

**HOPKINTON FIRE DISTRICT**

 2876 State Highway 11B

Hopkinton, New York 12965

(315) 328-4682

Commissioner Meeting Notes – Special Meeting August 30, 2022

Present: Joachim VanElls, Rob Stillwell, Richard Powers, Carl Pitts, Earl McBride, Sue Wood

Absent: Ernest Wood

Guests: Dave Perry, Carolyn Lashomb, Deborah Rust, Peggy and Jeff Burham, Steve Parker, Greg Crump, Steve Hopkins, Dick Eakins, Judy Converse, Will Votra, Rick and Ashley Eakins, Alicia Walters

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman VanElls, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. The chairman explained this was a special meeting to discuss the proposed construction of a new fire station. The proposal was passed by the fire commissioners on July 13 and a vote of the public is scheduled for September 20. The proposal is for $2.5 million.

Chairman VanElls turned the meeting over to Chief Steve Parker to explain issues with the current fire station and why a new one is needed. Chief Parker invited everyone in attendance to review the posterboards. The current building is not ADA compliant. The current overhead doors are 9’6” and new or used equipment is not readily found. The beams are not able to be raised as they are going in the wrong direction. Any special truck order would cost approximately $500,000. The existing bays are 35’. The newest engine is 32.5’ not leaving any room to walk behind it. The restrooms are located on the second floor and are not up to code. The water supply is currently supplied through NuMed as there is no well. There is no space to drill a well as the back side of the building is sitting on NuMed property. The fire pit also sits on ½ of property owned by NuMed.

The new designs for the station are due to NFPA recommendations. A thermo vent system is required to suck up the fumes when starting up trucks. This is a cancer causing issue. There is also no contamination area – the current option is hosing off with a garden hose. A washer and dryer is needed to get remove the carsinages from the turnout gear. By not having this, family members could also be exposed. A fitness area is also being requested.

The department is only asking for the bare minimum – a meeting/training room, a couple offices and truck bays. NFPA requires drive through bays so the equipment does not need to be backed in. A small kitchen, bathrooms and a laundry room are included in the design.

Chairman VanElls explained what a fire district is and that they need to follow town law. The district was established in 2010. The district is responsible for making sure the department is supplied with the appropriate equipment and establishing rules and regulations. The district is not allowed to interfere with the fire duties of the department. The district needs to prepare a financial budget each year and hold a public hearing. Once the budget is approved, it is turned over to the town to be included with the town budget. The fire tax is separate from the town tax. There are five (5) appointed commissioners who serve staggered five (5) year terms. The treasurer is elected for a three (3) year term. The secretary is appointed.

 A fire district, upon approval of the voters, may issue bonds to cover the cost of the construction and furnishings. The district is asking the voters to approve $2.5 million in bonds, which is based on the current cost estimates of $2,236,075 and potential price increases. The primary source of repayment currently a USDA loan, along with $90,000 from the capital reserve fund. This is a 25-year payback. The current application includes a grant for $100,000 for furnishings.

The district is also pursuing other sources such as the Community Project Funding. There is also an HR-3728 bill in congress that is co-sponsored by Elise Stefanik. This provides FEMA with grant money to upgrade and construct fire and emergency medical services facilities.

The current estimated payment after construction would be $110,000 annually for 24 years. The current interest rate through USDA is 2.25%. In 2021 the fire district tax levy was $101,218, a 1%

increase from 2020. In anticipation of this project the tax levy for 2022 was $130,560 which amounted to 29% increase. That amount included $42,360 for the capital reserve fund. The estimated proposed tax levy for 2023 with a 29% increase will be $168,422 and $217,264 for 2024. A property owner with property valued at $63,600 paid $62.44, which was an additional $10.89 for the year. For the 2023 year, it is anticipated that $80.55 would be paid in fire tax and d$103.91 in 2024. These amounts are barring any other sources of money from the federal or state government.

The floor was then opened for questions:

Dick Eakins questioned the finances. He stated that the taxes are being doubled for a building. He suggested that the overhead doors should not be under the eaves. Westville Fire Station is a good example of this. He also questioned the purchase of the exhaust system as there is little smoke from the new vehicles. The district needs to put forth a plan for the taxpayers. He also feels the building should be turned around and put in the long way. The floor needs to be heated.

Mr. Eakins also asked why this vote wasn’t set up for the November ballot. Chairman VanElls replied that this was not allowed but it could have been voted on in December with the commissioner elections.

Judy Converse asked the difference between bonds and loans. Chairman VanElls explained that a bond attorney will go out and purchase municipal bonds. These bonds accrue interest and only a specific number of bonds are purchased. This gives a supply of money to keep the construction going.

Peggy Burham stated that municipal bonds are five (5) years, with 7-10 at the most.

Dave Peery commented that bonds give the board more power and protection. Anyone can look to Potsdam for examples of what not to do.

Judy Converse also asked when the rate from USDA is locked in. Chairman VanElls replied when the paperwork is signed. The board did look into going through a local bank but the interest rate was higher.

Peggy Burham suggested that a building committee be established with community members to get different ideas. Community members with a business background may be able to get the cost down. Joachim VanElls stated that the land is located in the Adirondack Park. When initially started, the estimated cost was $1.9 million. The commissioners would need to find out if changes would need to go back to APA.

Rick Eakins mentioned there was funding (ARPA funds) from IDA for ventilation. Also, with the new location being so close to Nicholville, has any consideration been given to combine departments.

Judy Converse asked what the options were for the current building. The agreement was the building would be returned to the department. It will be their choice as to what options are looked at.

Deborah Rust asked if other options for fund raising have been looked at. She would like to see more fundraising as this is not fair to taxpayers, especially those on fixed incomes.

Will Votra stated they just had a fund raiser a month ago with another one scheduled in October. The department tries not to conflict fund raising with other departments.

Rick Eakins asked if there was a contingency plan if this is voted down. Chairman VanElls stated that if it is due to the cost, the board will go back and present again to the taxpayers after a review of where areas can be cut. Rick also asked if the board had looked at any pre-engineered buildings. Jim Sheehan sells steel buildings and should be looked into. Chairman VanElls also stated that since the building faces south, a solar system could be possible.

Dick Eakins questioned the height and width of the doors. The width is currently planned for 12’ and the height would be 16’.

As no further questions, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.