

**Charlestown, NH Board of Selectmen Workshop
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 22, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.
Community Room and by Zoom**

Selectboard Present: Jeffrey Lessels (Chair), Jeremy Wood (Vice-Chair), William Rescsanski, Shelly Blouin-Andrus and Nancy Houghton

Staff Present: Mark LaFlam – Interim Fire Chief
Diane Dezan – Human Resources
Jessica Dennis – Administrative Assistant
Millie Barry – Recorder

Call to Order: Jeff Lessels chair of the Board called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

Consent Agenda:

Ms. Houghton moved the consent agenda, Ms. Blouin-Andrus seconded motion, motion passed 5-0

Minutes of Previous Meetings:

Ms. Blouin-Andrus moved to accept the minutes as printed of:

September 15, 2021 – Regular
September 15, 2021 – Non-public #1 Legal
September 15, 2021 – Non-public #2 Legal
September 15, 2021 – Non-public #3 Hiring
September 15, 2021 – Non-public #4 Hiring
September 15, 2021 – Non-public Reputations
Nancy Houghton seconded the motion, motion carried 5-0

Human Resources:

Cell Phone Policy -Mr. Lessels requested to address the cell phone policy first.

Ms. Dennis said there were two cell phone policies circulated a few weeks ago. One is the original policy giving employees a \$40.00 reimbursement. The other was a Town provided cell phone. Ms. Blouin-Andrus stated the Town has access to enough phones so that if employees wanted or needed a phone the Town would provide one for them. A reimbursement was not necessary. Ms. Dennis said the reimbursement affected three people using their personal cell phones for Town business who are receiving a reimbursement. Ms. Blouin-Andrus said as an example, if someone uses their personal cell phone to text 12 messages, the Town was reimbursing them \$40.00. Mr. Rescsanski said he was one of the three and would use a Town cell phone and have messages forwarded to his personal phone.

Mr. Wood motioned to approve the second cell phone policy as written, which provides a Town Cell phone to individuals and no reimbursement. Ms. Blouin-Andrus seconded, motion carried 5-0. A letter will be sent to the three affected employees.

Employee Review Letter – Included in the packet – Ms. Blouin-Andrus motioned to accept the letter, policy review process and budget letter as written, Ms. Houghton seconded the motion, motion carried 5-0.

Personnel Policy - Included in the packet – Ms. Dezan questioned, under categories of employment, (page 7), if full time employment was 32 hours or 40. Ms. Dennis said the Town had always considered 40 hours as full time. Ms. Dennis added the State considers 32 hours for retirement purposes. The board agreed 40 hours was full time. Ms. Dennis questioned (page 7) the introductory period. Did the Town want to continue a 6-month introductory period or change to 90 days? The Board agreed to change this period to 90-days. Page 16, regarding holiday pay. Ms. Dennis said the police department worked 12 hour shifts but was paid for an 8-hour holiday. Ms. Dennis said this also applies to the highway department during the summer months. Ms. Blouin-Andrus believes holiday pay should be reimbursed as per the employees regular, normal standard hours. The Board discussed at length, years of service versus days of vacation. Ms. Dennis stated the current policy caps out at 20 days of vacation. Mr. Rescsanski believed vacation days needed to cap out. He was in favor of the policy as it was. Ms. Dennis said in the current policy, employees did not get paid vacation until employed for one year. The Board agreed to change the year to six months. Ms. Blouin-Andrus suggested for each additional year, after 20 years, to add one day of vacation. The Board also discussed vacation buyouts. Ms. Dezan suggested offering a buyout to employees having more than two weeks of vacation time. Ms. Blouin-Andrus said employees were required to use their time or lose their time. Mr. Rescsanski believes vacation is meant to be used. Rather than give more vacation or pay-outs, his suggestion was to raise employee pay. Ms. Houghton said she did not believe in carrying over anything. Ms. Dennis said there were decisions made by the board affecting departments making it difficult for people to take time off. The Board will talk about this issue at another time. Mr. Rescsanski confirmed the introductory period was 90-days and suggested vacation to begin accruing at start date. The Board agreed employees would work six months before earning vacation pay. Mr. Wood believed a 50% buyout at 20 years and more would be a bonus for longevity. For example, if an employee had 20 days of vacation, they could take a buyout of 10 days. Mr. Rescsanski said he would never agree to buy-out vacation time. This is an incentive to not use vacation. Vacation was to be used to relax and come back to work fully re-charged. The Board agreed, with Mr. Rescsanski dissenting, at 20 years and more a 50% buyout. He stated he believed this was a disincentive to use vacation time. Page 19, Jury Duty and Witness Leave. The policy will be changed to a full-time employee who works 40 hours per week. Mr. Rescsanski questioned workers compensation for employees being asked to submit to exams from a physician other than their personal physician. Ms. Dezan said workers compensation is regulated by the Town's carrier.

