

Approved

SANBORNTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MINUTES

February 21, 2017

Town Offices

The Board of Selectmen convened in regular session on Tuesday, February 21, 2017 at 5:00 p.m. at the Town Offices. In attendance were Selectman Karen Ober, Selectman John Olmstead and Selectman Katy North. Town Administrator, Katie Ambrose was also present.

1.0 Pledge of Allegiance - Those in attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

2.0 Public Hearing Re: Warrant Article 12, Petition to discontinue the emergency medical service fire & rescue apparatus equipment & vehicle special revenue fund - Chair Olmstead asked that one of the Petitioners, Roger Grey, present the petition warrant article.

Roger Grey stated the Town pays around \$200K in ambulance services every year out of the general fund and \$50K of ambulance revenue goes into the ambulance revenue fund, which is restricted to ambulance purchases rather than being sent to the general fund to be used for ambulance services. What's wrong with taking the ambulance revenue and putting back into the general fund, to help defray the costs of running the ambulance because that is what other Towns do and what Sanbornton did prior to the 1999 Town Meeting vote. Mr. Grey noted the Town property assessments is 3% commercial and 95% residential land & building, so Sanbornton desperately needs additional revenue sources and discontinuing the ambulance revenue fund frees up \$50K a year for other uses and would not leave the Fire Department "high & dry" because it has fire truck CRF with an estimated \$267K and another \$70K to be voted on this year. Mr. Grey suggesting renaming the fire truck CRF to include the ambulance, just like the ambulance fund was renamed in 2008 and 2011, to allow for purchase of other equipment but doesn't mean that a second ambulance couldn't be purchased. Mr. Grey stated the average calls per year is 200, so the ambulance is not overburdened and it wouldn't make economic sense to purchase another one at this time. The Sanbornton CIP Committee estimates that the DPW is going to need \$507K in the next 6 years to replace aging equipment and the discontinuance of this fund would help pay for that.

Bill Whalen stated he is in favor of maintaining the fund and is something he looks forward to every year because the funds are presented as a warrant article by the Fire Department and the money is not raised by taxation, which is voted on at Town Meeting and he feels that is the best way to go. Placing the revenue into the general fund or the unreserved fund balance, which can only be justified by the Selectmen to be used to offset the tax rate, which they didn't do this year because there was a surplus from last year's money, it would be like placing the funds nowhere. Mr. Whalen noted that every year the Fire Department will have to come in and fight for every piece of equipment or anything they need with a big discussion at Town Meeting and now, we rarely discuss anything about the Fire Department because the monies are not raised by taxation and it

would be a mistake to do away with the fund. Roger Grey has some good points but there are other ways to raise money for the Town but not this one.

Johnny Van Tassel stated there is some sound reasoning but the ambulance is about to be replaced and if the fund is taken away then the Town will need to “lease/purchase” for the ambulance or other equipment, which will need to be raised by taxation and will not be saving the Town money by putting the revenue into the general fund but will be swapping one thing for another. Mr. Van Tassel noted most items are purchased out of a department’s operating budget and the revenue goes into the general fund but at least this way, the people get to see what comes into the Fire Department and how it’s dispersed. Mr. Van Tassel stated he doesn’t really see the point in changing the fund now, the people have voted on this in the past because it shows the money coming in and how it flows.

Sara Dupont explained that she is an ER Social Worker and works with the EMS Crew on a daily basis when someone is having the worst day of their lives and the idea of not having a replacement ambulance or secondary ambulance has several implications beyond the fiscal ones. Ms. Dupont informed the Selectmen there have been 30-40 calls this year when a second call has gone out to another surrounding Town, which creates a systemic issue with other agencies to resolve our own issues. Ms. Dupont stated when we look at the financial piece, we need to decide how much we value life in our own community of 2,900 residents, some full-time residents, some summer residents and tourists but we need to show we care because there is a ripple effect when fiscal matter more than lives.

Tim Lang stated this is a self-sustaining fund, so the revenue is from the Fire Department and used by the Fire Department, which I think they have done a good job. Mr. Lang noted the purpose of that fund was changed because they realized they were making more revenue and could use the fund for more things without taxation. Mr. Lang expressed concern with the decision in 7 years, to purchase a new ambulance or pave a road which would be presented to us (the Town) with or without the fund. Mr. Lang noted the funds are currently spent by the Legislative Body and if the funds go to the general fund they will be spent by the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Lang stated he is in support of the fund because it maintains a good level tax rate.

Alan Graustein spoke in support of the Fire Department and all they do for the community but the problem he sees is increased taxes, which he has seen every year except last year. Mr. Graustein noted a second ambulance with additional staff would create a bigger burden for the taxpayer’s to bare and he lives on a fixed income.

Melanie Van Tassel clarified that this petition warrant article has nothing to do with a 2nd ambulance but is about purchasing another ambulance when the one we currently have is no longer in service. Mrs. Van Tassel noted the allocations into the other Fire Department fund is just enough to recycle the equipment at the end of its life and the Town would need to double the savings to replace two vehicles, so how is this a savings to the taxpayers? Mrs. Van Tassel explained that it will cost a quarter of a million dollars

to replace the ambulance as a guesstimate, which takes one year to build from start to finish and there is no plan for replacement and will only raise the tax rate.

