thinks they go to tax sale after 1 year, she knows the Town of Glocester goes to tax sale immediately after accounts become delinquent. Ray said that the taxpayers do have 1 year to redeem after the tax sale takes place though, right? She said yes. Kim stated that she would also like to move the sale date to April instead of having it in the Fall. She would send the 90 day notices out in January, after the holidays. She said having the tax sale in the Fall has proven to just be too much. The 90 day notices need to go out the end of June, beginning of July, then the phone calls start. The regular bills go out by August 1st, then the cash receipts and phone calls continue. 40 day notices go out mid-August and there is another rush of phone calls. So on and so on. Between the tax sale and billing it consumes the entire summer. She feels having the sale in April would be much better. It would be over just before we start preparing the budget and annual meeting and the work flow would be spread much more evenly throughout the year. Sandy agreed saying there is too much going on all at once.

Moderator Huston said that these items will be added to the agenda for next month's meeting for the board to vote on.

Jim made a motion to accept the Tax Collector's report as presented. Louise seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

VII. – Chief's Report:

As requested by the district board a letter was mailed to the Glocester Town Council, and copied to our local elected officials, regarding the status of the Route 44 road work project through the Village of Harmony. Copies of the letter were included in everyone's folder.

Account Temps was the company that supplied us with temporary help while Kim was out of the office. Interviews of the candidates were performed by the Chief and Kim. The 1st candidate was excused and the 2nd will be here through next Friday.

RI PBS was here in the station for about 2 hours one day filming a documentary profiling cities and towns in RI. HFD had been selected for the Town of Glocester profile because it had been recommended as highly regarded by several sources. Glocester is the 1st of the 39 cities and towns in the state to be profiled.

On October 6th we had several EMT's attend a meeting at the Glocester Senior Center with the RI DOH regarding the RI Special Needs Registry's on-line changes and the new GIS mapping tool. A town wide meeting on this subject was also discussed for the near future at the RIAFC meeting that the Chief attended this morning.

The Chief attended an informational session held by the RIDOH regarding Ebola. They are working in conjunction with the department of emergency medicine. Lt. Kevin Farley has been following this topic closely and addressing issues pertinent to our department. The next step he is working on is FIT testing for the crew. Sandy asked if any purchases are needed for full

protective gear. The Chief said that within the next 48 hours we will know more about what the requirements will be. The CDC is working on their minimum requirements list now.

Louise asked about having a flu clinic at the voting polls. She said we had discussed it during the last election. Scituate had done it back then and we had thought it might be a good idea for Gloucester too. The Chief said that a flu clinic is something that would have to be coordinated through the Gloucester EMA Director. He could ask him about this, but he wasn't sure if it was possible on such short notice.

Annual Inspections are being done for the district's business's renewing Gloucester Liquor & Victualing licenses. The inspection for Fogarty Elementary School was actually started this afternoon.

There has been work done on the heating system to get it up and running for the heating season.

Bid advertised in the Valley Breeze today for the Town wide Radio Upgrade project. RFP's are due by November 17th. Some discussion followed about issues with the old system. The new system should bring our coverage up to 97%, at best coverage is spotty now. The engineers that came in told us that the 4 towers we currently have are not all needed. George asked if the Ponaganset Middle School tower is working now. The Chief replied yes it is.

We have also been working on our new on-line training program, Target Solutions, to get it up and running.

The Chief announced that he had just received a letter earlier and had a short time to review it. He was ready to answer each and every question asked, but it was something that would need to be discussed in Executive Session because it involved personnel issues. The Moderator said it could be discussed at that point in the agenda.

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

VIII. – Harmony Fire Department & Improvement Association Report:

Lt. Willy Vota was present as Association representative. He stated it had been quiet and there was nothing to report tonight.

The Moderator asked how the Steak Fry had gone this year. Willy said it was better than last year and there was actually more take out.

The Moderator asked if there were any events coming up that they were planning. Willy said just the tree lighting, but he hadn't heard much about that yet.

The Chief said he was looking into getting a Toys for Tots drop off box for the station.

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

IX. – Committee Reports:

- a. Broadband Work Team – Milton Huston, Chair
Milton said that there was nothing new to report this month.

- b. Apparatus Review Work Team – Jim Richards, Chair
Work Team: Jim, George, Chief, Deputy Chief Segee & Capt. John Falco
Ray asked if there was any feedback from the crew in the audience about the new apparatus? No one in the audience commented. The Chief said that his input is that he feels it will be a very useful piece of equipment. There are a couple of hinges they are switching out for stronger ones and the jaws still need to be put on board. But all in all he thought the crew was happy with it, as he is. Jim commented that this item is now complete and can be removed from further agendas.

