

HUDSON, NH BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Workshop with the Fire Department on February 3, 2004

Selectmen: William P. Cole, Kenneth J. Massey, Shawn N. Jasper, Ann Seabury and Teresa Stewart

Staff/Others: Steve Malizia, Town Administrator; Priscilla Boisvert, Executive Assistant; Kathy Carpentier, Finance Director; Shawn Murray, Fire Chief; Charlie Chalk, Fire Marshal; Gary Rodgers, Deputy Fire Chief; Jack Brewer, Fire Captain; Ray Rowell; Howard Dilworth, Jr; Leo Bernard; Coleman Kelly; Richard Maddox; Matt St. Laurent; Anne Lundregan, TEL

The Workshop began at 7:40 p.m., (following an attorney-client session), with Chairman Cole saying one of the reasons they got to the point of holding a joint workshop was the ongoing issue of overtime in the Fire Department, concerns of some Board members with the call force—its utilization, its future, etc.—and other peripheral issues, which all coalesced about the same time Chief Murray was appointed Chief. The purpose of the workshop was to review and discuss the Fire Department’s mission, goals and objectives, organization for both the full time and call force, and policies and procedures—operational and administrative. The goal for tonight’s meeting was to reaffirm existing policies or conditions in the department, or to revise existing policies or conditions, or to eliminate an existing policy or condition, or possibly to establish a policy or condition and will require full participation by the Board of Selectmen and Fire Department leadership, with a zero tolerance for ambiguity relative to direction or the Board’s commitment to providing the Fire Department with the resources to implement the stated policies, as they go through the process of moving the department forward into the future.

Mission Statement. *The mission of the Hudson Fire Department is to preserve life, property and the environment from man-made and natural disasters through education, while by providing emergency medical services, fire and rescue operations, communications, public education and fire prevention programs.* Chairman Cole said the two elements for a mission statement are that they be attainable and quantifiable. He believed the Fire Department’s mission statement is attainable, but not necessarily quantifiable. The basic mission of the Department is to put out fires and save lives and property. He thought “through education while” should be removed and replaced with “by.” Chief Murray agreed to the change. He said the National Fire Service is emphasizing all-risk educational programs—man-made or natural disasters and domestic terrorism.

Call Force. Chairman Cole recognized Selectmen Jasper who said he was very concerned that it has become increasingly difficult to be a call fire fighter because of increased requirements. When he got into the department 20 years ago, the important thing was training and responding to the calls they could, and they were all paid \$400 a year. He resented the fact that he was going to up to 400 calls a year and was getting paid the same as someone who only went to 10 calls. When Ray Carter became Chief, they went to an hourly basis. If you attend training to keep your skill level current, and going to more calls than you are training, that is a positive situation for the Town. There has been no recognition that a lot of people have a lot of pressures on them and, as a result, some good people have been forced out. Three Town meetings ago, Chief Carpentino said Robinson Road station was in good shape. This Saturday, there was a structure fire in Town and, from listening to the scanner, only one person from that station responded. So much focus was placed on the number of calls attended, they forgot that they wouldn’t have any help when there is a big incident.

Chief Murray said the department does a lot of things right, one of which is to require a minimum level of training for call fire fighters. They need to meet Level 1 A & B certification, the basics of fire fighting. The training for call fire fighters is becoming an issue throughout the United States. A couple years ago, they proposed the ride along program, which never came to fruition because of time and budgetary concerns. He, Lt. Brough and Acting Lt. Rudolph have talked about trying some different things. They could compare the benefits of riding along versus meeting 70% of the training and if the call force committed to riding two or three times a month, with clear objectives stated during the ride-along, it might be a viable alternative. If someone does not remain proficient in even basic fire fighting skills, or if training stops for two or three month intervals, it constitutes a huge safety issue to yourself and the other fire fighters. Selectman Jasper agreed that there has to be training for safety purposes, but he could only think of three people who had been injured over the years and they are still with the department, adding that he wasn’t saying it was their own fault. People cannot be allowed to become lax in safety and training, but he was focusing on the requirement to make X amount of calls at different levels. People have been asked to resign because of that. He thought it would be better to have trained people available, even if they didn’t respond to a certain number of calls. The call force went from 30 to 15 active people in a very short time. When advertising for the call force was discussed in the past, the rationale was that there wouldn’t be much of a response. The people that were on board were whittled away over time. Chief Murray asked what Selectman Jasper would suggest. Selectman Jasper said they have to look at people as individuals, not statistics. If someone is going to calls, but only standing by at the station, they aren’t learning anything, whereas someone else may come in for 25 calls and were out providing service, that would be a greater value. If there was a natural disaster, they wouldn’t have the resources to pull from, which is one of his fears. There is a greater response for a structure fire than for a natural disaster. There will never be enough people on a shift to respond to a worst-case scenario. When he was a call fire fighter, he believed that his level of training wasn’t as important as the competence of his officers.

