

Board of Firewards
Town of New London – Approved Meeting Minutes
July 15, 2024

The meeting was called to order at 4:31pm, with the following members in attendance: John Ryan, Bill Degnan, Pete Lauridsen, Karen Hoglund, and Steve Ensign. Selectboard representative Janet Kidder, Police Chief Emily Cobb, Fire Chief Jay Lyon, Lt Andrew Sarnevitz and NL resident Karen Epstein was also in attendance. There was a recommendation to accept the Draft Minutes of the May 13th meeting and they were accepted as posted. Motion made by John Ryan and seconded by Pete Lauridsen.

Dispatch update:

Police Chief Emily Cobb was invited to attend the Firewards meeting to give a Communication Center update. Chair Ensign had attended the most recent Selectboard meeting and said that the power point that Chief Cobb gave was informative about NL Dispatches history. Chief Cobb gave a brief overview and talked about the advancement in equipment over the last 10 years.

Steve asked about the mapping issues with Active Alert/911 and how the directions are not often incorrect. Chief Cobb indicated that CSI has been very responsive and is working to correct the issues. She used the example of the Highway mile markers. She also explain the information needs to be entered with the known location correctly.

Steve inquired about the radio interference on the Fire/EMS frequency. There is significant radio bleed-over by UNH Fire Alarm, located in Durham. Chief Cobb had originally talked to Bernie at Belltronics last year, when the interference first started. Unfortunately, New London's input frequency is the same as UNH's output frequency, with a different PL (Private Line). The Chief had reached out to UNH in this spring and Chief Rick Walker of the Barrington Fire Department seemed open to assisting with correcting the issues, however their common radio company has not been as responsive. Emily's last email was in the beginning of June, and she hasn't heard any updates. Steve suggested copying the Selectboard and Firewards in future emails, and was very supportive as this is a real safety concern during busy times. Belltronics has applied for an additional frequency if needed, but there will be a significant cost as all radios will need to be reprogrammed. The Mt. Sunapee repeater sight was discussed and this might be a good time to reprogram if needed. The Chief hopes that this additional sight will be online this fall. The grant was approved by the Governor and Council and equipment has been ordered.

The Chief also talked about the two recent trainings for Departments using the new software and the dispatchers staff training. Emily is in the process of doing an analysis to figure out the time it takes to tone a call, but this requires lessening to the recorded tapes to more accurately determine times. There is a standard from the time received and the tones being transmitted. Steve inquired about the time it takes to dispatch a call. Chief Cobb describe that process and the difference between the 911 centers in Concord/Laconia and the 526-2626 number (NL Dispatch). When calling 911, the operators are trained to assist the caller and provide medical care, where NL Dispatch simply takes the information and contacts the appropriate agency/ies. Jay also explained about the time it takes for 911 to gather the information and how sometimes the delay can be slightly frustrating. John Ryan gave an example of this when he came across an individual that needed an ambulance on 103a, and the multiple questions that they ask. Bill Degnan clarified that the significant number of questions were EMS calls only, and that PD & Fire calls are forwarded relatively quickly the designated Dispatch Center/s.

The Main Street water line replacement was discussed and Chiefs Cobb and Lyon talked about some issues, but generally speaking has been going well and is on track for completion at the end of September or beginning of October. An anticipated punch list, will take an additional month.

The Firewards thanked Chief Cobb for attending and her update of current state of the Communications Center.

General Updates regarding NLFD calls and mutual aid:

NLFD has responded to 474 calls. Four of those calls were today. We are currently ahead of last year's numbers, however last year the NLFD responded to 112 calls just in July. Jay though the fireworks on Pleasant Lake went very well and Selectmen Kidder had received some very positive feedback. The NLFD is getting geared up for Hospital Days and the next event will be the September 11 remembrance.

FY 2026 Budget:

The Chief talked about preparation of the FY 2026 Budget. He has been working on the next budget and is still waiting on some quotes. He will plan on emailing the draft to the Firewards over the next few weeks. There will be increase in Overtime as there is an average of 17 extra OT a pay period. PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) for a set of gear, jacket & pants is now \$4,300 and boots are now over \$600. This year the Budget Committee is looking for a more thorough explanation of the line items and justification of needs.

Jay also expects to request an increase for call coverage. A recent survey was sent out to the membership and although most members don't join the FD for the money, a common theme was compensation. Chief Lyon talked about shortages and participation levels and is very concerned moving forward. He is concerned about staffing levels and reiterated the information talked about at the last Firewards meeting.

Overnight Staffing:

Chief Lyon talked about the live-in program and opening up the program to students that are attending NHTI in Laconia. Connor Heath has indicated that he would like to participate again for the 2024/25 Academic year. Jay had hoped that the NLFD would have two students this year, but the second applicant has withdrawn as he will not be attending the Fire Science Program. This has been a very successful in the past, and it's benefitted the Town of New London significantly. Steve thought that this was something to look at in the future, and would like to see some additional information as interviews and vetting of applicants would be needed.

Upcoming Performance Evaluation:

Chair Ensign asked for the other Board Members for input with regards to Jay Lyon's evaluation. Please email Steve with any information that the Board would like to have included. The Board will plan on going into a non-public session at the August meeting. It was also note that Chief Lyon will be evaluating Lt Sarnevitz as he has been with us for a year already.

Next Meeting: August 19th, Motion to adjourned was at 5:38pm