

Progress Report Update

Submitted by

Harpswell Fire and Rescue Planning Committee

To

Harpswell Board of Selectmen

February 9, 2017

I. INTRODUCTION

Last October, the Harpswell Fire and Rescue Planning Committee provided the Board of Selectmen with a three-part strategic plan to improve fire and rescue services in the Town. Since that time, the committee has met nine additional times, including sessions with the Town's Attorney, representatives from the three independent fire associations, the Fire Chief of Kennebunkport, and interested members of the community. The focus of these meetings was to gather community and professional input and identify ways to validate/refine, as necessary, aspects of the initial plan. Particular attention was given to Phase 1 of the plan which recommended: funding two full time equivalent (FTE) municipal fire fighters for day time coverage on weekdays; funding an architectural feasibility study for a centrally located municipal fire station; and hiring a municipal fire chief.

II. RECOMMENDED CHANGE TO PHASE I OF STRATEGIC PLAN

The committee continues to support funding for two FTE fire fighters and for the architectural study. However, after reviewing Maine State Law (Title 30-A) dealing with the authority and responsibilities of fire chiefs and discussing this issue with the Town's Attorney, it became clear that hiring a municipal fire chief would require significant change to the by-laws of the three volunteer fire associations. It would also create potential span of control issues between the municipal chief and the volunteer chiefs within the three existing fire zones in Harpswell and necessitate establishing a municipal fire department. Since a desired goal of the committee was to develop a plan that could be implemented with minimal impact on the Town and its existing fire associations, a different approach was sought. The Town Attorney recommended investigating the evolution of fire services in Kennebunkport where a fire administrator position was established over 20 years ago, some 10 years before the establishment of a fire chief position in the town. The committee met with Kennebunkport's Fire Chief on January 9, 2017 to discuss the specifics of the fire administrator position vis a vis a fire chief and came away convinced that creating a fire administrator position first would be less complicated and disruptive than establishing a municipal fire chief position and would still support Harpswell's immediate objective for enhanced fire and rescue services. As a result, the committee unanimously recommends the Board of Selectmen support this change to the originally submitted plan. (A draft job description for a Fire Administrator is under development and will be forwarded following committee review and community input.)

III. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

A key component of the fire and rescue strategy calls for enhanced recruitment and retention efforts within the volunteer associations. This point was emphasized by members of the community and the volunteer fire associations at several meetings. To that end, the three

associations sponsored a recruitment and retention seminar on January 16, 2017. Led by a nationally known fire and rescue recruitment and retention expert, the seminar was well-attended by Town officials and members of the three fire associations and will hopefully result in more innovative and successful recruitment and retention efforts by all three fire associations.