

Memorial Town Hall, 1 Library Street, Georgetown, MA 01833
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BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES
Memorial Town Hall
6/4/19
6:30PM-General Meeting~2nd floor meeting room, Town Hall

Selectmen Present: Joseph Bonavita, Chairman; Charles Durney, Clerk; Gary C. Fowler, Douglas W. Dawes, and David J. Twiss

Others Present: Michael Farrell, Town Administrator; Janet Pantano, Administrative Assistant; Brian Coolidge, Firefighter

Absent:

6:30PM Call to order

Mr. Bonavita opened the meeting. He stated that the town received a report from Municipal Resources, Inc. on the workings of the Georgetown Fire Department and tonight we are holding a workshop to discuss the report. He stated we will see how to get from point A to point B.

Workshop-Fire Service Management Letter

Mr. Bonavita asked the Fire Chief where are we now.

Chief Mitchell stated that he has hired four (4) full time to start in July. He explained the process that he went through for the interviews and the fire chiefs who participated. He stated all four are internal candidates. He stated that one has declined the position because of the finances. He stated that one will start in September. He stated he has an offer going out to the next candidate.

Mr. Bonavita asked about how the call and full-time staff will work.

Chief Mitchell stated that rank is rank and that is how he will proceed. He stated the full-time staff will work days Monday to Friday, two 6AM to 2PM and two 8AM to 4PM. He stated per diem will be 4PM to 10PM with 3 shifts. He stated that there will be duties that the day shift will need to get done. He explained that the staff work for him and they are quality people and he is confident with the staff he is hiring. He stated that we have to address the need of the community not the need of the staff. He stated that he needs continuity of staff.

Mr. Bonavita asked about the grievances he received dealing with full time staff. Chief Mitchell stated that he was at DLR today and the part time and full time are in separate groups. He stated that there was no outcome of today's hearing, that it was a fact-finding meeting today.

Mr. Twiss stated that there are 35 firefighters on list and 20 are active. He asked how he fills the gap.

Chief Mitchell stated that he will have more part time hours in the evening and overnight for staff to fill.

Mr. Dawes asked how many shifts the Deputy Chief fills. Chief Mitchell stated that he fills 10 shifts a month.

Mr. Durney asked when the full-time staff start. Chief Mitchell stated July and September. Mr. Durney asked if the union saw the report. Chief Mitchell stated that the union has a copy of the report.

Mr. Dawes asked if rank and file issues have been dealt with. Chief Mitchell stated that he has been working on negotiations. Mr. Dawes stated that is too bad. He asked when the report was

done. Chief Mitchell stated that last summer and report received in October. Mr. Dawes asked if there is a command staff union. Mr. Farrell stated that there is not and they cannot force them to join. Mr. Dawes stated that the new staff will not solve the problem. He stated that staff have to get on board or go. Chief Mitchell explained that everything he does is addressed with the Deputy Chief is not going to like this.

Discussion on the duties to command staff and small items that staff can work on.

Mr. Dawes stated that it does not seem like anything is happening to move forward.

Mr. Durney stated can we agree that there is merit to report and to go through and assign some staff with dates and see what happens.

Mr. Fowler stated on pages 30-33 it sums up where to start.

Mr. Twiss stated that on page 26 states discourse must be dealt with before moving forward. He stated the board is here to help him move forward.

Mr. Fowler asked if the hiring process fit into this report and the problem with report is hiring is put on days. He stated that seems that this is not where he has issues. Chief Mitchell explained he has issues in daytime. Mr. Fowler stated it seems that he and Mr. Ricker need to work it out.

Mr. Bonavita stated that we have let a few firefighters go and then they were let back and town council has said that there could be retaliatory issues. He stated one word that keeps popping out is that the Fire Chief does not have trust with some of these people. Chief Mitchell stated he would rather push items to people he has trust in then with those which may cause issues.

Mr. Bonavita stated that we should go over recommendations.

Recommendation 4.1

The Town of Georgetown should recognize that the use of paid-on-call firefighter/EMTs and per-diem employees has been an effective model for meeting the emergency response needs of the community, however, currently and in the future the only way to develop a more active and properly staffed fire department is the hiring of career firefighters to staff positions during the daytime hours and to continue to actively continue to utilize the current on-call personnel to bolster the ranks.

Fire Chief stated that this has been taken care of.

Recommendation 4.2

Adopt a staffing model which will provide fulltime coverage supplemented by call firefighters and per diem staff to meet coverage for emergency responses.

Mr. Dawes asked if the Chief is in charge of this. Chief stated he sees the way the PD is handled and he has to change the culture of Fire Department. Mr. Farrell stated right now the union wants to run the department and we will not let them. Mr. Durney stated this recommendation wants the department to develop a staffing model.

Brian Coolidge stated that there are people who tell him they do not want to complain because they do not want the hassle they get if they do. He stated we have to fix the culture because no one wants to get involved.

Recommendation 4.3

MRI recommends that in January of 2019, hire 2 career Firefighter/EMTs to work Monday through Friday to provide fire and EMS cover from 6 am to 4 pm. Call firefighters and per diem staff would supplement the day shift as available, cover the nights, weekends, and Car-6 shifts.

Chief Mitchell stated that we have addressed this with hiring staff. Mr. Bonavita asked about 10-hour days. Chief Mitchell stated that he wants to get the full time in and integrate in department.

