

Special Meeting of the Dorset Select Board & Dorset/East Dorset Fire District Boards

August 24, 2015 ~ Minutes

Present: Mike Connors (Vice-Chairman), Michael Oltedal, Henry Chandler, Brad Tyler, R. Gaiotti (Town Manager),

Absent: Chris Brooks (Chairman)

Also, present: Patrick McArdle (Rutland Herald), Andrew McKeever (Manchester Journal), Harvey K. Watkins, Jean Kingston, Paulinie DeLaszlo, Sandy Pinsonault, Danny Pinsonault, Stephen Ludlam (East Dorset Prudential Committee), Judy Collins (East Dorset Prudential Committee), Howard E. Towsley, Jr. (East Dorset Fire Chief), Alan Casey (Dorset Fire Chief), Tyler Yandow, Ralph Colin, Jim Hand, Rosalie Fox, Clarissa Lennox, Ellen Maloney, Hans Pause, James Kingston, Allan Sullivan, Linda Sullivan, Steven Davenport, Terry Tyler, Margery Freed, Jim Salsgiver, Ruth Stewart, Abbot DeRham (Dorset Prudential Committee), James Stannard (Dorset Prudential Committee), Ben Weiss (Dorset Prudential Committee)

R. Gaiotti, Town Manager, called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. explaining that this was to be a roundtable discussion with the East Dorset Fire District, the Dorset Fire District and the Select Board to converse about the collaboration between all three groups. R. Gaiotti noted that his memo dated August 24, 2015 was a general outline of items to be discussed with the potential of moving forward if considered worthy by the groups. Future meetings could be warned as a three Board meeting or the three Boards could delegate representatives to form a subcommittee to continue discussions. J. Stannard indicated that all his Board members wanted to be involved in any discussions. A. DeRham stated that he would only be in favor of having a subcommittee of representatives as long as they were not able to make any decisions without each Board's approval. J. Stannard asked if these would be open meetings and R. Gaiotti responded yes.

R. Gaiotti started a review of the August 24th memo ~ Overview of challenges ~ by noting that nothing in the list should be taken in a negative manner and these items are not unique to Dorset.

- **Organization & Funding Formula:** Residents are paying different tax rates for the same essential service based on where they live in Town. A. DeRham expressed that this should not be the first item discussed as it was a contentious issue and they should not discuss budgets, finances and equalization of taxes first. R. Gaiotti responded that this was listed first as all other service costs in the Town of Dorset are uniformly split among residents and this fundamental issue creates a dichotomy. A. DeRham said that Fire

Districts, according to State Statute, are treated as municipalities and the discussion should be how to get two municipalities and two water departments on the same page before trying to equalize budgets. R. Gaiotti thought this would be the easiest hurdle to get over and A. DeRham felt opening discussions with money would take away from the purpose of the meeting. J. Stannard said that the Dorset Prudential, the Dorset Fire Chief, the East Dorset Prudential and the East Dorset Fire Chief were planning on having a meeting. B. Weiss noted that the voters of Dorset approved forming a committee to start the process.

- Recruitment & Volunteers ~ Limited list of potential candidates for the fire departments as it is difficult for younger people to live and work in or near Dorset.
- Existing Member Base ~ Difficulty in retaining volunteers due to work and life commitments which places strain on other members. This creates a need for automatic mutual aid for both Dorset Fire Departments and for Fire Departments in other Towns.
- Complexity & Redundancy ~ Meeting community needs has become more complex due to State requirements and expectations of what a Fire Department has to do (training, paperwork, etc.) Taxes are billed separately three times in Dorset.
- Dorset is Lacking in First Response ~ Because of the distance from Manchester to parts of Dorset off Route 30, there is a lack of first response medical services. The Fire Departments and the Manchester Rescue Squad tried to create a Dorset First Response team, but out of 20 volunteers there is only one left. R. Gaiotti noted that it was very difficult for volunteers to keep up with the obligations of their busy lives and volunteering their services. A. DeRham and H. Towsley talked about the difficulties in attracting new volunteers and the requirements needed for certification and insurance.

R. Gaiotti explained that collaboration between the departments started when everyone worked together along with himself, J. Hand and E. Maloney of the Energy Committee and received a grant for both departments for energy improvements. J. Stannard added that both departments do training jointly and A. Casey noted that other joint training sessions are upcoming.

A. DeRham noted that some of the Dorset Prudential Committee members felt there were some problems with methodology and conclusions of the Public Safety study with regard to statistical problems. He wanted to know if he could talk to the person who created the report to learn how their conclusions appear to have the force of a statistically valid survey. A. DeRham felt that the Dorset Prudential Committee should have a chance to respond to the report. R. Gaiotti stated that if there are inaccuracies in the report, then the Board should make a list which could be brought back to the consultant so they can be remedied. J. Stannard complained about publicity in the newspapers regarding animosity between fire departments which does not exist and A. Casey and H. Towsley agreed.

R. Gaiotti referred to the financial sheets in his August 24th memo saying that economy of scale could be gained by having a joint ten year plan for replacement projects and equipment/costs with any additional adjustments added along the way to be placed in a sinking fund so that the

cash could be expended when necessary. Pooling money for truck/equipment purchases would save money and a cooperative plan would be efficient and get rid of finance charges. A. DeRham asked if it were possible to share equipment purchases as each department might have vendor or brand preferences and A. Casey noted that they usually purchased equipment based on quality and pricing at the time of purchase. A. DeRham felt that Dorset, East Dorset and Manchester all need a current list of equipment for each department so that future purchases could be a team effort.

