

Special Meeting of the Dorset Select Board & Dorset/East Dorset Fire District Boards September 28, 2015 ~ Minutes

Present: Michael Oltedal, R. Gaiotti (Town Manager),
Absent: Chris Brooks (Chairman), Mike Connors (Vice-Chairman), Henry
Chandler, Brad Tyler
Also, present: Patrick McArdle (Rutland Herald), Andrew McKeever (Manchester
Journal), Jean Kingston, Sandy Pinsonault, Danny Pinsonault, Stephen
Ludlam (East Dorset Prudential Committee), Ellen Maloney, Allan
Sullivan, Linda Sullivan, James Stannard (Dorset Prudential Committee),
Ben Weiss (Dorset Prudential Committee), Joseph Clark (Dorset Fire
Department), Alan Casey (Dorset Fire Department), Bob Davidson,

R. Gaiotti, Town Manager, called the meeting to order at 7:40 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. There was a quorum for the East Dorset and Dorset Prudential/Fire Committees, but not of the Select Board.

Review Meeting Minutes of August 24, 2015

B. Weiss asked what the Dorset Fire Tax figure would go up by if the fire taxes were equalized and R. Gaiotti responded it would be approximately \$9.85 per \$100,000 of assessed value using the existing budget figures and East Dorset would go down by approximately \$30 per \$100,000 of assessed value.

J. Stannard moved and M. Oltedal seconded to approve the August 24, 2015 minutes as presented. Motion carried by consensus.

Review and Discuss Draft Pros/Cons List for Collaboration/Consolidation

R. Gaiotti read the list of pros/cons (list attached). S. Ludlam expressed that the list of pro items would be considered pros by any Fire Department, but thought that the purpose of the meetings was to equalize the tax rates only. B. Weiss said that there are advantages to having services handled by the municipality as there is a full time staff, with a Town Manager who is trained in municipal affairs. S. Ludlam felt that accomplishing what could be done quickly such as tax equalization and dry hydrants should be first; then work on the long term items. J. Stannard stated that it was important to equalize costs between the Fire Departments and noted that they already have mutual aid with joint shared equipment and joint training. S. Ludlam remarked that consolidation of taxes was already approved in 2011 by a Town vote and the East Dorset District

has already made the changes necessary to enable entering into an agreement with the Town to accomplish this. R. Gaiotti stated that at the last meeting the tax equalization discussion was side tracked to discuss other items and read the memo listing the *Combined Fire Tax Timeline* from 2009 to 2011 which listed the favorable vote in 2011 to have equalized taxes collected by the Town through a contract. J. Stannard said that there are a lot of problems with the Dorset Prudential/Fire Department bylaws and only the people in the Dorset water district should vote on the water and the same for the Fire district. J. Stannard stated that they would need to talk to their lawyer about making changes. R. Gaiotti noted that the VLCT staff attorney did a report outlining the options for solving any issues and he read a *VLCT Fire Tax Study* paragraph. The two Fire Departments could approve their own budgets, submit them to the Select Board to include in the Town budget and the Town would issue one tax bill. S. Ludlam asked what was standing in the way as the East Dorset Prudential Committee was in favor of this set-up. J. Stannard said that the Town and the Fire Department are two separate entities and the Town vote cannot dictate what the Fire Department has to do. S. Ludlam questioned if everyone agreed there is a need for equalized taxes, what is an effective way to get this resolution passed. M. Oltedal asked if J. Stannard could get legal clarification and J. Stannard replied that they follow State law. B. Weiss stated that this was a solvable problem by getting the people in the Dorset District educated and having them show up at the Fire Department annual meeting for voting.

R. Gaiotti reviewed the *Dorset Fire Tax Inter-Local Contract Chart* and *Dorset Fire Tax Equalization Contract Flow Chart* noting that the Fire Departments would present their approved budgets to the Town for inclusion in the Town budget. B. Weiss felt that there were other items on the pro list where the Town could facilitate the process with both Fire Departments and encouraged looking at multiple items of consolidation rather than a one by one approach which would take a long time. M. Oltedal agreed that looking at multiple options would be a benefit. S. Ludlam asked what kind of time frame would be involved with creating a municipal department or consolidation. R. Gaiotti replied that a timeline would be dependent upon what portions of the list the Departments were willing to do, but there could be administrative restructuring with contracts for bookkeeping/taxes and options to merge/contract with the Town to accomplish economies of scale, truck purchase schedules, combined insurance policies. Net savings would be accomplished. S. Ludlam felt that none of the other items on the list stand in the way of tax equalization now and he expressed that municipal departments were several years down the road.