Marla Davis expressed her thanks to the Fire Department for the level of care they provide because she has lived in many other communities and by far, has never met people who care as much about what they do. Mrs. Davis explained that this is a special revenue fund and is not a capital reserve fund (CRF), the special revenue fund is only money that comes from ambulance calls. Mrs. Davis explained that the Town may have 2,900 residents which swells to about 10,000 residents during the summer months when it comes to service and those people pay into this fund as well, so keep that in mind. Capital Reserve Funds are something else.

Fire Chief and resident, Paul Dexter stated he would like to clarify that the \$200K discussed by Mr. Grey is also a payroll number and not just medical calls but fire calls as well, the other \$100K is the operating budget and we do not have two separate pots to pull that money from. Secondly, the money that goes into the ambulance special revenue fund annually is there for a specific purpose and the Town expanded upon that a few years ago, to try and save taxpayers money for things like protective equipment clothing, the command car, etc., which didn't cost taxpayers a dime. The fire truck CRF (\$70K) is based on design through the capital improvements program's plan that goes out 34 years and determines when apparatus need to be replaced, this fund would need to be doubled just to make that plan fluid. Chief Dexter stated he and the Fire Department do not recommend eliminating the fund because it is used to offset taxes and is not a "slush fund". This is a good thing for the taxpayers of Sanbornton.

Craig Davis explained that he sits on the CIP Committee and this is "smoke & mirrors" and if this goes through it will blow up how the whole plan of how the Town functions. We are going to put free money into the general fund and pretend everything is going to be fine but everyone's taxes will go up because now funds will be taken out of the budget to buy equipment instead of the revenue generated by the ambulance. If this fund goes away, when we need a new ambulance there will be no money to buy one and agree we need to find a way to fund new roads but this is not the way to do it. I was a Police Officer and have thrown people in ambulances, this is not a dump truck we are talking about and time is of the essence when you dial 9-1-1, plus we are all getting older.

Ralph Rathjen stated he has been a resident since 2010 and has never heard of any issues with this fund or whether it was serving its purpose. Mr. Rathjen asked the Selectmen if there has ever been any issues with this fund over the past 20 years or attempts do something else with the fund in that time. Chair Olmstead replied none we know of. Selectman North added the fund's use was expanded in 2008 and 2011, to help reduce taxes. Mr. Rathjen questioned whether it would be really wise to eliminate a fund in 20 days from now that has been in place for 20 years.

Transfer Station Manager, Kevin Austin stated he signed the petition and signed because it was presented as two ambulances for the Town but didn't realize it was funds that the ambulance brought to Town. Manager Austin doesn't support this article and a second ambulance is a different discussion.

Linda Suroweic stated she has been on the Fire Department for 20 years and has been in her family longer than that, it was said that the department misses 20 calls per year which may be true and that's fine, unless it's you. Chair Olmstead asked if the ambulance is out and the department gets a call, do we still respond? Ms. Suroweic replied if we are available, we do but with an engine or personal vehicle.

Mary Baxter stated the fund has been so responsibly over the years and transparently plus spent responsibly.

Roger Grey presented the Board with an opinion from the NHMA. The Board took under advisement.

Tim Lang asked if the Board would start to expend the ambulance special revenue funds and steer away from precedent by going before Town Meeting as a warrant article to expend the funds because for him that's the caveat, the fund is so transparent. Selectman North replied it is a special revenue fund set up by statute and can only be used for the special purpose it was set up for.

There was a discussion regarding mutual aid and when another department responds they bill out for those ambulance services, not Sanbornton. Chief Dexter noted the fund was changed in 2011 because if something happens to the engine or the ambulance they would need to wait for Town Meeting approval, which could be a long time and is why the Selectmen are the expending agents.

Craig Davis asked if we buy a second ambulance then we wouldn't be running the current one into the ground? Chief Dexter replied correct, by not sending one to the "White Farm", if something were to happen, then we would have a backup plus it would help with dual transports, which is all based on the CIP plan.

Town Meeting is to be held on Wednesday, March 15, 2017 at 7 p.m.

3.0 ADJOURNMENT – Chair Olmstead made a **motion** to adjourn the meeting at 5:56 p.m. Selectman North **seconded** the motion and the **motion passed unanimously**.

4.0 NEXT MEETING(S) – The Board of Selectmen's next regularly scheduled meeting will be held on **Wednesday, February 22, 2017 @ 5 p.m.** at the **Town Offices**.

Respectfully submitted,
April Rollins, Administrative Specialist

(These minutes are in draft form and are subject to review & approval at the next regularly scheduled Selectmen's meeting. Meeting minutes are not official unless they are viewed on the Town's web-site www.sanbortnonnh.org or are on file with the Town Clerk.)