Chief Murray asked if the Selectmen heard of CERT—Community Emergency Response Teams, a program offered by FEMA to train local people to respond to disasters, fires--anything that requires a lot of resources and people. The Chief wondered if that was something they should look at in order to bring the numbers up. The call force is changing. Some call fire fighters have been with the department 20 years, such as John Wilcox, Patty Laine, Lt. Rudolph, Lt. Brough, and they are the people that don’t mind covering the station. The newer group, those hired since 2001, want to get in on the action. His main concern is keeping the level of proficiency current. They are looking at ways to maximize the roles of the call force. It is difficult for a call fire fighter who works full time. A couple of them used to work in Town and could respond to calls, but that is no longer true. If the call fire fighters would come in to ride along two or three shifts a month, that has tremendous training value for remaining proficient and would provide the same results as two or three trainings they would be required to attend in a year. There is also a problem of motivation. One call fire fighter told the Chief that if he had to chose between sitting around the station with the guys or being home with his family, he’d choose his family. He has to take into consideration what is best for the Town.

Selectman Jasper said the call force has a good history and, until very recently, the call department was strong. Pressures were imposed by the requirement to adhere to standards, which resulted in the situation they are now in, that when a call goes out, they don’t have the resources. More and more, the full-time people being hired come from out of town. He’s afraid they are going to get caught short one of these times, with no one to rely on, if they don’t have the

people to come in and do the basics. Chief Murray said it sounded like Selectman Jasper was agreeing on the need for proficiency training, but not the way the activity level is measured. Selectman Jasper said that's part of it, and he's already talked to Deputy Rodgers. There are different levels of activity. A few weeks ago, he heard the call for 118 Robinson Road and Engine 4 went there, but Engine 1 was never called. He didn't know all of the particulars, but he did know that is not why they staffed that truck at the other end of Town, where a year and a half ago, the truck would have been dispatched from Robinson Road and been the first on the scene. What they ultimately needed was lift assistance. He, personally, has no medical training, but he and a lot of others have done a lot of lifting, so are they better off with rigid standards? If someone is coming to less calls than he is training, he's obviously not going to be doing any good and is costing more just to keep him proficient than he is providing services. He also knows there are professional fire fighters living in the community that are hired in other towns who got pushed out. If the Town offered a two-hour class in HAZMAT that the person didn't attend because they already had a certificate for attending in another town, he or she would be penalized for not attending Hudson's class. The Town has a lack of flexibility, which is ridiculous. A case in point is an individual who didn't meet the Town's training standards, but was hired to teach a class in that Town.

(Start Tape 1, Second Side)

Chief Murray said the trust that a fire fighter puts in his officer is the same trust that he puts in a fellow fire fighter. It's not just a training issue, it's getting to know that individual next to you inside and out while fighting a fire. Selectman Jasper said he agreed when it came to hands-on training. He's talking about being flexible with classroom training. People aren't going to come in for every box alarm; they'll come in for structure fires. The Town has a lot of resources that aren't being utilized. Chief Murray asked if Selectman Jasper felt that it's an issue of the quality of the individual, or the quantity. Selectman Jasper said someone like Rich Houle is a quality fire fighter, but got tired of being told what he had to come in for—and there's others in that category. You have to look at both quality and quantity. Chief Murray said that's a subjective call. For instance, Fred Brough has been here for 20 years, but when he gone for five days, he is at Central Station on the sixth day to either catch up on the training he missed, or to ride with the crews. The Chief said he was willing to look at ways to determine someone's proficiency. The challenge will be to meet the Department's needs to allow call fire fighters to be safe responders on the scene, yet not too difficult for them to meet training requirements. Selectman Jasper said with training, he was referring to those who are full time in other departments, who get sufficient training. The average person is gone eight hours a day, or 1/3rd of his time that you know he is going to miss. Fifty is a tough number for someone who works. Most of the fires are at night, when the call fire fighters are available. Chief Murray said there is an increase in the number of fires, which makes it difficult, as well. At Robinson Road during the day, there is only one individual who is available. Selectman Jasper said full time staffing levels have to be developed to cover 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. because structure fires tend to be at night. Chief Murray asked where Selectman Jasper sees the call force going in the future. Selectman Jasper said it will depend on the people who are recruited and how willing the Town is to help them. There needs to be flexibility in understanding not all call fire fighters will be able to do everything that they need to do. If you want 15 people to respond, then you need 30-40 on the call force. If you built to that level, people could take nights. He wanted to do that with Co. 1 at one time, but it fell apart. In Dover, they are talking about instituting a fee schedule for fires. Chief Murray said the new call fire fighters are interested in becoming full time. He has proposed a policy change for evaluations to be done on an employee's anniversary.

