

BOARD OF ENGINEERS MEETING

FEBRUARY 9, 1999

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Meeting called to order at 7:45 p.m.

Members present: Michael S. Trovato, Chief

Warren Alexander, Deputy Chief

Adam Wolf, District Chief

James Roderick Jr., District Chief

Joseph Notaro, District Chief

Gerard Menangas, Captain #3

E.J. Martinez, Captain #2

Others present: Mary Jo Avellar, Selectmen

Marilyn Miller, Advocate Reporter

Sue Harrison, Banner Reporter

Chief Trovato stated that at the last board meeting Captain Ronald White of Engine Company #1 advised the Board that five veteran firefighters from #1 would be retiring from the department as of April 1st, 1999. White added that it was not a threat and the men did not want to leave the department but they felt they have no protection and a lack of support from town officials.

The Chief advised those present that the Board of Engineers knew the story behind Paul Silva's and Gerard Menangas's case and felt that they should not have been charged by the Police, but they were charged and Silva's legal fees ran up to \$13,000.00. The day before the case was heard, the District Attorney's Office was trying to make a deal with Silva that he pay \$100.00 in court costs and the charges against him would be dismissed. He was told that if he did not pay the money there would be no plea bargaining and all the men would have to go to trial. He added that although the authorities had information from Mr. Patrick that nothing had been stolen from his establishment, Silva was still forced to go through the humiliation, aggravation and expense. When Silva decided to go before the judge, the District Attorney's Office changed its mind the court costs were dropped and the case dismissed. At that point Silva asked for reimbursement of his legal fees.

The Chief reminded those present that when he and the members of #1 joined the department they were teenagers, they are now business owners who risk losing everything by trying to help the community keep the tax rate down and do a good job. He added that the firemen also spend many hours training that they are not paid for, recently it was the Cairns Iris Helmet Training at the Air Force Base.

The next day the Chief met with Town Manager Bergman to advise him of the situation at hand and that it was a cry for help from the firemen and he could not afford to lose the men.

Captain Martinez stated that it was an unfortunate situation but no one from House #2 had informed him that they were leaving the department. He added that it would be nice to have some protection from the Town but he was not going to worry about it and would continue to respond to fire calls and do his job.

Chief Trovato advised Martinez that one member from #2 had advised him if the members of #1 left, he was going with them and another member said he would just as soon fight fires through a window rather than go into a building.

Captain Gerard Menangas felt that firemen should be protected by the town the same as the police department is protected. He added that there were a couple of men from #3 who were talking about walking out with the members of #1.

Deputy Chief Alexander advised those present that the department could not afford to lose any members. He added that the number of members had decreased through the years from 87 to 60 and if the department lost six more, we would be down to 54 members. With the backing of the Wellness Law, there are a half dozen people who want to join the department but there are fewer people responding to calls and the department cannot afford to lose anyone advised Alexander. He added that volunteer members must feel secure since they are sacrificing their time with their families and putting their lives on the line anytime they go out the door to a call. He added that they were working very hard to keep the service alive but that even without the issue before them he felt a slow death was in the future and help was needed to keep it alive.

District Chief Wolf stated that he believed since the Board of Selectmen had not taken any action regarding the matter it left the possibility open for discussion and a change of mind. He added that it was unfortunate that people involved did not have the patience to wait for something that takes its time to proceed before it hit the papers and the news media and he hoped that the issue would still be addressed with the Board of Selectmen.

Chief Trovato stated that he had asked several times to meet with the Board of Selectmen beginning in the fall and a meeting was never scheduled.

Wolf reminded the board of the fire department by-law that each person signs when they come into the department advising them that when they are on private property should they take anything that is not theirs they are on their own and are acting on their own behalf and the fire department does not have to back them for using bad judgment. He added that in this case, he was personally told by Mr. Patrick that he had been badgered by the police several times and threatened with grand jury proceedings to get to the truth after he had told them that nothing had been taken.

The Chief stated that the system didn't work and it got to the point of who was going to win instead of looking at the facts of the situation. He added that we must go forward now and figure out what can be done to make things better.

Captain Martinez asked if the department had any liability coverage? It will be looked into.

The Chief added that recently a full-time, union employee, had a problem and the Selectmen voted to pay his legal fees yet the firemen who work for nothing, get nothing and are being taken for granted.

District Chief Notaro suggested that the Board of Engineers invite the Board of Selectmen to meet with them at the Main Fire Station.

Motion: Notaro motioned to invite the BOS to meet with the BOE on Thursday, February 18th, 1999 at the Main Fire Station at 7:30 p.m. at their earliest convenience; motion seconded by Roderick; All in favor.

Specs for raising Fire Station #5 (514 Commercial St.) discussed.

Plans drawn up by Joe Kelly to be reviewed by the board. Pending the approval of funds at Town Meeting for the new fire truck it should be delivered by September. The goal is to have the raising of the fire station completed prior to the delivery of the truck.

At this time everyone except the board members left the meeting.

Lack of enthusiasm by members at CPR re-certification classes discussed. Instructors should be paid for their services due to the amount of preparation time and effort it takes to instruct the classes.

Adjournment

Roderick motioned to adjourn the meeting; Wolf seconded the motion; All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 9:55 p.m.