- c. Property Review Work Team – George Kain & Louise Michaels, Co-Chairs
George reported that they are kind of in limbo right now. He said that Ray has been looking into funding options for the project, but there really isn't much for money out there. Ray said he is trying to get the RI Foundation to send someone out here to look into the project for funding. They do give out a total of \$31 million a year. Their projects are not awarded to individual departments, but to regional efforts. The Moderator asked if George knew the status of the sale of the property? He said that he doesn't know if it is currently being advertised, but the owner had told him that she couldn't wait any longer. The board agreed that this was understandable.

X. – Old Business:

- a. Access to Public Records Act (APRA) Certification –
The Chief explained that another person was needed to become certified. This can be done through an on-line video presentation or attending a seminar annually in August. Kim continued to explain that if she is unavailable, someone else needs to be certified and trained to retrieve the requested documents. If not the district risks penalties from the Attorney General's office. Kim had enclosed handouts in everyone's folders. Sandy and Louise both agreed to look over the material and let the board know at the next meeting.

- b. Mobile Home Legislation –
Kim explained that this item was carried forward from last month when she was out. She had enclosed copies of the legislation in everyone's folders for their review. What it is in regards to is legislation enacted on behalf of the Town of Glocester to enable collection of taxes due on mobile homes and trailers. The tax collectors for all 3 fire districts agreed to propose to their boards to go forward and piggyback on this legislation, so it will be consistent in taxing entities within the town. She believes that Chepachet and West Glocester fire districts have already approved the proposal.

Louise made the motion to be added to this piece of legislation. George seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

XI. – New Business:

- a. Annual Submittal of Roster & Officer Listing by Chief According to SOG's –
Copies were included in everyone's folders.
This report was tabled.

b. By-Law Changes –

Kim explained that most of the By-Law changes pertain to sections where we are adding "... pursuant to RIGL" as we had discussed earlier with Geoff Malo. Ray asked if the one we had discussed earlier was included on this page? Kim said no. Everyone agreed that there were a lot of changes and it really wasn't a rush, so it would not hurt to wait and let Fred review everything more carefully. Kim also explained that on the back side of this handout was an item she was looking for advisement from the board on. The state had noted at one of the meetings she attended that agendas should not be listing items titled "Old Business" and "New Business" because they are too vague. However when asked they did not provide clarification as to what we are to use, except for saying that agenda items must be specific. They also stated that agenda items can be added during a meeting for discuss purposes, then added to the next meeting's agenda for any needed votes. No one really knew what to do about this. George suggested that we see what other places are doing. The board tabled this item pending further research, as well as review by Attorney Mason.

XII. – Public Input:

Present in the audience for this meeting were: Deputy Chief Michael Segee, Captain David Plante, Lieutenant Kevin Farley, Lieutenant Paul Perreault, Private Kimberly Perreault, Private Linda Ferragamo and Private Robert Waterman.

Pvt. Ferragamo addressed the board. She was wondering why Deputy Chief Segee was asked to step down from his position. She said she was not happy about what has been going on around here. Ray said that the board is here to listen. He said he only received the unsigned letter yesterday, but it is a personnel matter so the board has no choice but to go into Executive Session to discuss it. However during this Public Input section of our meeting anyone has the right to speak and voice their opinions to the board.

Deputy Chief Segee stated that he is present tonight for himself. He is assuming that these people [other members of the crew] are here to support him, however he was not aware that they were coming, nor did he ask them too. He said that he was asked by the Chief to either retire or step down as Deputy Chief. When he asked for reasons why, he said he was told that his administrative levels were not up to standard. He said he asked if this was something that could be corrected or fixed and he was told no. He said he is just curious why. What part of his administrative duties did he not fulfill? He said the Chief and himself do not have any animosities against each other. They don't argue, they don't fight, they don't disagree, 90% of the time they think the same. He understands there was an application process going on for the position of Deputy Chief. He would have reapplied for the position, if he had known. Louise asked "who asked you to step down?" He replied the Chief.

The Moderator stated that it is not really the position of the board to get involved in personnel decisions like that, unless they are asked to and they really haven't been. But he is willing to air it out here in this forum, if that's what they [the crew] want to do. The board is willing to be part of the interview process if needed, the same as the last time, but that's it.