Selectman Stewart asked when advertising was done for the call force. Chief Murray said about two years ago. He was holding off until after this workshop to find out where they want to go with that. Selectman Stewart said they should advertise to find out what the interest in the community is. At the fire last week, she was concerned there were no drivers for available apparatus and wondered if DPW workers should be cross-trained. Chief Murray said Steve Dube was training on the equipment and they are working towards Joe Triolo's certification. Chief Murray said he, Gary and Charlie would jump on, too. When needed, everyone gets involved to do what they have to.

Selectman Seabury said from what she has heard, the Town needs to dumb-down their standards, which have been set too high. In the current day and age, people can't possibly do what they used to when they were farmers or worked at their own business in Town. Selectman Massey said so far, they have been talking about tactics. Once they agree on a mission, it then becomes incumbent on anyone who wants to be, or remain a call fire fighter, to agree to those terms and conditions. He liked the idea of ride-alongs as a training tool. The primary goal may be backup, supplemented with enough opportunities for them to remain active. If the Town is going to train someone, they need to commit to a certain number of years and they would need to understand there will be a certain amount of time as backup. Chief Murray agreed there was tremendous value in ride-alongs. Right now, there isn't much manpower at Robinson Road. Jim Bavaro used to work third shift at HADCO and come into the station to ride along during the day, even though he was dead tired from working the night before. That is how he got experience and why he was picked up immediately after he received his certifications. Selectman Jasper said ride-alongs have potential, but it is very difficult for married members of the department. He compared it to Selectmen coming into Town Hall, waiting for a meeting to break out. Selectman Stewart said the requirement for ride-alongs could be stated in the ad.

(Start Tape 2, Side A)

Selectman Massey said that if someone is required to come in for ride-alongs, they should be compensated for it and if there was a call fire fighter who was the leader of the call force, it would instill an additional level of esprit de corps within the group. Selectman Jasper said those things would help and should be considered. The call force, at one time, had Deputy Campbell as their leader and Harry Chesnulovich was their captain. There were some fairly ugly things that happened with the Deputy Chief, which was very demoralizing. They ended up with someone who didn't represent the call force to administration. Relative to where the money will come from to pay for the ride-alongs, Selectman Massey said if it was known that these people were going to be there, it would go a long ways toward addressing the overtime issue.

Chairman Cole didn't think they would see a call force of 30 again. They could go out and recruit 30, but probably 18 of them would be duds. The days of barn-raising and putting cows in a corral to run to a fire are over. The Fire Department and the safety of the residents are not training aids for the call fire fighters. The call force is an adjunct, an auxiliary, a peripheral—a means to an end. The problems that individuals are having are systemic to modern society with regard to being able to fulfill the mission. If you can't meet the requirements because of job, family, or any number of modern ills, then you can't be a call fire fighter. That's not being negative, that's reality. What they should be doing is looking at a way to consolidate the assets they have so they can have a viable call force, whether it is five or 15 people. Many of the people who left within the last year or so were quality individuals, but their circumstances didn't allow them to meet the standards—and it wasn't necessarily the number of calls because he had Chief Carpentino do an assessment on two different occasions of the entire call fire force with regard to training and calls. It was a number of issues that brought those individuals to Chief Carpentino's attention, not simply one issue that precipitated their leaving. He didn't want any ambiguity and asked exactly what the Selectmen wanted the Chief to address, or come back to the Board on, relative to the call force. He asked the Chief to provide more information on CERT.

