

# 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, February 19, 2015.**

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

Absent: Board Member – James Richards – excused

Audience: Deputy Chief Jeff Muto

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

**II. – Approval of the minutes from the January 15<sup>th</sup> meeting:**

Moderator Huston asked the board if there were any discrepancies to note on the minutes from the January 15<sup>th</sup> meeting. If there are no corrections, he would like to call for a motion to accept them.

Ray made a motion to accept the minutes. Louise seconded the motion.  
The motion carried unanimously.

**III. – 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. There were none. He also stated that this is an informational report only and no vote is necessary.

**IV. – Treasurer's Report:**

Beginning balance December 1<sup>st</sup> \$503,084.59 and ending balance December 31<sup>st</sup> \$437,792.84. Large payouts in December were the building loan payment (which was listed in the wrong column and will be corrected by the Treasurer) and the crew call pay checks.

Beginning balance January 1<sup>st</sup> \$437,792.84 and ending balance January 31<sup>st</sup> \$387,641.53. Large payouts in January were the \$30,000 transfer to the truck replacement fund and the life insurance premium.

Sandy also stated that the 4th quarter reports had been submitted to the state and copied to our Accountant Geoff Malo.

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

**V. – Tax Collector's Report:**

The taxes receivable balance as of today's date is \$100,007.67.

Taxes collected in the month of January totaled \$11,521.52.

Third party billing fees collected in the month of January were \$3,527.03. Sandy stated that although this month was lower than usual, we are ahead on collections year-to-date.

Past due notices for 2014 delinquent taxes went out recently. The 90 day notices for our tax sale to be held May 15th have also gone out. Kim said that she knows we had discussed an April sale date, but by the time she got the list to the Attorney, the sale dates were in May.

Since Jim was going to be out of town for this meeting he had sent an e-mail to Kim asking her to thank the board for the fruit basket sent after his recent surgery.

Kim also mentioned the updating of the By-Laws. She had updated according to our vote last month. While reviewing the document however she noticed that there were several other sections where specific sections of the RIGL were quoted. Attorney Mason had asked that the new changes made only refer to RIGL and not be specific, so she wanted to know he wanted her to go ahead and make those clerical changes as well, before she printed the 10 copies for the board. He said yes go ahead and make the changes.

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

**VI. – Chief's Report:**  
Snow, snow, snow....

On January 20th the 3 Gloucester Fire Chiefs met to discuss Communications project. The RFP has been finalized and they are ready to award it.

The Rescue and Squad have both passed annual state inspections. The Squad is now licensed as a BLS responder non-transport. With this said we will be able to submit the Squads runs to 3rd party billing for reimbursement and some additional revenue will be gained.

A new Car 1 has been ordered. It is a 2015 Ford Expedition 4x4. The total cost is \$40,256 which is a little under the budgeted amount. It will be ready for delivery in about 3 months, between April & May.

In January we had a Blizzard and a detail was posted from 6pm - 8am to ensure apparatus getting out. An e-mail was sent to the board advising them of events. Lt. John Detri brought his snowmobile to the station for use in the case of an emergency. The board thanked him for his generosity. The Deputy Chief, Lt. Detri, Capt. Rick Waterman and Pvt. Danielle Fiori were here. The cost for the detail was \$925.70 and a Damage Assessment Report has been submitted to RIEMA for the cost of personnel, snow removal, and use of Utility 2 totaling \$2,020.70. It is not known if we will be reimbursed for anything yet.

**Legislation**

On February 17th the Chief met with Speaker Matiello to go over passed and pending legislation affecting fire districts. The passed legislation that we must comply with, the RIAFC is proposing they change the requirements to submitting an Annual report only. As for the new proposals, H-5343, H-5344 & H-5345, it was the speakers opinion that the legislation had no "legs" and would not be an issue. Some discussion followed about the particulars of these new proposals.

