

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING
MINUTES
Monday, November 5, 2018
Groveland Town Hall
183 Main St, Groveland, MA 01834

Attendance: Chair Bill O'Neil, Vice Chair Lisa Dube Carpenter, and Selectmen Bill Dunn, Ed Watson, and Michael Wood

Also Present: Finance Director, Denise Dembkoski and Shawn Murray, from MRI Consulting Interim Fire Chief Richard York, firefighter Tracy Guilford, and a business owner were in the audience.

The Board met with Shawn Murray from MRI Consulting, the independent fire department consultant to discuss the reasons the Board decided to have a review of the fire department. In addition, the Board wanted to discuss any concerns they have regarding staffing, equipment, budget, calls, etc.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 6:30pm.

Mr. Murray introduced himself and thanked the Board for the opportunity conduct this review of the department. MRI has done the initial site visit and toured both stations, met with officers, met with the Finance Director gathered information on apparatus, and to gather a global view of the scope. In addition, he met with the Police Chief and Police Lieutenant to discuss dispatch and dispatch protocols. Earlier today, he met with two members of the Finance Board to get their feedback on budget and concerns. MRI is still planning to meet with the firefighters.

Selectman Dunn asked about any weaknesses. Mr. Murray stated he has found some, in every department you're going to find issues. They will provide a full write-up with their recommendations and best practices. Hoping to have their report completed end of November or early December.

Selectman Wood asked about how granular the report will get? Mr. Murray said they will discuss organizing and hierarchy, but not specific individuals. They will look at the leadership structure top to bottom and will make recommendations as to how that might look.

Selectman Watson discussed his history of working in the department and how the stations were staffed. The prior Chiefs were cognizant of filling positions with people available during the day. If the stations were built back up to 20 people in each, he feels there would be enough staff to cover the calls. Too little calls you lose interest, too many calls you lose interest. Wondering what the thought is about the Class V non-transport ambulance. Currently the fire department must be called to all medical calls, wondering if the town were to step back from the Class V non-transport ambulance service. Secondly, he stated that the town never, in his 45 years associated with the department, allowed personnel to be appointed, unless they were living in the Town of Groveland to be on the department. Now we have people working for the Town of West Newbury, Georgetown, Boxford, etc. We prohibited people from working on both the police and

fire stations at the same time, because someone couldn't answer to two masters. Maybe grandfather current employees, but not allow anyone else on the department because of staffing shortages. The other thing that occurred under a former Chief, John Clement, the radios were set up to tone out 5 or 6 guys at each station, like a group tone. The rationale is a guy wouldn't have to get up every night. Currently, you get the same people responding to the same calls every night. People a mile away might not make the truck because the closest people jump on the call first. It's a possibility to have a group tone with four or five guys on call. Selectman Watson acknowledged that he knows you'd have to pay people to be on call for that respective night, but having people on call might help.

Mr. Murray responded to some of Selectman Watson's comments. Regarding the Class V, non-transport license, the majority of calls today are medical call related as the population is aging. Fire service started to decline back in 1984 and has been a slow and steady decline. Recruitment and retention have been declining. Selectman Watson rebutted that it's because of sprinkler systems and fire retention systems and that's why calls are done and fire departments added medical calls. Mr. Murray stated that many tasks have been added to fire departments over the years, medical, hazardous conditions, he would disagree that's why medical is being done by fire. He believes many things were added, because the fire department has been known as the first responder for many things since the eighties.

Mr. Murray articulated that one complication with the Class V, is that even though we have Trinity, it is not dedicated to the town. If there is another medical call there can be a challenge to have the call answered. Residents have a right to equal medical care. The police department are first responder trained and carry defibrillators, but they are not trained to the true First Responder level.

Regarding residency, towns have changed their position and started adding others to their department who can respond, as fewer residents have stepped up to be on the department. Yes, if there are two calls at the same time, the employee will have to choose who to respond to. At that point, there is mutual aid, and that's there for a reason.

