

**Board of Firewards
Town of New London – Meeting minutes
August 19, 2024**

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 pm with the following members present: John Ryan, Karen Hoglund and Steve Ensign. Selectboard representative Janet Kidder, New London Fire Chief Jay Lyon, and Karen Epstein were also in attendance. There was a motion to accept the Draft minutes of the July Meeting and they were accepted as posted.

Updates:

Calls have been steady. We have had 55 calls to date for the month of August.

- We assisted Sutton Fire with a rollover involving entrapment.
- The department assisted Sunapee with a sinking boat in Georges Mills. We used our pumps and generator to help them out along with their fire boat. During that call we also assisted a boater who had hit some rocks and had a significant hydraulic leak.

Water main replacement:

The project has been on schedule and they have installed the temporary waterline in front of the station. The elementary school has been great about us utilizing their property to park our apparatus and personal vehicles during the project. When the replacement piping is installed, it should take one day for the waterline to be placed in front of the station and then another day for the sprinkler line hookup.

Ladder 3 is in Vermont for repairs and the Sunapee ladder will respond if needed for a reported building fire. Our Engine 1 will run in place of Ladder 3.

Hospital Days went well, without any issues during the week.

Patriots Day will be on September 11th at 11am at the New London Fire Station. This remembrance event involves the 4th and 5th graders, and Amy Lyon will be the Master of Ceremonies again.

Budget:

A great deal of thought and time has gone into preparing the budget

The most significant proposed increase is in salary administration, especially for on-call and per-diem shifts.

The current operating model has worked extremely well for over 25 years, but with changing times we try to meet the challenges impacting our members while being fiscally responsible and taking care of the community. Chief Lyon presented a graph that showed the demographics in 1987, 2008, and 2024. This graph depicts the change over the past years. Especially in the number of members who live and/or work in town. The model that we have been using since the late 90s is no longer effective. We currently have three (3) full time employees and FF Edmunds as per diem on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. While we try to utilize our career personnel to cover the vacancies, last year Lt. Sarnevitz worked over 400 overtime hours between call back and call coverage.

We are currently struggling to cover all on-call shifts which are instrumental with reducing operating cost and membership burnout. This is not the only area of decline as we have noticed a decrease in the number of calls our members can assist with. The on-call issues have really been problematic since the first of the year as some key members were hired by other departments and there were some others with life changes. Chief Lyon explained that we are plugging leaks and inquired, how long do we have before this band aid no longer is effective. A discussion followed as we address recruitment and retention issues and? How do we cover open shifts?

In the past we were fortunate to have CSC students and we have been very successful with the live-in program. Participants have been Lt. Tom Peltier, Lt. Quinn Miller and currently Connor Heath. They have helped supplement the night calls at very little cost to the town. We have been a great small training facility for others to transition to other career departments.

What has changed? The need economically for both parents to work and people needing down time. As of now we have 10 firefighters in their teens and 20s. The 50 and 60 year olds are the main providers right now, however do we do when they transition to a non-firefighter role. The NLFD is fortunate to have 7 fulltime members (from other municipalities) on our department. While their expertise is greatly appreciate, these members often have conflicts because of their work schedules and family obligations and are not available to respond to calls. Although recruitment in many departments is the issue, we currently have 40 members and it's the participation and encouragement for response that is the issue. This dilemma takes us to the budget.

There are several scenarios to cover shifts:

Do we hire Per Diem people to work Saturday and Sunday 7am to 7 pm? This comp rate would be at least \$25 an hour, and would we have interested individuals that would be able to cover these shifts. It was noted that the rate of compensation for the career members in the area of \$50 hour in Derry. This would be considered a Band-Aid fix as nights and weekends are a struggle. Steve Ensign pointed out that we need to start somewhere. We currently have 9 Officers including the Chief and out of those officers only four or five take call on a regular basis. There has been an issue with covering the night and weekend shifts, and therefore there was a recommendation to change on call from \$50 to \$75. Weekends excluding per-diem will be \$150. Steve stated that the buy-in has to be done by the Officers and how we incentivify them is a challenge. We are trending towards some significant changes to support the fire department and provide services to the town of New London. This is a first step into a reorganization.

The Standing Committee recently modified the participation requirements and are trying to work with the membership schedules and having reasonable expectations.

The operating model will be looking differently in the future as additional career employees will be needed. Jay talked about some of other towns and the issues everyone is facing. The other towns are now dealing with the same issues the NL did in the late 90s when he was hired to focus on preparedness, code compliance and training.

In a recent survey that was sent out to the membership, it was mentioned that compensation was a concern, but as important was time with their families. The Chief explained that on-call coverage has been opened up to the firefighters to cover vacant shifts, but there are still gaps in coverage. Steve commented that the per-diem and on-call pay is our starting point and might be best fiscal approach for the time being but changes are coming. Janet Kidder asked how many

calls we respond to for mutual aid. Chief Lyon reported that we respond to 45 mutual aid calls out the 950-ish calls annually. Janet asked if we bill other towns when we assist them. Jay explained that New London can only bill for forest fires and NL has to rely on our Mutual Aid partners for a larger incidents like the Hilltop Fire. He also talked about the relationships with contiguous towns and explained that there is no better training than a real fire or emergency event. Most mutual aid calls consist of structure fires but also include extrications, wilderness carry-offs, and water emergencies. The Chief also explained RSA 154-24, that was voted upon during Town Meeting.

Regarding the operating budget, it was explained that most line items will remain the same, with the exception of the personal protective equipment (PPE). A set of gear (jacket and pants) is now \$4,200.00 and is required to be replaced every 10 years. Jay talked about the increase in all equipment and talked about when we on bring on new people we use old gear. If members are going interior they are issued new gear.

Larger capital expenditure were discuss:

- The portable radios were just replaced and therefore the past annual contributions will be adequate.
- The SCBAs will be replaced this year. There is currently sufficient funds to replace all the air packs.
- The 1998 Tanker was to be replaced in 2028. Jay will be recommending re-chassisising the plastic body that would save the town 200K. The current amount of funds in the apparatus replacement account would cover this expense.

The question was asked, when do we start making the appropriate plans for station expansion, which will be required before FY2032 when the new ladder is ordered? The Chief has been in contact with Brian Carey and reviewed the plans with him. Brian though it was a good idea. Funds will be needed for plans. Do we asset money aside for the engineering as the FMO will need these as they issue the permits in NL? This will be discussed at future meetings.

The Board will receive the completed budget details by September 1st. Things can be tweaked and modifications made with a couple of weeks left before September 16th.

Board of Selectmen: Janet Kidder advised that they have a meeting tomorrow with DES to discuss the ground water contamination in the area of Newport Road behind the Hospital. DES was asked to come and speak to them and address what the ramifications are for the town. This has severe implications for the workforce housing and hopefully DES will have some answers.

The Board of Firewards then entered into Non-Public session under RSA 91-A:3, II2 (a+b) at 5:27pm following a motion made by John Ryan and seconded by Karen Hoglund

The Board came out of the Non-Public session at 5:40pm and approved a motion made by Karen Hoglund and seconded by John Ryan to seal the minutes of the Non-Public session until such time as the information becomes available in the public domain.

The next meeting will be Monday September, 16th at 4:30pm

Meeting adjourned at 5:45.