**Grants**

Representative Chippendale has secured us a \$1,000 House of Representatives Legislative grant. We intend to use these funds to purchase a new Ice Rescue Suit.

We also had \$6,178 in funds left to be expended from our 2013 AFG grant. We have used these funds to buy lengths of 1-3/4" and 2-1/2" Hose. The total for the purchase will be \$6,339, with 5% due from the district (\$316.95)

The 2014 AFG grant we submitted for the 4" Hose we have not heard anything about yet.

The Chief then wanted to briefly go over a list of accomplishments that have been made in the last 8 weeks since mid-December by our Officers, it has been phenomenal.

- Inspections of Rescue 2 and Squad 2 - no deficiencies  
Squad 2 is now licensed as BLS provider non-transport (increased revenue)
- Manual Inventory being completed and entered into Fire Bridge
  - ability to compile a list of fixed assets for our Accountant
  - deficient equipment being identified and replaced as necessary and replacement schedules are being established
  - old turn out gear sent out and tested for NFPA compliance - failed and discarded
  - gear closet cleaned and organized - shelving added
- CO Meters and Calibration Unit purchased
- Ice Rescue Sled purchased
- Ice Rescue Suit on order
- Hose on order
- Recruitment efforts stepped up - Deputy Chief Muto spoke on this subject
  - help wanted sign posted by street
  - we are mainly looking for EMT-Cardiac's
  - have received several applications,
  - applications are mostly from uncertified individuals - some are already involved in programs, the rest we are now trying to get into one
  - however we have had a Registered Nurse and a Doctor inquire - unfortunately according to the state these individuals will still need to take a RI EMT class to become certified to ride our rescue - both are willing to do this  
The Doctor, whom is an Anesthetist at Brockton Hospital and lives in Pascoag, has also offered to help us with our training and quality assurance program and is very excited to do so. Ray mentioned that Dr. Hokeness, who lives in district, is not semi-retired and he may be willing to help out too.
  - research is still being done on other recruitment & retention options. The process is going a little bit slower than was anticipated and gets a little frustrating at times.  
The Chief said that the bottom line is we are doing what we can. The bottom lines are our quality of care, our people and the safety of our community.

The Chief stated that as most of the board knows the past couple of months we have been slammed with calls. We are having some difficulty responding, but thanks to the efforts of some of these guys and gals stepping up we have been able to keep getting the truck out. They have been putting in a lot of long hours in at their regular jobs alone this winter, but then they are also putting in a lot of time here responding to calls. They have done quite well stepping up to the plate. Who wants to get out of bed at 3:00 am, when it's 25° below zero to do was these ladies and gentlemen do? Ray asked how Chepachet and West Gloucester doing on this front? The Chief said it is checks and balances. We hit our lows and they hit their highs. Then it switches. We do still rely on each other quite often for mutual aid. Chepachet and Smithfield both. Smithfield is fine with it because we have given them a ton over the years. The Chief also had a long conversation with the Chepachet Chief a few days ago and he is fine as well, he gets it. They will do what they need to do to support us, just as we would do to support them. We have had a couple of fires recently and a few different types of tough rescue calls too. But we all got through them. He said that he, as well as the Deputy Chief, have heard the thanks from the community though. We still hear it echoing all the time, "Thanks for the wonderful job you do!"

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

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

Willy stated that there really wasn't anything going on.

Kim let Willy know that there was a letter included in everyone's folders from Association Treasurer John Detri explaining the financial difficulties regarding the tree lighting event. Willy stated that the banking issues had taken much longer than had been expected. He apologized and thanked the board for their assistance.

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

## **VIII. – Committee Reports:**

- a. Property Review Work Team – George Kain & Louise Michaels, Co-Chairs  
George wanted to talk to David Steere since he used to work for the USDA, but he hadn't been able to. With all the snow and everything they just weren't able to get together.