Ms. Dennis said the personnel policy would be reviewed by legal counsel before becoming final.

Pay scales – Ms. Dezan stated she had found information used by the Town of Hopkinton in 2016. The Board felt the two Towns were comparable. Mr. Wood suggested using the NH starting average as a minimum. If that average is higher, what employees are making now is the starting place, if the NH average is lower, the Town would consider adjusting the employee pay. Ms. Dennis had information regarding salaries and job descriptions from NHMA (New Hampshire Municipal Association) based on population to use as a starting point. Ms. Blouin-Andrus felt the Charlestown area was below most of the NHMA averages and to consider the numbers carefully. Ms. Dezan said she would have information on job grade and minimums available at the next workshop meeting. Ms. Blouin-Andrus requested Ms. Dezan forward the information she had available a week in advance of the review.

Job Descriptions – Ms. Blouin-Andrus stated she was fine with any job descriptions approved by a specific department head. Ms. Blouin-Andrus said any job that fell under the recreation department had not been reviewed or approved by the recreation director. All descriptions will include an escape clause such as, ‘any other projects or work that may arise throughout the course of the daily/weekly/annual activity’. Ms. Dennis said all department heads should review the descriptions regularly to be sure they are up to date.

Background Checks – Ms. Dennis said Primex had not given her a solid answer but suggested the Town have a policy on background checks. Ms. Blouin-Andrus suggested background checks be waived for soccer referees for the current year until clarification was received. Ms. Blouin-Andrus motioned the Town no longer require referees for recreation sports to have a background check. Ms. Houghton seconded motion, motion passed 5-0.

The Board recessed at 6:07 p.m. reconvening at 6:21 p.m.

Fire/Rescue Selectboard Visions

Mr. Lessels read Ms. Blouin-Andrus written suggestions or ‘homework’ for the fire department (information included in the packet). – Ms. Houghton said she believed advanced training was important also. Mr. Wood believed some of the responsibilities of fire department employees did not require advanced training. Mr. Wood said advanced personnel were not on the fire department so individuals could continue to perform duties as they do not fall under the fire department license. Ms. Houghton questioned the status of one individual. Mr. LaFlam said the person had not attended trainings or drills except for one. Mr. Wood said the individual Ms. Houghton referred to, was waiting to be contacted by the Board. He continued that personnel was a work in progress and thought the Board should discuss the structure and stipends. Ultimately, he believes the finance committee would determine stipends. The structure decided would eliminate some stipends. Mr. Wood agreed with the structure posed as Chief, Assistant Chief, Captain and three Lieutenants. If an employee wanted to be more than a Lieutenant, an EMR

(emergency medical response) training would be required. Ms. Houghton questioned if a Captain of the Fire Department and emergency medical was required. Mr. LaFlam said at a call, he would have over all command but the highest medical license on the scene was in charge of the call.