Selectman Jasper took issue with some of the Chairman's remarks. There is still a great deal of interest, such as in Litchfield, which has the same demographics as Hudson. Call fire fighters have not gone by the wayside. The nature of fire fighting is that someone may get hurt, but they will be killing residents if they don't have enough people to fight fires. They need to ensure there is enough personnel to service the needs of the community—and it wasn't that long ago that they had about 30 people on the call force. Chief Murray said a lot has to do with each individual. Rachel Nault put a lot of time and effort into her training, then moved to Manchester after she completed probation.

Chairman Cole asked Selectman Jasper what he wanted from the Chief. Selectman Jasper said to come back with a plan. Maybe 95% of the time, they have enough manpower for the calls, but there are periods of time when there aren't enough people. Chairman Cole asked Chief Murray what he understood Selectman Jasper's request for information to be because in looking at past minutes on a variety of subjects with regard to what the Board said and did, the trail peters out; ambiguity is not a prerogative. Chief Murray understood that he is to formulate a plan to address staffing levels and training requirements for the call force.

Chairman Cole said he'd like to see a mission statement for the call force. He asked if Selectman Massey wanted to see the Chief address the establishment of a Captain's position in the call force, with a recommendation to the Board. Selectman Massey said he would like the Chief to formulate a plan for maintaining the call force at a level that would allow the Fire Department to achieve its goals to meet the mission statement that would address some of the issues about retaining interest on the call force, maintaining the esprit de corps within the call force and that there be no misunderstanding by anyone who is a part of that call force that when they sign up, they are signing up for the requirements of the job and, if they can't meet them, the Town will look for other people who are willing to make those commitments. Selectman Jasper said the requirements must be reasonable. Selectman Massey said they must be requirements that are consistent with what a call force person is likely to be able to confront, in support of the Hudson Fire Department's mission.

Selectman Stewart said she'd like to see an ad within a month or two, especially since the process would take up to a year. Chairman Cole said recruitment would be an element of the overall plan of restructuring and re-energizing. Deputy Rodgers asked if recruitment should be limited to Hudson residents, which is the last word they had heard on that subject. Selectman Jasper said there should be exceptions, such as someone who lives just across the bridge and can get here quicker than some residents. It should be on a case by case basis. Chairman Cole asked if there was a policy in place with respect to recruiting. Chief Murray said not a formal one. Selectman Massey said if someone can't meet the job requirements, that is grounds for dismissal. A requirement is to commit to a certain amount of time and, if not, the cost of the training will be reimbursed to the Town. They shouldn't have an iron-clad policy that says the call force has to come from Hudson. Chief Murray said it's important to note that the Fire Department has to do what is right for the Town, and that includes the call force. Chairman Cole asked if the Chief was clear on what he was to put together for the Board. He said he was.

The Chairman declared a break at 9:00 p.m. The meeting resumed at 9:10 p.m.

(Start Tape 2, Second Side)

Union Logo on Fire Fighters' Shirts Selectman Stewart raised the issue of union logo being on fire fighters' shirts. She wanted to see documentation on how it got to be where it is, etc. You don't see it in Manchester, Nashua, Derry. . . or even New York. Chief Murray said his research revealed that Chief Carpentino allowed them to change to the polo shirt. There was no written agreement but, as part of an effort to build morale and labor-management relations, Chief Carpentino allowed them to put the 3154 logo on the shirts. Last summer, in a written document, Chief Carpentino approved a new shirt design and logo. That came back with a written decision that stated it constituted a past practice. Selectman Stewart said the Board never discussed it or voted on it—and the Union is not buying the shirts, the taxpayers are. Neither the DPW nor the Police Department have their union labels on their shirts. Chief Murray said the fire fighters see it as a morale issue, and some departments wear the union label, while others don't. If they are forced to dispense with that practice, it might invoke a grievance and it would be costly to remove it from all the shirts. There is no additional cost for the logo to be put on the shirts. Selectman Stewart said the issue is the taxpayers' dollars and this could be addressed in contract negotiations. Three people on the Budget Committee were very upset when they saw the shirts with the union label on them. Selectman Seabury said there's nothing to negotiate because it was never in the contract. Chairman Cole asked if Selectman Stewart wanted the current shirts with the logo put aside and buy new shirts, or that all shirts purchased from a certain date not have the logo on it. Selectman Stewart said when new shirts are ordered, they are not to have the union logo on them. Chief Murray asked if the Board would consider allowing the fire fighters to wear a small union pin on their uniform. Selectman Stewart didn't have a problem with that, as long as they weren't paid for by the taxpayers. Chairman Cole asked Selectman Stewart to make this is an item for the February 10 agenda, including an appropriate motion for consideration. Selectman Jasper said this has the potential to be an issue, but since it was created through the change of uniform, it could be taken away through a change of uniform. If they go to a different style uniform through attrition, that takes away the past practice issue.

