

Town of Charlemont, MA

Select Board Meeting Minutes for Thursday, December 21, 2017

Hawlemont Regional School Cafeteria, 7:00 P.M.

In attendance: Select Board Chair Sarah Reynolds, members Marguerite Willis and Beth Bandy; Residents Tommy Shields, Fire Jerry Dupree, Fire Chief Annear, Fire Captain Furlon, Fire Lt Hamel, Ambulance Director Dana Johnson, EMD Michael Walsh, Vaughn Tower, Firefighter Eric Dean, Firefighter Ken Hall

1. The Select Board Chair called the meeting to order at 7pm, and established that it was the intent for the Select Board to ask question and then to allow comments from the audience only after both interviews have finished. Sarah summarized that the Town advertised through Indeed, Craig's List, the Franklin County Fire Chief's Association, and Shelburne dispatch to all Emergency Services.
2. The candidate scheduled for 7:00 was Kenneth March. He reviewed his resume and work experience. He said he is not known for mincing his words, he's straight to the point, and gets the job done.
3. Sarah highlighted the number one problem in Charlemont is the lack of volunteers and asked how he would he suggest they fix this. He mentioned that volunteers have dropped 24% nationwide, that you have to make the experience an enjoyable event, have to recognize what they do, have community support for your volunteer fire department, and the executive support from the communities. When something happens, publicly recognize it. Throwing money at it is not always the answer. Reward people for a job well done. If the Town can offer perks, such as retirement; these can make the job easier.
4. Asked if he sees difficulties between Massachusetts and Vermont legislation and how to adjust, Ken responded that at the working level, when there is a fire there's not a lot of differences between call vol towns, elaborating that each town has its own identity. He was also asked if he maintained any Massachusetts licenses, or done any EMT work. No, because at the time EMTs were not reciprocal with VT, he let his MA license lapse.
5. Asked he see this part time position changing, he responded that would be something he would put to the Town and asked if services are increasing that they could use afford a full time employee? When asked if he can he work within the remaining budget until June 30th he stated he has to, mentioning that when he was the public works director, he never went over budget. Asked if there are ideas he would have about setting up next year's budget, he said he could have suggestions. Asked does he have any restrictions on taking more work as a retired employee, he stated no.
6. Asked how he could contribute to discussion around shared services, he mentioned that when he went to Vermont the mutual aid system was disjointed. He was able to bring them together to talk through concerns, to meet in the middle, and now the Deerfield Valley is doing training together, explaining that they got there through relationship building, "go to them".
7. Asked how he figured out his leadership style and whether he has an effective way of dealing with being the new guy in, Ken mentioned that he would have to rely on those guys who have been there for years because even the newest firefighter has something to offer to which others should listen.

8. Asked if he is able to follow through on Fire Inspections, Ken stated yes, that there are some nuances like hard wired, battery, age, and understanding the code book.
9. It was mentioned by the Select Board that the town from which Ken came is similar to Charlemont. Ken stated the laws are the laws. It was asked if there are any laws that can be removed/ changed to alleviate that which wouldn't affect life and limb. He'd have to research, and stated that most of the fire code comes about because of what has happened in the past. Most times they are put in place as a life safety measure.
10. Asked what will be biggest obstacle, he stated that it would be getting to know the people.
11. Ken is 24.4 miles away; it takes 39.11 minutes seconds to get here.
12. Ken was asked if there is any regional configuration beyond mutual aid. He remarked that regionalization works famously in other parts of the country, for example Prince Edward County or LA County Fire. Cape Cod has a somewhat regionalized model that works under a Fire Commission where each Town has their own Chief, and they are managed through the Commission.
13. Asked if they have mutual aid in Vermont, Ken shared that mutual aid is an automatic. With Deerfield Valley mutual aid system, they sit down and talk about their apparatus and their equipment, and determine what is sufficient based on what the mutual aid system needs. In the Fire service sharing equipment is difficult to do because you're all doing whatever is needed at the same time, similar to Highway Departments sharing plows, versus a bucket truck that could be shared. Regionalization has to be with the thought of improving the service delivery. This has been a hot potato that has been going around for 15 years. One example of a forced regionalization is Groton - West Groton and Groton - which failed miserably.
14. It was stated by the Select Board that it can't be at an additional cost.
15. Asked if they recruit from their high school, he said they used to but in recent years the interest dropped off. An example, some coaches were discouraging athletes from participating during sports seasons. Fire Companies have to find a way to keep up with their other interests.
16. Asked by Ken, where does the Town see the Fire Department in years' time. The Select Board stated that they don't know, but it doesn't mean they don't care; the Town is in flux, in an exploratory phase. The Town initially tried posting a position for here and Heath. At this point, Heath's Chief is leaving at the end of the year. In the new year Charlemont is talking about what is possible. The Select Board mentioned that they are trying to fix what's wrong. Trying to draw people in and address the existing problems is the most important.
17. At 7:40pm the Select Board thanked Ken at which time he provided his references.
18. At 7:45pm the Select Board welcomed their second candidate Dennis Annear, our current Fire Chief's brother.

