

**PRUDENTIAL COMMITTEE FIRE DISTRICT #1**  
**144 Newton Street**  
**South Hadley, MA 01075**

Prudential Committee Meeting Notes

Date: 2/8/18

Location: Fire District Headquarters, 144 Newton Street

This session is being recorded

Call to Order: 6:30:p.m.

Prudential Committee Members Present: Kevin Taugher, Chairman  
Michael Wozniak, Clerk

Invited Guests: Representative John Scibak and Prudential Committee member FD2, Richard Constant

- Call to order
- Signing of warrants authorizing payroll and expense payments.
- Motion made by Michael Wozniak, seconded by Kevin Taugher, to approve the 1/18/18 regular meeting notes. Unanimous Affirmative Vote.
- Motion made by Michael Wozniak, seconded by Kevin Taugher to accept the 2/8/18 letter as written by Kevin Taugher to the Prudential board of Fire District 2. Unanimous affirmative vote.
- Michael Wozniak presented an update of discussions held with Representative Scibak regarding merger discussions between the two fire districts.
- Representative Scibak presented an update on research that he has done regarding other communities that have gone through mergers of either fire and/or water districts and presented a list of past and proposed mergers going back to 1950. The discussion points were as follows:
  1. If the districts do indeed decide to merge, the districts would have to go back to the initial enabling legislation and would have to repeal certain parts of it. John will provide the actual legislation that created District 1 and District 2 along with the actual laws that created the merged districts on John's list.
  2. He pointed out that the Whately Town Water Dept. and the Whately Water District are also talking about merging. He suggested that it might be beneficial to talk to some of these local communities. He also suggested that we contact Deerfield to find out why they decided not to merge the Old Deerfield Fire District and the South Deerfield Fire District in 2006. He suggested that we contact these communities to look at the pros and cons of why these districts merged or didn't merge.
  3. In regards to merging the two water districts, the "land mine" could be MWRA (Mass. Water Resources Authority). There might be a \$500,000 cost involved regarding infrastructure should the two water districts merge. Another issue is whether the wells in District 2 have enough capacity to supply District 1.

4. Kevin also pointed out that we have to consider the financial implications of merging the districts and would need a plan that goes out 2-3 years so that there were no “surprises” to either district. Kevin also pointed out that between the two districts, there were 80 firefighters as either permanent staff or call firefighters and if District 2 wants to address staff reductions through attrition only, then that could also be a problem.
  5. Another issue that arose was the Granby residents serviced by District 2. If District 2 were to lose the tax revenue from Granby, it could be a 5% - 6% “hit” on their tax revenue.
  6. There is also the issue of annexation where there would have to be “home rule” legislation abolishing District 2, and annexing the property that was District 2. Regarding the MWRA, if District 2 was abolished, then both districts could be purchasing water from MWRA without the additional infrastructure costs.
  7. In order to accomplish any merger, both District voters would have to approve it and have it certified before any “home rule” legislation could be filed. If the two districts agreed on language, then legislation would be submitted to Boston for their review and approval through a formal or informal session. The only objection from outside the district might come from MWRA.
  8. John will provide Kevin with copies of the laws that were written to accomplish the mergers as outlined on his list and also provide a copy of the DLS report for Hamilton and Wenham.
  9. Michael Wozniak informed the board that he has already met with Rick Constant from District 2 and that he was looking at setting up a joint meeting with the two Chiefs the week of February 20<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- There was a general discussion about aligning the District elections with the Town election. Monica has forwarded to Barbara Miller a list of questions that would be presented to Carlene regarding the aligned election. Monica suggested that they meet with representatives from Palmer since they have four fire districts in town. The plan is for Monica, Barbara, Rick, and Mike Wozniak to have a joint meeting with Carlene and Mike Sullivan to finalize the alignment of District elections to the Town election. Warrant articles relating to bylaw changes affecting the District election are finalized and are ready to be voted on at the Annual District election on April 30<sup>th</sup>.
  - A general discussion took place regarding the bylaw change from Strong Chief to Weak Chief. Mark Beauregard called the Attorney General’s office and talked to a person named Kelley who was of no assistance regarding this issue. The bylaw change has been approved by both the District voters and the Prudential Committee. The question is how the bylaw is to be implemented. The bylaw change would not affect the current Chief and would only apply to a future Chief coming into the District. John Scibak will contact Mark to see if we can get a resolution with the Attorney General’s office regarding this issue.
  - Kevin stated that he did receive confirmation from Mt. Holyoke College that they will donate \$20,000/year for 10 years towards the purchase of the new ladder truck subject to a memorandum of understanding.
  - Monica provided an update on the bonding for the new ladder truck. She met with Unibank bond counsel and we are looking for a “green light” letter from them. Unibank will present three different options that are available and make a recommendation to the District based on our situation by the end of February.