Sandy compiled a summary of the information she had received in the past from Joanne Demars of the USDA, as the board had requested. She said she briefly went over the current building loan which will be paid off in 2023. Then continued with the different requirements that the USDA has. They require a business plan format, stating what it is going to cost. They will give you a 40 year loan, just like we have now, to keep your payments reasonable. Sandy said that the engineering study and research costs could be built into the loan.

The Chief spoke with Chris Albert of Senator Jack Reed's office, as the board had requested. They directed us to the USDA, contacted Joanne Demars and asked that she be at our disposal for any assistance we may need with our project.

The Chief said that he did not think there was any harm at this point to get our ducks in order. Milton asked exactly what that would entail? He said getting an architectural engineer, such as Ahronian & Associates whom we have used in the past, to get involved to create a clearer picture of the scope of the project, what we want the property to be and what it will cost. George said that he wanted to be careful and not put out too much money on that though. He feels we should only do the studies that we really need to do. Sandy said that we need to have a business plan before we meet with Joanne again though, it is a requirement. Louise agreed, we have to get the data first. George said well a lot of the studies we have already done. Sandy said no not those, a business plan. The Chief said if it is the boards pleasure, before next month's meeting he would be happy to reach out Ahronian... George interrupted him to say are you going to scrap the committee? The Chief quickly said he would gladly hand him over the contact information and the committee could take it from there. George said no, we could just work with you because you have already done the leg work. The Chief agreed. Louise asked if one person could do the entire plan or do we have to hire individual ones for each thing. Milton said he thought it should be just one architectural firm. Ray agreed saying that a Landscape Architect, such as Ahronian, would probably be the one. They can always get other smaller people to give quick quotes. He also said that John Visich from Bryant, who had helped us with our Strategic Plan a few years ago, has offered to help us with another project for free. He will contact him before our next meeting to see if he is interested. George will speak with the Gloucester Building Inspector about the project before the next meeting. Further discussion followed about the scope of the project.

## **IX. – Old Business:**

- a. Approval of Audit  
Copies were distributed at our last meeting for the board's review.  
Ray made a motion to approve the Auditor's report. Louise seconded it.  
The motion carried unanimously.

#### X. – New Business:

George brought up the need for adding a weekend per/diem shift to cover the rescue. The rescue has been having trouble getting out.

Ray suggested that the Chief speak with the other 2 Fire Chiefs and see if this is something we should do town-wide for consistency. It worked well when the original per/diem plan was done as a combined effort and this would probably be the same. The Chief replied that he was already approached by them, but he would be happy to meet with them again.

It was decided that at the March meeting an executive session should be called as a matter of personnel, to discuss the information gathered and compensation.