19. Asked why he applied for the job, Dennis stated that the Charlemont Fire Department is close to him because it is where he started. He was able to move on to work with Orange for 23 years and retire, and is now here today. The department will always be his home town, though he didn't move back here. He found out about the position when he was at the Franklin County Fire Chief's Association. With his experience, and knowledge, it gives him an opportunity to give back.
20. Asked when it opens up as a permanent in six months whether he would be interested, he said possibly. He would have to consult with the County Retirement Board. This six months would not affect his retirement; beyond that he is not sure.
21. Asked if he sees himself being able to help, he asked where the Select Board want the Fire Department to go and said it would be up to the Chief to build off that. The Select Board mentioned that they are looking at what different options might be. This interim period will be when they start digging in and looking at details of different configurations.
22. Dennis mentioned that he has been involved in three studies, the last was quite extensive, through Direct Local Technical Assistance (DLTA funds) to look at Montachusett joining Athol and Orange career departments. They presented the three basic configurations that work. Dennis was also on the Hiring Committee in Wendell to hire the Fire Chief who serves both departments of Wendell and New Salem. He could provide the Select Board some direction and information. He could dig out information from old studies. A large number of studies have been done to look at small and large configurations. The DLTA study outlined how it could be done through the MA law. The Board mentioned that the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) has been working with towns to look at shared services, but that the challenge is the pushback. Dennis mentioned that the simplest way you to handle shared services is to look at an intermunicipal agreement, that you can opt out of at any time.
23. The Select Board asked about the loss of local control. Dennis shared that the intermunicipal agreement gives more control, but offers more stability because it usually establishes an agreement for a length of time and time period to opt out.
24. A Select Board member mentioned that the last founding member of the Charlemont Fire Department Ray Purrington endorsed Dennis as Interim Fire Chief.
25. A Select Board member stated that she believes we are on the cusp of an economic revival once we obtain the recreation tax and high-speed internet access but until those two things happen, she is personally doing financial triage.
26. Dennis was asked what the hardest part of being the Chief before and how he envisions himself melding in. He responded saying they're in a transition as a Fire Department, that he hasn't spoken to them, but anyone who wants to volunteer to provide that service, he wants to give them a reason to volunteer. Dennis had 9 full-time and 24 part-time firefighters, and one station that was all call vol.
27. The Select Board mentioned that one of the things that came up at the Select Board meeting is that they need someone to do inspections. He said that is not a problem. He did it for 23 years, saying they were very strong on enforcement in businesses.

28. The Select Board mentioned that they were told this Chief was the last that was grandfathered. Dennis said he would have to look into his certifications, and call John Wood at the State Fire Marshall's Office.
29. Asked how far he lives, 13 miles. Dennis is still involved in responses. He mentioned that someone from the Town of Charlemont should attend the Regional Emergency Planning Committee. Dennis mentioned that he is a member of the Fire Chief's Association of Massachusetts.
30. Asked if he would you recommend combining the Fire and Ambulance Departments, he stated that's a whole discussion. His belief is that EMS belongs in the Fire Department. He referenced covering 100 square miles with 4.5 towns, and mentioned that it is very hard, no matter where you place the station.
31. Asked about volume, Dennis mentioned they had a \$1M budget and were bringing a little over \$500k. If the Commonwealth allows Towns to provide community paramedic, that is the direction the Towns should go. New Hampshire just started it with the opioid epidemic, providing education rather than just Narcan.
32. The Select Board asked about his management style, how he brings people together. Dennis shared that they have to have ownership and feel wanted and needed. Then you have to try to show them that you're headed somewhere, or knowing that they're providing a service, that they are well respected and wanted in the community.
33. Asked how to do this, Dennis suggested by creating some stability for 6 months, they will be moving in that direction. He said they have to make sure they are well aware that they are involved in any discussions, saying information is huge.
34. Asked if he can work within the remaining budget, he said it depends what is in the budget. He didn't find the budget online. He didn't go through the whole town budget.
35. The Select Board mentioned that they are coming up to budget season, and asked is he willing to make recommendations for the budget season, to which he said yes.
36. Asked if he was still a licensed EMT, he hasn't decided whether he'll recertify, but he is still a paramedic.
37. Dennis feels this is an opportunity to give back.
38. Encouraged to ask questions, he said he could wait to be hired. The Select Board again encouraged him to ask, to which he responded by asking if he could get a letter stating he is required to have internet and email as part of the job to be able to write it off, and that he would require a town email.
39. At 8:14 the Select Board thanked him for coming.
40. After Dennis left the Select Board asked for feedback from residents. Vaughn Tower thinks one question the board missed is hours, how many hours and what the compensation was, and that there was no set agenda for both candidates. Beth stated that hours and compensation come up by hearing what

their expectations are around different activities. Marguerite referenced the job description which states 400-500 per year. Beth mentioned that this is an opportunity to look at what the position requires.

41. Eric Dean asked about the miles and whether the vehicle goes home with them. If the Town's vehicle goes out of Town, it will increase the cost to the Town. The Select Board doesn't know if they can require residency. Dana stated yes, Springfield does it, some schools do it.
42. Shane's suggestion is to have another Select Board meeting next week. Beth pointed to the fact that this is the last time they can meet before the Fire Chief's resignation is effective January 1.
43. The person coming in is going to have to deal with volunteers and code enforcement. Doug would argue that a person doesn't know what they're coming into. The Select Board responded saying they want someone to be adaptable. Doug stated that the Town needs a strong Chief. The Select Board mentioned that the problem is a moving target and trying to address it is difficult.
44. Shane stated that both are qualified. He doesn't think it matters if they live 15 miles from here. Shane thinks the Board should ask how each of the Fire Department members feels, who they would pick and why?
45. The Select Board discussed meeting Tuesday 7pm at Town Hall to choose its Interim Fire Chief.
46. The meeting was adjourned at 8:47pm.

Respectfully submitted by Peg Dean

Draft minutes until approved by the Select Board

References submitted by Ken March