Proposed Reorganization Chief Murray passed out a proposed reorganization plan and said he there have been attempts to eliminate the Assistant Chief's position, but that position is an important part of the organization as a whole. The former administration created a strong framework, with operating procedures, guidelines, and excellent professional personnel. Keeping in mind the mission statement and a review of the MRI Report, they have identified the need for a Captain and a Training Officer for both the full time and call force to develop a program that changes the title/position of Assistant Chief to Deputy Chief of Support Services Division, which replaces the Fire Prevention Division and the Deputy Chief of Support Services Division replaces the title of Fire Marshal. The change comes with added responsibilities, such as communications and dispatch (four additional personnel) and anything to do with fire alarm systems and radios, and the apparatus maintenance program. The Fire Marshal's position, a Captain's rank, is changed to Captain Training/Safety Division. The Deputy Fire Chief of Administration becomes Deputy Fire Chief of Operations. No new positions are created, only title changes, with an overall cost savings of \$17,081. The responsibilities of Deputy Chief of Administration are divvied up throughout the organization. The Executive Secretary picks up the Telestaff scheduling program, which has been in operation for two years and running fine, and she picks up the policy manuals, doing the final draft of the changes that are made. The Administrative Secretary picks up purchasing and the purchase orders. The Deputy Chief of Support Services will pick up communications and apparatus maintenance. The Captain Training/ Safety Officer picks up the hiring and promotion process and the Safety Committee. The Deputy Fire Chief of Operations picks up Safety Committee, HIPPA program (Patient Privacy Act), Emergency Management Director and building maintenance and facilities. This change assures consistency in scheduling and coordinating training; it may help to alleviate some overtime on day shift when Captain is out to reduce overtime; transitions emergency medical coordination responsibilities into the Training Officer/Safety position; Training Officer

works Mon-Fri or at night, as needed for call force (40 hours, flex schedule); provides ability to develop specific, measurable objectives for call force training issues; provides an Incident Safety Officer to monitor safety issues during emergency operations and at fire stations; maintains State and Federal required certifications in EMS, HAZMAT & fire Standards; prepares personnel for the potential of future upward mobility within the organization; use of an operational Captain as Training Officer is non-productive; Training Officer will conduct orientation program for new full time and call firefighters; and Captain will also chair the Safety and Training Committee. Capt. Tice has agreed to take on the Training Officer's responsibilities while the position is vacant. The advantages of moving the Fire Marshal to Deputy Fire Chief of Support Services is to improve efficiency within the department and emergency services for the community; it divides the work equally among the chief officers; it assigns duties and responsibilities that fits the skills, knowledge and abilities of individuals; it provides challenge, diversity and motivation within the position; it combines all elements of communications under one division (Dispatch, Fire Alarm Systems, Fire Alarm Plant and radios); and provides for a smooth transition to Combined Dispatch by having technological and personnel issues under one person's oversight. The Fire Marshal is currently making \$59,030. As Deputy Fire Chief of Support Services, his salary would increase to \$62,221. The Captain/Training Officer position would be \$54,728.

(Start Tape 3, Side A)

Selectman Jasper thought this was a great proposal and assumed that Deputy Rodgers and Fire Marshal Chalk had agreed to it. They both indicated they were aware of/supportive of it. Selectman Jasper asked who would be second in command. Chairman Cole said the Deputy Chief of Operations.

The consensus of the Board members was favorable. Chairman Cole said this will be an agenda item for their next meeting and the Chair will entertain appropriate motions with regard to moving this along. He will talk with the Chief about the backup information needed. He asked if the Board wanted to take up another topic or set another meeting. Selectman Massey suggested setting up another workshop to discuss goals and objectives. Selectman Jasper agreed, saying the apparatus replacement program doesn't need to be addressed until the next budget cycle. It was decided to set the next workshop for February 17 at 7:00 p.m.

Chairman Cole closed the workshop at 9:50 p.m.

Recorded and Transcribed by Priscilla Boisvert
Executive Assistant

HUDSON, NH BOARD OF SELECTMEN

William P. Cole, Chairman

Kenneth J. Massey, Selectman

Shawn N. Jasper, Selectman

Ann Seabury, Selectman

Teresa Stewart, Vice-Chairman