R. Gaiotti stated that it was important to look at the option of agreement on services that could be provided and M. Oltedal added that contracting with the Town for administrative services could be done right away. J. Stannard reiterated that this option would have to be voted in by members of the District. R. Gaiotti pointed out that they could hire the Town for services without a vote. S. Pinsonault commented that the Dorset Fire tax was due on October 1st and the Town office staff has taken numerous calls regarding this tax payment and people also bring their payments to the Town office because they know there are people available. B. Weiss expressed that a special vote is not needed to contract with the Town and D. Pinsonault noted that the Town has

better tax collection capabilities. J. Kingston asked if the Fire Department tax could appear as a separate line on the tax bills and R. Gaiotti replied it would be up to the Select Board and there is only a limited amount of room on the tax bill. Discussion ensued regarding one fire department with two fire houses; reward of saving money; and possible gain in volunteers if more compensation is available through savings. J. Stannard expressed that the Fire Chief's would have to weigh in on the options and R. Gaiotti answered, absolutely, everyone in both Districts would have to agree to restructuring. J. Stannard stated that the main basis of choosing any options has to be the safety of the firemen, people and protection of property.

A. Casey, Dorset Fire Chief, noted that the fire load for each Department needs to be considered – fire load is how much can burn in each district measured in square feet. R. Gaiotti remarked that previously each department was isolated, but now with better equipment and roads it makes is easier to share assets. It was also noted that currently there is inequality in compensation for firemen in the two departments; the general population of Dorset as a whole is declining/older causing a lack of volunteers; and it is harder to attract and keep volunteers. There is a need to discuss how to make the two departments sustainable and work together for improved results. S. Ludlam stated that everything could be done by agreements which do not require one department and felt that equalizing the tax rate should be first. R. Gaiotti suggested that the departments have discussions for what each District would like to do and create a written outline of their wishes.

E. Maloney asked if the Dorset Prudential Committee can secure a contract for services and tax collection that would agree with their bylaws and R. Gaiotti responded that in a VLCT study, the language to use for changing the bylaw at their annual meeting was given by the VLCT lawyer. S. Ludlam reiterated that it was his opinion that the tax equalization could be accomplished soon, but the rest of the options would need a lot of private action on the part of each Fire Department. The East Dorset District has already amended their bylaws. R. Gaiotti suggested that each District group come to the next meeting with a status update.

The next joint meeting will be October 21, 2015 at 7:30 p.m. at the Town Office.

Adjournment of meeting was called at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Aversano

Town of Dorset

Select Board

Date 9/28/15

East Dorset Fire District

Regular Meeting

Special Meeting

Dorset Fire District

(Please Print)

Name	Address	Representing	Testifying (Yes or No)
Sandra Pinsmault	1665 VT Rte 7	self	?
Eileen Maloney	3585 Mad Tom	"	?
Patrick Mc Ardle		The Rutland Herald	No
Joseph Clark	40 CRYSTAL VIEW WAY	DFD	No
Alan Casey	31 RT 30	DFD	
Allan J. Sullivan	932 McNAMARA	Self	No
Linda Sullivan	932 McNAMARA	Self	No
Bob Davidson	314 Village St	Self	No
Stephen Huslam	140 Mt Rd	ED Provential coma	YES
Darryl Hueste	E Dorset	me	yes
Ben Weis's			
Jack Stannard			

Town of Dorset, Vermont



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East Dorset, VT 05253

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Website: www.dorsetvt.org

Chartered 1761

August 25, 2015

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

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 - *lack young people*
2. Effect on existing department procedures and traditions
3. Demographic pressure (general lack of young people)
4. Funding/ Taxes