Group tones does help if you can offer a stipend or per diem to be on call. But if the numbers aren't there, you have to hope enough people will be there to respond to a call.

Mr. Murray shared statistical data from other town's he's reviewed and shared comparisons, and discussed a recent report about call department and getting people to respond.

Selectwoman Carpenter asked what is being used for the matrix with regards to the study. Mr. Murray responded they are using NFPA20. Best practices for call and volunteer department with benchmarks regarding response times, number of responding staff, and other items that pertain to call and volunteer departments. Ms. Carpenter asked about regionalizing the fire services with neighboring communities. Mr. Murray stated that is a great question, and now it's called more "shared services", but New England has been resistant to sharing service. Chair O'Neil stated that Malden and Revere share a station and they take turns manning the stations. Mr. Murray shared stories of how it could work, by sharing a ladder truck or sharing certain apparatus, instead of each community having their own. Those types of services make sense. Could put a MOU articulating maintenance costs. Mr. Murray believes regionalization in this area is

inevitable, it's just a matter of time as equipment costs escalate. Selectwoman Carpenter feels it would be ideal, we could still have our own Chief, but share responsibilities with calls and equipment. The understanding is we cannot regionalize with a weak chief. Could the town enter into MOU's with a strong chief? Could we form a regional full-time department with multiple stations, under one Chief? Is there anything that legally prevents us from entering into an MOU with a strong fire Chief? Chief York responded that we currently have several MOU's and mutual aid agreements with neighboring departments.

Chair O'Neil asked if the final recommendation will contain structure of the department and the hierarchy and will they make recommendations on the pay structure? Mr. Murray responded affirmatively, but might not give specifics on pay data, but ranges or other comparable factors. The Chair asked if recommendations will be made on the equipment and the health factor of the equipment. Will there be a recommendation regarding the budget and how it's being spent? Mr. Murray responded that yes, he will report on all those. The Chairman asked what would it cost to include as part of this report, a recommendation on weak chief versus strong chief? Mr. Murray will consult with the director of fire services at MRI and will get back to us.

Chair O'Neil asked if the final recommendation will identify personnel that may not be situated in the right positions within the organizations, ie. They might not have the proper skill set, they might not have the correct training/knowledge. Yes, the report will comment on each set of positions and what should be expected of them.

Selectman Dunn asked if they will review the ambulance response times, and will that be part of the recommendation? Mr. Murray stated yes. Selectman Dunn stated we had a lot of problems in the past where too many people were responding to a medical call. We're expecting a 192 unit affordable housing unit and that may increase the number of calls. Too many people were in the house. Mr. Murray stated that is a fire Chief matter to establish a level of care with staffing levels. However, when there is a serious matter, it would be expected to have more people attend.

Selectman Watson followed up Selectman Dunn regarding medical calls, he specifically mentioned the Housing Authority and said several people had complained that too many people are showing up at the calls in their small apartments. Residents have wanted to call the ambulance directly and bypass the department. Obviously if there is a serious situation there should be more employees there/available. Chief York wanted to interject: since he has taken over as Interim, he has gone to a double tone for all medical calls, so if there are two situations on both sides of the town, people are on standby. People call away other responders when they arrive on scene, so there aren't an inappropriate number of fire employees in the house. Trinity triages the medical calls to determine the type of response. We currently have a fairly decent response and most calls are answered prior to Trinity by our department.

Chairman O'Neil reiterated that nothing said here should be considered a criticism of the Chief or the Department.

Selectman Watson asked if the duties and responsibilities of the line officers will be looked at, and if there will be a recommendation for a written promotional exam? He asked about using

dispatch and radios to dispatch both police and fire at the same time? The Fire Chief informed the group that we currently have the ability to simulcast to both as needed.

Mr. Murray would like to thank the fire chief for his cooperation in this process. He has been very transparent and open.

Selectman Wood made a motion to adjourn at 7:43pm, Seconded by Selectman Dunn. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted by: Denise M. Dembkoski

*** Unanimously Approved on December 10, 2018 ***