Recommendation 4.4

July 2019, hire 4 career Firefighter/EMTs, two groups of two working a rotating schedule Sunday through Saturday, four days on to cover from 6 am to 6 pm, then followed by four days off. Call firefighters and per diem staff to cover two additional daytime slots 7 days a week, and 7 nights a week from 6 pm to 11 pm, and Car-6 shifts.

Chief Mitchell stated the he hopes to address this in the next fiscal year and hire more staff and go to longer hours. He stated that this would be in FY21.

Recommendation 4.5

The Town of Georgetown and the Georgetown Fire Department should apply for a federal SAFER grant for fulltime positions and on-call recruitment and retention. This grant should be utilized to develop a comprehensive marketing program to attract new members and provide incentives for the retention of those personnel currently in the fire department.

Chief Mitchell explained the grant and that the federal government will fund for first year, joint second year, and third year. After that the town is responsible and cannot get rid of staff. He stated that he is interested in applying to fill more positions. Mr. Bonavita asked when does he see putting in a grant. Chief Mitchell stated in FY21. Mr. Bonavita stated give some feedback on when he will apply for the grant and a timeline.

Mr. Fowler stated that the grant can be for on call and fulltime.

Mr. Bonavita asked about a grant writer and if there is a cost. Mr. Coolidge stated that there are grant writers and there would be a cost.

Recommendation 4.6

The Town of Georgetown should convene a focus group to determine what concepts and recruitment and retention strategies are feasible and most attractive to potential candidates.

Discussion on a focus group.

Mr. Dawes stated that there should be a group in the fire department to work on recruitment and retention. Chief Mitchell stated that this is an issue in all towns. Mr. Coolidge stated in Maine they are offering discounts on taxes.

Mr. Durney stated other towns have this same issue and we should look at what they are doing.

Mr. Twiss asked if they have looked at trade schools. He stated that they could put a notice at Tech Schools, and public Schools. Chief stated it is finding competent staff who are willing to put in the time for training. Mr. Twiss stated you can also look at Veterans.

Mr. Sadler, 7 Hillside Drive stated that there is a lot of information in the report and the board could put together an advisory board to work on the issues. He stated that it would be a way to get residents involved. He stated as a resident he is scared to death for his family with the 21-minute delay on a recent call. He stated that they should not worry about union and have be more concerned about the 8500 residents. He stated that they should form a Fire and EMS advisory board as was done in Upton.

Recommendation 4.7

The Georgetown Fire Department should set a realistic goal of recruiting at least 5 to 10 new members over the next three years and simultaneously set a goal of maintaining the overall call member force at 30 to 35 active personnel. These personnel should be required to be properly trained and certified to the Firefighter I/II level, and preferably to the EMT-basic level.

Chief Mitchell stated that he can see the recruitment of 5 members.

Mr. Dawes asked if he has a plan for the town written down. Chief Mitchell stated that he has a plan but has not put to paper. Mr. Dawes stated that he would like to see a plan.

Mr. Durney asked about training. Chief Mitchell explained the training his staff has to obtain that is extensive.

Mr. Twiss stated have to get another 15 people to fill shifts.

Recommendation 4.8

The Georgetown Fire Department should make it a priority to develop an active on-call recruitment program led by the call deputy fire chief. At a minimum, this program should consist of:

- 1. Developing a recruitment brochure and mailing it to all residents***
- 2. Holding periodic open houses at the fire station***
- 3. Performing public outreach through the local media***
- 4. Contacting community and service groups***
- 5. Developing an eye-catching banner on the town's and fire department's websites and conducting radio and media advertisements***
- 6. Placing signs recruiting call/volunteer personnel at the main entrances to town***
- 7. Placing a temporary signboard at various locations within the community***
- 8. Placing signs for call/recruiting volunteers in local businesses, particularly highvolume locations***
- 9. Implementing or enhancing a fire explorer program***
- 10. As part of a retention incentive consider allowing active responders to participate in the Town's health insurance at their own cost (100%) or if they respond to more than 50% of the calls provide a percentage match up to 50%.***

Mr. Fowler stated that this should fall under the deputy fire chief to take on this task. Chief stated he does not agree with this process. Mr. Fowler questioned why the report mentions this person for this position.

Discussion on making changes to the department.

Mr. Durney stated that this is an important recommendation is good but should take out Deputy Fire Chief.

Chief Mitchell explained projects by a firefighter who owns the project and does a great job. Mr. Bonavita stated that he would like to see a new member take on this project.

Mr. Twiss asked Mr. Coolidge if he felt the department with new staff will change culture. Mr. Coolidge stated that there is fear in staff and they do not want to deal with issues.

Board asked for a written plan with some timelines.

Mr. Bonavita stated that they will discuss building at next meeting.

Mr. Sadler stated that it would be great to televise these meetings. The town people need to be involved and he sees a need for an advisory committee. He stated they need to have the buzz go around town.

Mr. Fowler stated that this report is to the town. He stated that workshops are helpful and he invited Mr. Ricker tonight. He stated that people do not know what training is involved in the Fire Department. The public does not know that we do not have a full-time staff. Mr. Twiss stated that they need to give the Chief some leeway to get this fixed.

Next Meeting

Monday, June 10, 2019 at 7:00PM, 3rd floor meeting room, Town Hall.

Adjournment

Mr. Dawes moved to adjourn. Mr. Fowler seconded the motion and the motion was approved by a unanimous vote.

Minutes transcribed by Ms. Pantano.

Minutes approved June 24, 2019.

Documents used in this meeting:

- Municipal Resources, Inc.-Fire Service Management Letter dated October 2, 2018