B. Weiss suggested creating a list for the pro's and con's for consolidation and mentioned joint purchases as a pro. R. Colin proposed that the focus of these discussions should be the benefits or drawbacks regarding combining the departments – what will work and what will not ~ to see if the proposal is worthwhile. He noted that recruitment for one combined department allows a greater pool of applicants to pick from. B. Weiss said that another pro would be if all members of each department can use each other's apparatus so that when a fireman is closer to one fire house than the other, he can utilize that equipment. A. Casey noted that insurance liability might be a factor in all members sharing the use of all equipment. A. DeRham asked if the first step was to be disbanding the two fire districts and creating one municipal fire district with two fire houses.

R. Gaiotti listed four options that were mapped out by the VLCT for joining the departments:

- Interlocal contract between the Town and the Fire Districts
- Expansion of fire district boundaries
- Merger ~ two departments into one department or merge two departments into the Town
- Creation of a Town fire department transferring the assets to the Town

After the VLCT report, feedback from both departments was received noting that both wanted to stay autonomous and continue providing the services they currently were so that the contract method seemed to be the best way to implement the funding change. A. DeRham questioned if it were possible to have two fire houses within the same department; one Prudential Committee, one Fire Chief with multi sub-Chiefs which would allow budgets to be aligned and evaluated equally. R. Gaiotti stated that the water systems are a completely separate entity that stays with the users. J. Stannard felt that neither of the water departments would give up their Fire District entities without the Water District going along with it.

R. Gaiotti directed the discussion back to the five points listed above and what would be ranked the number one issue such as funding, recruitment of volunteers, training requirements, complexity of paperwork/documentation necessary today, or having one administrator. B. Weiss noted that most people call the Town office when they have questions about water, burn permits, taxes, etc. S. Ludlam expressed that this discussion was related to the Fire Departments, not the Prudential Committees which have no intention to combine. D. Pinsonault agreed that there were two different entities (fire & water) and the purpose of using Town resources was not to relieve people from paying their water bills. A. DeRham noted that the availability of water intertwines with firefighting abilities and there are different issues on each side to deal with.

R. Fox suggested probing for deeper reasons for not having available volunteers: too busy, employee commitments, loss of pay, local jobs, etc. R. Gaiotti pointed out the median age in Dorset is 51 years old with less young people available and this is, unfortunately, not unique to Dorset. A. DeRham suggested finding common ground first. D. Pinsonault praised the firemen for their hard work, but said that everyone's main duty was to look at what was best for the Town as a whole. S. Ludlam commented that the decision to combine is up to the two fire departments. A. DeRham remarked that due diligence on the part of all Boards is necessary to attain efficiencies of scale first before addressing the tax issue. S. Pinsonault noted that the East Dorset residents pay twice as much as Dorset residents for fire tax and fire service is a Town service which should be paid for equally by both sides. Discussion ensued regarding one fire department with two facilities and one budget; benefits of shared billing and equipment; ISO ratings; training for fire department members; firefighter retention and tax collection strategies. R. Colin mentioned that an indirect benefit to saving money on a combined fire department, might be having more money to invest on police services. A. DeRham expressed concern with having two fire budgets combined into the Town's budget as it reminded him of what happened with Act 60. The discussion on tax payments and fire department budgets continued.

R. Gaiotti created a list of pro's and con's for jointing the two Fire Districts. (copy attached). The next Joint Fire Departments and Town meeting will be on September 28, 2015 at 7:30 p.m. in the Town office. The meeting ended at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Aversano

Town of Dorset, Vermont

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August 24, 2015

List of Pros & Cons for consolidating the two Dorset Fire Districts:

PROS:

1. Economies of Scale (save money of finance costs of large trucks, compensation package)
2. Funding/ Taxes
3. Shared Billing (possible savings + resident convenience)
4. Shared Equipment
5. Joint Training
6. Improved ISO rating
7. Districts no longer competing against each other for:
 - a. Recruitment/ Training
 - b. Grants
 - c. Resources
8. Improved communication with taxpayers/ residents (water district example)
9. Dry Hydrants
10. Combined budgeting (to create one total budget that outlines all the needs and can be voted upon along with other traditional budgets, school, town)
11. Tax Sale option (if by town or billed through town)
12. Improved compensation for volunteers
13. Improved Administration (if through town or access to improved administration)
14. Improved staffing ability
15. Improved response time
16. Lessen the pressures placed on volunteer boards

CONS:

1. Volunteer concerns/ change & leadership questions
2. Effect on existing department procedures and traditions
3. Demographic pressure (general lack of young people)
4. Funding/ Taxes

Town of Dorset ~ Select Board

Date 8 / 24 / 15

Regular Meeting

Special Meeting X

(Please Print)

Name	Address	Representing	Testifying (Yes or No)
Patrick McAuley	The Rutland Herald		No
Andrew McKeever	Manchester Journal		No
Harry K. Watkins	Dorset Mt Rd Dorset		No
Jean Kingston	Rte 30 Dorset		No
Pauline de Laszlo	East Dorset		No
Sandy Pincusault	E Dorset		NO
Danny Pincusault	E Dorset		NO
Stephen Kudlam	E Dorset	Prudential Comm	
Judy Collins	East Dorset	Prudential Comm	yes
HOWARD ETOWSLEY JR	EAST DORSET V.	FIRE CHIEF	
ALAN CASEY	Dorset	Fire chief	
TYLER YANDOW	DORSET	SELF	Y
RALPH COLIN	E. "	SELF	Y
Jim Hand	E Dorset	"	?
Rosalie Fox	Dorset	self	NO
Clarissa Lennox	Dorset	"	"
Henry Chandler	Dorset	Selectman	"
Ellen Maloney	E. Dorset	self	" ?
Hans Payne	Dorset	self	NO
JAMES KINGSSON	4	"	?

