

December 3, 2018

To: Michael Freda – 1st Selectman

From: Pasquale Nuzzolillo – Chairman Board of Fire Commission

Re: Final Report – North Haven Fire & Medical Services Workshop Group

On Tuesday, November 27, 2018 the North Haven Board of Fire Commission met at our regularly scheduled meeting to discuss the recommendations from the Board of Finance Sub-Committee. Listed below are the conclusions our board has made:

Proposal # 1 – Basic Life Support (BLS) Public Service Area Responder (PSAR)

This was not discussed due to the current litigation in obtaining the PSA from the current contract holder. This initiative had already been taken by the Office of the Fire Chief with approval from First Selectman Michael Freda prior to meeting with members of the Board of Finance. This effort will continue until a decision has been reached through the Office of Emergency Medical Services.

Proposal # 2 – Emergency Dispatch

The hiring of additional dispatchers was discussed by the Board of Fire Commissioners. The commission agreed that additional dispatchers are needed, however the responsibilities of dispatch are at the discretion of the North Haven Police Department and the Police Commission. The Fire Commission and the Fire Chief look forward to future discussions prior to the Police Department budget workshop presentation. An increase in dispatchers will drastically improve routine fire scene operations and have some impact on the dispatching of FD resources based upon the ability to internally provide emergency medical dispatching versus an outside contractor presently utilized. There is little evidence to suggest that

a drastic reduction in the number of fire/EMS incidents is to be expected; however the proper utilization of resources and patient care will improve. The remaining suggestions regarding the reduction of phone calls that don't involve police or fire business is fully supported by this commission.

Proposal # 3 – Create second 24/7 Paramedic Unit

This proposal involved the addition of paramedic equipment and use of existing staff to enable a paramedic on our only water apparatus in our staffed fleet. The commission recognizes to do so may involve union negotiations and questions the risk in doing so to have the appropriate staff for fire suppression. The North Haven Fire Department responds on average to 60% medical incidents and 40% fire calls meaning the staffing and ability to operate at a fire scene cannot be compromised. The fire commission acknowledges the need for an additional operating Paramedic on shift; however this isn't the manner in which to accomplish this. This proposal was discussed during the November fire commission meeting with members of the public whom attended. Of those that attended, it was clear that while a second paramedic is needed, the fire department shouldn't sacrifice fire suppression assets or personnel.

Proposal # 4 – Additional Fire/Medical Career Personnel

The proposal detailed the hiring of two additional firefighters/paramedics to work Monday-Friday daytime shift only. The commission and Chief have determined that there is no particular day or time period during the week where adding daytime staff will satisfy the critical need for paramedic services to our town residents, business owners and visitors of our Town. The need for additional career fire personnel exists 24/7, 365 days a year. The commission agreed that the best way to utilize the \$140,000 set aside dollar amount would be to hire two (2) full time firefighters that will be assigned for duty by the Chief. As previously reported during prior Board of Selectman meetings this line is truly a \$280,000 FY line, with \$140,000 made available half way through this current fiscal year. It was suggested that the monies be released immediately in order for the fire commission to begin

interviews and background checks for the successful candidates to be completed in December. The new firefighters would be enrolled in the Spring 2019 Fire Academy Class and will graduate in June, 2019.

Proposal # 5 – Volunteer Firefighters

The commission is clearly aware that the Chief has improved training, respect and morale from the first day he became Chief. We strongly agree that a substantial increase in tax deferment be pursued which would require an amendment to Chapter 184 of the town ordinance. The Fire Commission asks that the First Selectman initiate contact with a town attorney to begin discussions on the needed amendments to address this change. Further discussion amongst the Board of Fire Commissioners involved the need to provide equal compensation or tax relief to those volunteers who reside out of town.

The reinstatement of a Deputy Chief of Operations has had a significant impact on the training of volunteer firefighters. This is a benefit which cannot be calculated and for which a dollar amount cannot be attributed. The future construction of the training center will certainly improve upon existing training opportunities and enhance retainment of volunteers.