#### XI. – Public Input:

Deputy Chief Muto asked if he could just touch on the last subject of extended coverage. He stated that he has been researching our options for extending coverage. He has spoken about the subject personally with Fire Chiefs in Pennsylvania, which is an area heavily entrenched in volunteerism, and they are also having the same issues. They cover areas the size of the City of Providence, but they are doing things a little bit differently than we do. The firefighter volunteerism as a whole is at a pathetic level. No one is joining. And this is at departments that don't even run rescues, they are fire only. He has found that this is a nationwide problem, not just an issue here in Harmony. He said the reason he brings this up, is because he feels it is very, very important for us to maintain what we have. The only way he sees that happening is through a work force, not paid, volunteers. He strongly feels that we need to aggressively address how we are going to maintain the people that join. Unfortunately, when he joined he was happy just to hang out at the station on a Saturday night, but those days are gone. The young kids today, they're just not interested. On top of that you are talking months of training before they can even get in the back of the rescue. That's just to be able to take a blood pressure and give oxygen. These people that are joining now, if they get into an EMT class right away and pass, they will probably get in the back of the truck about August and that is just as a Basic. In his opinion that is unacceptable, it's too long. We have calls coming in, Tuesday for example we ran 24 hours and didn't stop. Two fires, two rescue calls and we made every one of them. But getting back to the membership, we have to find a way to get people in here and keep them in here at night. Whether it be per/diem a night with a small stipend attached to it, we would have to come up with some figures. We have a duty night schedule now, a lot of the people come from Smithfield. We have had some members from Johnston, North Providence... One of them was sleeping in her car in the parking lot to be able to do a duty night shift. He hates to say it, but we have to start looking into something **now**, because what we are doing now doesn't work. Louise asked if he thought this was just an economics thing? He replied that it is a number of things, economics does play a role, but more so it's just the simple human desire to help our fellow man. It's the difference between passing that person on the side of the road with a flat tire or stopping to help them. The firefighter, the police officer, the person that steps outside of their realm to help their fellow man has an instinct built within them to do that. I think we see a lot in today's society that people just don't care. Louise said that besides the fact that obviously no one wants to do anything for nothing, sometimes even a thank you would be sufficient. But does he maybe have some ideas that he has come up with to somehow get people to come through the door? Whether it be an ad campaign on TV similar to what Scituate did, or whatever. And can we find out too, if it worked or not? The Deputy said they got the funding for that program through a grant and that is something that we are addressing. He said it will work, we put our sign out front, hopefully to get some residents. However, the people that have applied are from Smithfield, we got 1 from Gloucester. The next thing we just discussed this week, is placing an ad in a local paper. He said he has also made a ton of calls trying to get in contact with the JMF radio station through the Campus Involvement office at Bryant University. He would like to get them to put a shout out for us. He said because when he ran with Smithfield and responded up there he noticed that there are a lot of Paramedics, EMT's, volunteer firefighters that used to run in their own home towns. Bryant attracts a lot of students from New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, etc. So his hope was to get in there and put some posters up to hopefully get these guys back involved. The idea was to tell them we offer WiFi

here, they can come, do their homework here, while being available for calls. Additionally if you volunteer at the college level they will qualify for different scholarships. Also as simple as it may sound, we can offer them letters of recommendation when they go out into the job force. But again, if they are going to be here for 12 hours, where are they going to stay. Ray and Louise both said, "Well now we have a use for the house!" The Chief said this Tuesday night there is going to be an officers meeting and at that time we are going to be looking for all of the officers input to come up with a design or plan and then he will meet with the other 2 Fire Chiefs to get their thoughts and ideas. Ray said that volunteerism, regardless what you are talking about, is down. People used to fight to get on boards and committees, and now they fight to get off of them. Nobody in town wants to volunteer for anything. Sometimes it's hard not to wonder why though, because no matter what you do you get criticized, where before you used to get thanked if you did something good and chastised if you did something wrong and your name would no longer be good. Now anybody can say anything about anybody no matter what the discipline is. You hear about the person in Oregon who stopped to help change the tire and got wacked over the head. Unfortunately that person in Oregon is the only story you hear about and you don't hear about the other 1,000 people who do stop and help without issue. Someone stopped to help his Mother once and helped her, she made them an apple pie and never forgot that person. George said the thing about volunteerism though, you go back when we joined these outfits years ago there were 50-75 runs per/year. If you made 50% of those runs it was only 25 runs. Now we do 600 runs and 50% is 300 runs, they can't do that. Doing 50 runs per/year now a person won't even be active. The Deputy said just to get someone in the back of a rescue it now takes a good 2 to 2-1/2 years of solid training before they get the necessary certificates. So you get a person at 18 and they're not ready to go until they are 20-21 years old. That's why he is pursuing the already trained individuals. A lot of the certification now is National. So you can grab these Nationally certified medics and they're ready to go. That's his main goal, manning the rescue. That's 99% of our runs. The people coming through the door to volunteer are mainly the people that want to pull hose. Anyone one can do that and we can train them to do that. Getting EMT's is much more difficult. George said the bottom line is the rescue has to get out the door. No matter how we do it, it has to get out, it can't not get out the door. The Deputy said, I don't mean to interrupt George, but it does matter how we do it. We don't want to keep changing the plan, we want to do it right. George said he understood that, but we have to get the truck out the door. It has to get out the door. Whether its volunteers, call people, or whatever, its got to get out the door. The Deputy said absolutely. There are plans out there where we could have people staff it for no money at all... George interrupted and said but our liability is that its got to get out the door, you can't not get out the door.