- A general discussion took place regarding reinforcing the engine bay floors. The Chief stated that the drawings are underway and are on schedule for completion by the end of February. They should be starting the specifications next week. They have been advised of the delivery date of the new fire truck. Tighe & Bond is also developing a plan if temporary shoring will be needed.
- There was a general discussion about the ambulance operation for District 1. While the District charges \$1,500 for an ambulance run to BayState, in some cases we only collect 15%. Kevin also stated that out of the \$2,928,384 that the District billed out in 2017, only \$944,124 was collected. John stated that there are abuses within the system whereby some patients who are not really sick call for an ambulance, collect the insurance money and refuse to reimburse the District. Kevin made the point that the taxpayers have to foot the bill through increased taxes because we are not able to collect all of the money due to the District. Motion made by Michael Wozniak, seconded by Kevin Taugher to approve the ambulance adjustments for January 2018 in the amount of \$137,131.40 . Unanimous affirmative vote.
- Kevin stated that the union contract has been approved. There will be a Special District Meeting on February 22nd to vote on the costs associated with union contract. This includes the retroactive amounts along with an estimate going forward to the end of the fiscal year. The estimated amount is \$38,698 which includes \$15,000 in signing bonuses. The amount to be voted on at the Special District meeting is \$40,000. Monica stated she also needs a letter from the Prudential Committee Chair authorizing the expenditure of \$15,000.
- The Treasurer gave an update of the FY2019 district and fire budgets which includes the union contract settlement. The biggest increases to the budget are to the following accounts: New fire truck principal, \$120,000, new fire truck interest, \$42,000 and issue fee of \$15,000 for a total of \$177,000. The funding for the raises will be taken out of the ambulance fund which is up \$100,000 over last year. There is a \$293,204.17 overall increase in the budget and if you take out the \$177,000 for the new fire truck, there is an increase of \$116,204.17. If we took the full increase of \$293,204.17, that would equate to a 25 cent increase in the tax rate. The \$177,000 in itself would be a 15 cent increase on the tax rate. If the assumption is that property valuations in Town stay the same, the tax rate increase would go from \$2.29/\$1000 to approximately \$2.50/\$1,000.
- Chief's report: There were a total of 55 Fire calls and 202 EMS runs in January. YTD fire: 66, YTD EMS 244. Inspections for January were Business: 18, Smoke/CO: 11, Oil Burners: 4, Lockboxes: 3. The Chief also provided an update on staffing. Lockdown drills have been completed at SHHS, Plains School, Michael E. Smith School, and Mosier School. Members from the South Hadley Police, along with State Police, the Hampshire County District Attorney's office, and the Sheriffs Dept. have attended these drills. Fire District 2 was not in attendance.
- Motion made by Michael Wozniak, seconded by Kevin Taugher to adjourn. Unanimous Affirmative Vote. Meeting adjourned at 8:17 p.m.



Michael J. Wozniak, Prudential Committee Clerk, FD1