Proposal # 6 – Vehicles & Equipment

The commission agrees that the Chief has requested PPE and Engine replacements during his workshops each year he has been Chief. We are in agreement to purchase a used ladder truck from down south. However, we believe the dollar amount could be in the upper \$300,000 range to do so. The creation or addition of an operating line to replace PPE on an annual basis versus large capital funding requests is fully supported. Furthermore the suggestion that a set dollar amount of capital funding be budgeted for and carried over year after year to purchase apparatus is a plan this fire commission has advocated for year after year. Funding should be put aside each year to cover the replacement of fire

apparatus at the Fire Chief's and fire commission's discretion based upon the needs of the Fire Department.

Proposal # 7 – Mutual Aid

This issue is currently addressed in the EMS Plan written by our Chief and will be modified once we are successful in taking back the PSA. It was agreed upon that 2-3 simultaneous incidents have become normal for our department and that mutual aid will be requested by the Shift Commander for major emergency situations. Mutual aid should not be misconstrued with the expectation that outside resources are able to respond to simultaneous incidents occurring within North Haven. The North Haven Fire Department isn't called upon to respond to surrounding towns for anything other than during the occurrence of major incidents as each surrounding department is staffed adequately based upon call volume. It is the opinion of the fire commission that the general public expects a North Haven fire apparatus to respond to medical emergencies in order to provide immediate medical care while awaiting the arrival of an ambulance which may take 10-20+ minutes.

Summary

In summary, our Board of Fire Commission agrees the best way to utilize the \$140,000 set aside dollars would be to hire two fulltime firefighters whose compensation would be \$120,000 inclusive of all benefits. This equates to a \$240,000 annual expense with an additional \$40,000 available which should; in part, be utilized to fund internal promotions in order to remain OSHA compliant with the span of control.

The new firefighters will be assigned at the Chief's discretion in a manner that will not cause any breach of the current labor agreement and will enhance services provided by the department. The mission statement of the North Haven Fire Department contains the following, "Our job is to provide for, the protection of

property from the adverse effects of fire, medical emergencies, and exposure to dangerous environments from either man-made or natural disasters”. It is imperative that the North Haven Fire Department take the appropriate steps to replace equipment and apparatus in a timely manner. It is equally as important to ensure the personnel are available to respond to all incidents which can be reasonably anticipated within the Town of North Haven.

Within the Board of Finance report the position is that volunteer firefighters are expected to respond to any second concurring fire incidents. In the past the Fire Chief has clearly depicted the lack of volunteer firefighter response, to no fault of their own but due to an overall decrease in membership and a change in the demographics of volunteers today. The lack of volunteer firefighters continues to be a nationwide issue, particularly within Connecticut where working families are balancing dual income families and multiple jobs which places a strain on the ability to volunteer. The majority of employers today will no longer allow employees to leave work if they're a volunteer firefighter. Through the Board of Finance's own admission within their report, the assumption was that volunteer staff numbers will not greatly increase/decrease over time. The Board of Fire Commissioners concurs with this assumption and in turn questions then how with increasing call volume, an aging population and a locally booming economic development climate the Fire Department can continue to meet the demands of the community without increasing staffing.

There appears to be a disconnect between what the Board of Finance and the Board of Fire Commissioners anticipates the public expectations to be. Essentially the Board of Finance has determined what the level of risk will be for all residents, visitors and business owners within North Haven. The Board of Fire Commissioners adamantly feels the public needs to be informed of the associated risks due to current staffing levels with regards to the ability to respond to fire and medical emergencies. The Board of Fire Commissioners fears that little attention will be paid to the staffing needs of the fire department until a catastrophe occurs which is a risk the fire commission isn't willing to take. Members of the Board of Fire Commission have collectively served decades

meeting monthly to discuss the administrative and operational needs of the fire department. It is therefore the opinion of this board that an increase in staffing must be funded to satisfy the following, 1) Increase the number of paramedics on duty at all times, 2) Increase the number of apparatus able to respond to incidents due to simultaneous calls for service and 3) Increase the number of firefighters on scene. During the public comment portion of the November fire commission meeting, attendees made it abundantly clear that the Fire Chief is most capable of determining what the needs of the fire department are and that the need for additional staffing must be considered.

This analysis of the Board of Finance final report is in no way intended to discredit any member of the Board of Finance for their opinions or findings. The Board of Fire Commissioners is appreciative of the time taken to review these matters and welcomes future constructive dialogue.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of all fire commissioners,

Pasquale Nuzzolillo
Chairman
North Haven Fire Commission