Louise asked if the Deputy if he had ever thought of tapping the Veterans associations as well? It just automatically popped into her head when he said the word "Medics" that a vast majority of these guys who have the training, perhaps not to the certification level you're looking for, but basic training right when they walk through the door and could move right along and are looking for something to do. The Deputy said that unfortunately unless those people are Nationally certified, they would still have to complete the state mandated EMT course, before they could ride our truck. She said but at least they would already know the basics and have a commitment level that our organization would be looking for. The Deputy said it is an ongoing process and it can get a little frustrating. It's different coming from the era that himself, the Chief, Capt. Waterman and George came from, we actually used to get in fistfights to get on the truck. It's disheartening, but we will get there, it will just take time.

Milton mentioned that the Deputy may want to speak with the Kingston Fire District, because he believes they have the same kind of a scenario to the plan he was talking about earlier. The Deputy said without getting into the intricacies of their plan, it is something that we could do here. They provide a service without any money. We have a college base area here that we could tap and develop a plan similar to theirs. Milton asked how do they do it with no money? The Deputy replied that it is called a live in program, where you have facility that the students live in and they are assigned to a truck. You have say 6 students, with 2 assigned to the rescue truck per/night. Instead of paying dorm rent, they live there rent free. It would definitely have to be monitored, because as with everything it would have its issues. Ray asked if they would be able to get something in writing before the next meeting, since our clock is running to prepare for items to budget for next year. The Chief said they will definitely be able to get

something in rough draft form. The Deputy agreed saying yes they could put together a few different plans, but ultimately it would be up to the district board which direction they would prefer to go in. Ray said I think we are all concerned about the people we serve, but also the liability of the taxpayers and the safety and well-being of our volunteers. And all three of those things are equal. Something has got to give because as you have said society has changed and we are not going back to "Leave it to Beaver" days, those days are long gone. Sandy agreed saying the sense of community is lacking. Ray said well it used to be the Father went to work and the Mother was there and 90% of the families had 2 parents. Now it is just a different society, most people work, families need 2 incomes, children come home to empty houses at the end of the day. So with all those things, the volunteerism, the training, the standards, the auditing, the liability, too many lawyers... A round of laughter went up at the expense of our solicitor Attorney Fred Mason to lighten the mood. Ray continued to say that this information should be brought forward at the next meeting during executive session due to compensation issues. There is no reason we shouldn't be able to discuss the subject in public session though to, to hear any ideas the anyone else may have.

The Chief said that there was one other item he had failed to mention during his Chief's report. A member of our department while at work witnessed a cardiac arrest. Through the training that she has learned here she quickly took action and engaged in CPR and applied an AED along with the assistance of another co-worker. Through their efforts that person is still alive today. We are trying to recognize her for her efforts, but due to confidentiality laws it is difficult to get information through her employer. The board thought that was wonderful to hear.

**XII. – Executive Session:**

The Chief asked that Executive Session be called to discuss a personal matter.

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

The Board recessed for Executive Session at 8:07 pm and the regular meeting reconvened at 8:11 pm.

The Moderator stated that there were no votes taken during the Executive Session.

A motion was then made by Louise to seal the minutes of the Executive Session. George seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**XIII. – Adjournment:**

Louise made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ray seconded it. The motion carried unanimously. The February meeting of the Harmony Fire District Executive Board was adjourned at **8:13 pm**.

The next meeting of the Harmony Fire District Executive Board is scheduled for **Thursday, 7:00 pm, March 19, 2015** at the Harmony Fire Station.

Respectfully Submitted,



Kimberly S. Barber  
Tax Collector/Clerk