Ray stated he feels that it is the duty of the board to accept the Chief's recommendations. It is an awkward situation. He just wants to be sure that everyone is able to say what they want and in the forum that they want. There are just things that the board cannot discuss or give opinions on in public session, it must be done in executive session. Mike will be given every opportunity to

represent himself here, without any retribution, that is his right. As for the letter we must go into executive session to discuss it. If anyone else has anything they would like to say please come forward.

Capt. Plante said I'll ask a question. Why was the position only posted for 7 days? The Chief said there was a meeting called, he couldn't recall the date, but he said he put it out there for everyone to please attend. The Capt. said yeah on the 15th. The Chief said OK the 15th. Only 7 people attended. He said at the meeting he explained to everyone what was happening. He and the Deputy Chief both addressed those in attendance, saying there was no animosity between them. He explained the process that was going to be followed, that a letter was going to be posted. It was posted in the break room the next day and was not taken down until yesterday at 1:00 pm. Electronic notification of the meeting had been sent out to everyone on Monday and the meeting was held on Tuesday.

Pvt. Perreault said that the problem with our notification system is that not everyone has cell phones. The Chief replied that he believes that just about everyone in this room is on our Second Signal system. If there is someone that is not, they have not come forward to him to let him know. She replied what if someone did not have their phone that day or it was broken, shouldn't we use a second form of communication to make sure everyone receives the message? The Chief said point taken. Nothing was done to be sneaky. It was done up front in a timely manner to stop a rumor that was spreading and not from his mouth. The Deputy Chief added, "and not from this mouth either." The Chief continued that there were rumors running around at the Steak Fry and that is just not fair to the people in this department. The Deputy Chief said that he had asked at the meeting if anyone was spreading rumors to please stop. The Chief also asked the board at this time to clarify the fact that he cannot discuss personnel in public forum. The board replied that's correct.

Louise asked the crew in attendance if whatever is happening personnel wise going to affect how they support the department. Because ultimately that is the boards concern, to keep the district safe. Pvt. Ferragamo said yes she feels it will. She said she has been here many years, very active and she feels as a woman here, well she really doesn't want to get into it. This is a volunteer fire department for the people in the community and now we have outside people coming in and... she just doesn't want it anymore. She thinks it's a boys club and the women here don't get any input... she just doesn't want it anymore... she's tired. Louise thanked her for letting the board know how she feels. Ray said the board wouldn't want to lose her, they would rather see her take a leave and think about it first before making any decisions. She said she probably will take a leave. Pvt. Perreault agreed with the opinions she had expressed about women in this department, it's not level. New people come in, they've only been here 6 months and you get pushed aside for them. Pvt. Ferragamo said her turn-out gear has even been taken away and given to a new man. She went to a fire scene to do rehab and got soaked. After 13 years here she should have gear, every member should be entitled to gear for rehab and mva's. Louise asked if she had it before. She said yes, it was taken away because someone in the office said EMS doesn't need turn out gear. Ray asked if the audience would mind if the board recessed to go into executive session now to discuss the letter received. Louise asked if they would be willing to wait for further discussion after they came back. They said they would. Ray said if there are issues here the board wants to help resolve them.

XIII. – Executive Session:

Louise made a motion to go into Executive Session regarding personnel pursuant to *RIGL 42-46-5(a)(1)*. George seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The Board recessed for Executive Session at 8:08 pm and the regular meeting reconvened at 8:52 pm.

The Moderator noted that no votes had been taken while in Executive Session

Ray made a motion to seal the minutes of the Executive Session. George seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

The Moderator announced that he will be available to the crew, one-on-one or as a group, to hear any grievance or complaints. Crew members are to contact Lt. Vota, Association President, and he will arrange any requested meetings. He also expressed that the Chief is also approachable by the crew, with no fear of retaliation at all.

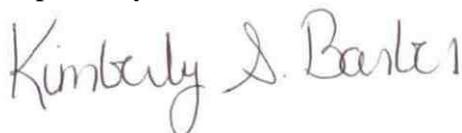
Pvt. Rob Waterman asked why is the Deputy Chief being asked to step down. The Chief replied that he is not allowed to talk about personnel in public. The Moderator said yes that was addressed before.

XIV. – Adjournment:

Ray made a motion to adjourn the meeting. George seconded it. The motion carried unanimously. The October meeting of the Harmony Fire District Executive Board was adjourned at **8:56 pm**.

The next meeting of the Harmony Fire District Executive Board
is scheduled for **Thursday, 7:00 pm, November 20, 2014** at the Harmony Fire Station.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kimberly S. Barber".

Kimberly S. Barber
Clerk