



Warner Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 19, 2020

APPROVED

1. Open Meeting Chairman Carson opened the meeting at 9:05 am.

Attendance: Selectman Clyde Carson – Chairman, Selectman Jonathan Lord and Town Administrator - Diane Ricciardelli

Selectman Judy Newman-Rogers - by teleconferencing

Others present: Sean Toomey - Fire Chief – by conference call, Kelly Henley

2. Fire Department Wages

A. Clyde explained to Sean there was some confusion regarding the Payroll Change Forms for the Fire Department. Clyde is looking for a better understanding. The question has to do with the stipends, is the higher rate for the stipends and does the higher rate also apply to answering emergency calls. Clyde asked Sean to explain what his understanding is.

B. Sean talked about the stipends first. In 2019, the Chief position received \$5,496.91 for a stipend, the Deputy Chief's and Clerk Treasurer all received \$1,083.03. Sean said when he was looking at increasing the hourly rates for his staff, he took the assumption that the stipends account for the extra duties/responsibilities for the four positions, Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chiefs and Clerk Treasurer. When Sean proposed the new pay rates for 2020 he came up with new stipend values: \$8,250 for the Chief, \$1,680 for the Deputies and \$1,160 for the Clerk Treasurer. On average a Fire Chief will complete at least 20 hours of administrative work a week and Sean thought going into this if we are asking people to do more, then the stipends should be increased. Sean recalls suggesting to the Board transitioning all of the stipend positions to an hourly value rather than the stipends and it was discussed to do so for the 2021 budget. Sean asked the Board for their thoughts. Judy asked Sean where did he get the \$30.00 per hour for the Fire Chief, the previous Fire Chief was getting \$20.00 per hour. Sean said he used that to calculate hours into the stipend. Judy said but the stipends were never established using hours or a rate of pay, the stipend is what it is. Sean said he used hours to come up with the stipend, if the Board wants to use a different method for the stipend he's good with that. Sean said he was trying to be transparent on how he came up with the amount for the stipends. Sean said the \$30.00 per hour was what he proposed for 2020, he then explained the other rates for the Fire Department staff that was also approved by the Board and the Budget Committee.

C. Sean said on December 10 he presented his proposal to the Board, the Board asked Sean to see what the impact would be if the wage scale was used, he did, and it impacted his proposal by \$25 to \$30K more. Sean then, on January 21, asked the Board to go with his original proposal. The Board approved Sean's request and that is what he built his budget on. Clyde asked Sean if those numbers are the same numbers on the Payroll Change Forms that were discussed on January 21. Sean said yes.

D. Sean asked if it's accurate to say there seems to be an issue with his pay rate (\$30.00 per hour). Judy said her conflict is with the stipend being changed, she was over-ruled by the other 2 Board members in January. Judy said stipends are set by the Board of Selectmen, and the Fire Chief stipend was set by a discussion with Sean, in the position, making a proposal and the Board didn't complete any research of their own. Judy said stipends are set by the Board and they are not usually included in a wage study. She also said none of the other stipends were looked at and haven't been addressed, but the Fire Chief's stipend is being addressed outside of the other stipend positions. Judy is concerned about the other stipend positions. Sean said the other stipend positions were increased the same way. Clyde said Judy is referring to other stipend positions outside the Fire Department. Sean said his point is as a Department Head he should bring forward a proposal of what he believes should be all the expenses for the Fire Department and then it's the Selectmen and Budget Committee that approves it or not.