Mr. Blouin-Andrus said Mark Houghton recommended to the Board everyone do both sides. Mr. Wood said he did not want to lose people over the requirement of everyone required to do both EMS and Fire. Mr. Rescsanski asked how many Lieutenants there currently are for fire. Mr. LaFlam answered there were three, saying there was a span of control. In the Fire and emergency services there were basically 6-8. If there were 20 guys on scene, each Lieutenant (3) has a certain number of firefighters he/she is responsible for while performing a special service. Mr. LaFlam said once EMR training was complete, one EMT would be an officer and two other officers in the department, would be medically licensed. He repeated he wanted everyone to come together as a brotherhood. It did not matter what the person was doing but that everyone was part of a team. A specific team member, an officer would oversee equipment, complete reports and clean, maintain equipment. Ms. Blouin-Andrus said she liked how Mr. LaFlam was leading the group. She asked if data could be maintained so that next year the Board and department would know what was needed for the department. Mr. Rescsanski asked what administrative tasks needed to be done for EMS. He confirmed there was a Lieutenant in charge of EMS would be trained. Mr. Lessels said if the ambulance service cost the Town \$50,000, this year they would allocate \$21,000 for EMS leaving \$30,000. The Town's goal was to have EMS respond to a call if the response was quicker than Golden Cross for the comfort of the Town's citizens and they have Golden Cross service. He said the Town was providing rescue, basically EMT level service for less than the previous costs and they were doing what the taxpayers requested. Mr. LaFlam said in addition, 98% of the calls were covered but they would not be covering every call. He asked for guidance about what level of calls to respond to, stating Delta (life threatening other than cardiac or respiratory arrest) and Echo (life threatening, cardiac or respiratory arrest) were definite, Charlie (serious not life threatening – immediate) was a question. If called for assistance, the department would respond to Charlie level calls. Mr. Lessels confirmed they were answering Echo and Delta calls and when requested to Charlie with assistance. In answer to Ms. Houghton's question, Mr. LaFlam said responders were getting paid a one hour minimum. One licensed person and no more than two other licensed persons would respond. If more responded, they would not be paid. Ms. Blouin-Andrus suggested the Board meet with one individual to talk about specifics and his situation. The Board confirmed the structure Mr. LaFlam recommended of Chief, Assistant Chief, Captain and three lieutenants.

Mr. Wood motioned to amend the proposal approved May 24, 2021 of command structure of the Charlestown Fire Rescue to Chief, Assistant Chief, Captain and (3) Lieutenants. Mr. LaFlam confirmed one person would have a medical license. Ms. Blouin-Andrus seconded motion, motion carried 5-0. Mr. LaFlam said the name on the license issued could be amended at some time in the future through the State. Ms. Houghton questioned animosity within the department? Mr. LaFlam said there was some but nothing that was

standing in the way of progress. Mr. Wood believed change is difficult to get through. Mr. Lessels said there had been a good deal of change but there is a vision and mission. Change was difficult for staff and the Board but felt they were coming through the change with 'flying colors'!

Regarding the repair of the tanker, Mr. LaFlam said there was approximately \$6,500 in the budget. The Board approved Mr. LaFlam seek prices to repair the tanker. Mr. Rescsanski asked if there is money in the budget for ambulance and they do not think it will be used, can they go over budget in the fire department knowing they will be under budget in the ambulance department. Ms. Dennis said the board was able to use or move funds as long as the bottom line of the Town's budget did not go over. Mr. Rescsanski requested, when the tanker estimate was received would it be possible to have some analysis regarding whether the ambulance fund would be over or under budget. Mr. Lessels stated he was fairly certain the Town would not go over budget this year. In addition, there would also be ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds to make plans for. He complimented Ms. Dennis, Ms. Chaffee, Town Clerk/Tax Collector and Mrs. Snide, Town Treasurer for doing a great job with financials. The Board agreed with Ms. Houghton's suggestion if the estimate was \$5,000 or lower and the Fire Department budget would allow the expense they approve moving forward.

Mr. LaFlam continued the Town had been getting a good deal for many years as the Chief's noted salary (not stipend) was \$7,500 with a requirement of 960 hours comes to \$7.81 per hour. The Assistant Chief's required hours were 520 for \$3,600 making compensation \$6.92 per hour. A Captain was paid \$500 or \$.96 cents for 500 hours. Captains was expected to do training and take on other responsibilities. He asked the Board what the stipend or salary was for. Mr. Lessels said when the all-department budgets were submitted including salaries to Ms. Dennis with proposals, the Board would review and discuss the fire/rescue department and meet again with Mr. LaFlam.

The Board discussed future agendas, budgets and use of ARPA funds. Ms. Dennis said new health insurance rates had not been received but information she had received indicated the Town's rates could go down. She requested to explore another health insurance plan to offer employees.

In another matter Ms. Dennis relayed to the Board in an attempt to steal the catalytic converter of the Town owned Ranger, the converter was not stolen but the converter pipe, transmission line and frame of the truck were cut. The Town's insurance company, Primex, has totaled the vehicle. Even though the vehicle was older, there were no major problems with it. She said ARPA funds were to be used for public safety and well-being. Possibly there were other areas where the funds could be used such as EMR training.

Mr. Wood motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:34 p.m., Ms. Houghton seconded the motion, meeting adjourned.

Jeffrey Lessels

Jeremy Wood

Shelly Blouin-Andrus

William Rescsanski

Nancy Houghton

(Note: These are unapproved meeting minutes. All corrections will be made at the next Selectboard meeting September 29, 2021)