E. Judy said she was under the assumption the stipend was approved for those positions in the Fire Department that are paid by stipend and she understands the calculations. She said the Budget Committee said they would approve the money for the extra hours worked in the Fire Department because the staff was not getting paid for training and that was the increase in the wage line. Judy said she did not understand the wage increases were part of this phase 1. She thought the wage increases would be looked at next year because the Budget Committee was concerned about the increase. Sean had used Newport NH wage study which had different towns than the wage study Warner completed, waiting until 2021 would allow the Town time to look at the comparison that the Town's wage study used and apply it to the Fire Department. Judy thought the 2-part phase-in would be paid hours for total hours worked and training for 2020, and then next year would be the wages. Sean apologized for his frustration. He said he presented his wage proposal on January 21 that included the stipend information, and a spread sheet showing the pay rates. Judy asked Sean if it is his understanding the Budget Committee approved his spread sheet. Sean said the Board of Selectmen approved the pay rates, the Budget Committee does not. Judy said but the Budget Committee budget was the budget that was approved by the Town and she asked Sean if his number for wages is in that budget as well. Sean said yes.

F. Judy said did the Board of Selectmen approve the phase-in increase for wages next year versus paying for the hours worked this year, that would be a Board decision and she asked if she is not clear on that. Sean said his understanding is we were doing his proposal for \$79,900 for training and calls and then there was discussion to come back in 2021 to try to bring the Fire Department into the Town wage scale. Judy asked how does bringing the Fire Department into the Town wage scale relate to the wage line of \$79,000. Sean said he did a partial wage adjustment and added money for actual hours worked. Clyde agrees with looking at wage adjustments for the Fire Department in 2021, it allows for time to look at the wage study information as well. Judy said she is not being negative toward the Fire Department, she thinks across the board, we need to apply the same requirements because the Fire Department was not included in the wage study, only the Fire Chief, we should apply the same requirements. Sean said for the record, he believes they should use the wage study information with the scoring matrix, he did that exercise and he asked for someone to review his work. He said using the scoring matrix will put the Fire Department on the same scale as the rest of the Town employee's.

G. Clyde asked if everyone is now on the same page with regards to the Fire Department wages. Judy said she understands it. This year the Board will work with Sean and look at what needs to be done based the Town's wage study. Sean will provide Diane with all the information that he has. He knows some people had a problem with Sean using the Newport NH study, but to him, it showed another dozen towns showing how he factored the wages. Sean's concern is if the Town's wage study is not used' then we continue to foster this idea that the Fire Department has their own wage scale. Sean is aware that there will be a cost impact to get his staff on to the wage scale, it needs to be done over time. Judy agrees the Fire Department needs to be fitted on the wage scale the same as everyone else was. Clyde said Towns all around the State are confronting the same issue, how to compensate a volunteer Fire Department.

H. Sean said based on his math, he as a Fire Chief, he might make \$15,000 next year between calls and the stipend. He said the amount of work for a Fire Chief, with a \$200,000 budget, millions of dollars in apparatus and a \$3,000,000 Fire Station and getting paid \$15,000 a year is a steal for a Fire Chief. Sean is also dealing with a grant that has the potential for the Town owing back \$100,000 to the Federal Government, but, between himself, the Bookkeeper and Diane, he feels that has been resolved. The administrative time Sean put in to resolve the grant was at least 40 hours. Sean learned the Town of Bradford hired a new Fire Chief and gets paid 24 hours a week and the Chief doesn't live in Bradford. Sean feels the Fire Chief in Warner should live in Warner and be actively engaged in the community. Judy said she agrees with Sean and she does not want her request for clarification on any issue to be interpreted as negative toward the Fire Department. Sean said it is that way, and he wants to work together to change any misperceptions. Judy said to Sean if he could help change the negativity that's out there as she has heard it, she would appreciate that. Judy said she is looking at the numbers and she understands the time Sean puts in because she herself is working full-time and she has the responsibility of being a Selectman. Judy has never said she wanted anything taken away from the Fire Department, she just wants to understand. Sean said he would be happy to supply any information the Board needs, he likes to be transparent. Judy said asking questions is her responsibility to the tax payers so they understand how their tax dollars are being allocated.

I. Clyde said the Board is now in agreement to move forward with the Payroll Change forms for the Fire Department.

3. Adjourn

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn at 9:40 am.

Board of Selectmen
Clyde Carson – Chairman
Judith Newman-Rogers
Jonathan Lord

Recorder of the minutes: Mary Whalen