

PRESENT: Calouro, Sweeney, Tyska, Parella, and Stuart

ALSO PRESENT: Michael A. Ursillo, Esq., Town Solicitor  
Chris Belair, Tax Assessor  
Michael DeMello, Fire Chief

The Council met in Special Session on Wednesday evening, January 25, 2017 in the Town Hall Conference Room beginning at 6:03 o'clock PM, Council Chairman Calouro presiding:

1. Fire Chief DeMello re Proposed Volunteer Firefighter/EMS Tax Incentive Program, **continued from November 16, 2016**

It is hereby noted for the record that the Council took no action on this agenda item.

Council Chairman Calouro announced that the purpose of this evening's special meeting is to accept information and develop a good understanding of the proposal and the reasoning for same. He added that since there is another regular meeting to commence in less than one hour, a future meeting on this topic may be necessary.

Fire Chief DeMello suggested that the initiative might be approached on a multi-year basis with the first year being devoted to the collection of data and planning a budget and the implementation taking place in the second year.

Fire Chief DeMello explained that the proposal is based upon a similar program which has been implemented in Swansea, Massachusetts and that the program in Swansea appears to be enjoying success. He also explained that each volunteer will be entitled to an abatement of \$2,500 maximum in a tax year and that the suggested recipients provide a valuable service to the community.

Fire Chief DeMello suggested that the program may encourage would-be volunteers to locate in Town and purchase property. He added that an increased number of Fire Department members may result in an improvement to the Town's ISO rating which would lower insurance premium rates.

Fire Chief DeMello outlined the relative cost the program, comparing it to the cost of paying full-time personnel. He noted that the Town responded to a total of 3636 calls in 2016 and that there were 803 fire calls and 2833 EMS calls.

Fire Chief DeMello noted that the dispatch log indicates that sometimes there is an insufficient number of volunteers available to respond fully to all calls and that sometimes when several apparatus are dispatched, a percentage of these do not answer the call. He outlined some of the specific statistics on this problem.

Fire Chief DeMello noted that some EMS calls are answered by "mutual aid" participants when Bristol volunteers are not available.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the paramedics still answer the calls with Fire Chief DeMello answering that the paramedics do answer the calls but must sometimes wait for a transport vehicle.

Fire Chief DeMello noted that since the Town bills insurance companies for transport services, the Town loses revenue when the transport does not occur.

A discussion ensued regarding electronic scheduling of personnel.

Fire Chief DeMello noted that he discussed the situation with Swansea and that Swansea experienced similar difficulties with its fire responses. He noted that Swansea does not provide EMS services on its own. He noted that before implementing its tax abatement program, Swansea tried stipends and paying for training but that the initial positive result of these programs "wears out."

He reported that on the contrary, the tax incentive program appears to be remaining viable.

Fire Chief DeMello noted that the problem he describes appears to be occurring nationally. He added that the goal of the department is to provide a great service for a reasonable cost. He also added that he still believes that the current department is strong and committed to provide service and that the members appear to be excited about the new proposal.

Fire Chief DeMello stated that he envisions that a potential recipient must apply for the program and that the Fire Department will examine the information provided on the application and compare this to the service and training logs.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the program is designed to accept change based upon life circumstances with Fire Chief DeMello responding that he would plan to factor all circumstances into the program but that the recipients must work to receive the benefit.

A discussion ensued regarding the incident response rate.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know the provisions in the program to support persons who might perhaps live with parents.

Fire Chief DeMello stated that the program would allow for cash payments in these cases.

Fire Chief DeMello outlined more specifics of the program and noted that it would be the first of its kind in Rhode Island.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know how many Towns in Rhode Island have volunteer fire/EMS departments.

Fire Chief DeMello stated that he would determine this and report back later. He added that Bristol appears to be the busiest volunteer department in the State.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration is a factor in the call volume with Fire Chief DeMello responding that there does not appear to be "rhyme or reason" to explain the call volume.

Council Chairman Calouro asked Tax Assessor Belair for her thoughts on the matter with Tax Assessor Belair responding that she estimates that the program, as proposed, will add \$.10-.11 to the existing tax rate. She added that it will be easier to know the exact amount after the program has been implemented for one year.

Councilman Sweeney asked to know how the planned automobile excise tax changes will impact the Town.

Tax Assessor Belair reported that the Town will have to balance the lost revenue with the property tax rate.

A general discussion ensued.

Councilman Tyska asked to now if it might be reasonable to start the implementation in the first year with Fire Chief DeMello responding that it will be necessary to obtain the permission of the General Assembly to institute the program. He also pointed out that he would like to carefully examine all of the data.

A discussion ensued about the possibility of implementing the program partially.

Council Chairman Calouro asked to know how success will be determined with Fire Chief DeMello responding that he would consider the program to be successful if the response rates increase.

Council Chairman Calouro asked to know if there are administrative costs with Fire Chief DeMello responding that the Department is already collecting data on training, service tenure, and responses.

Councilman Tyska asked to know what else the Council can do beyond the tax program with Fire Chief DeMello responding that it would be appreciated if the Council would be generally supportive by attending activities.

It was noted that the Council now receives copies of the Department's annual calendar of events.

Councilman Stuart asked to know the next steps with Council Chairman Calouro responding that the next steps would include refining the program with Fire Chief DeMello and Tax Assessor Belair.

Councilman Sweeney suggested that the program should be part of the budget discussion.

Tax Assessor Belair reminded the Council that there would be a need to obtain permission of the General Assembly through legislation.

Council Chairman Calouro reminded those present that the Town is also dealing with a \$3 million problem relating to school funding.

Peter Hewett of 11 Wendy Drive asked that the proposal might be placed on the Town website for public review.

Council Chairman Calouro agreed to do this.

Former Town Administrator Teixeira suggested that it was timely to move forward with this program.

Council Chairman Calouro noted that there are many steps to complete.

## 2. Adjournment

There being no further business, upon a motion by Councilman Sweeney, seconded by Councilman Stuart and voted unanimously, the

Chairman declared this special meeting to be adjourned at 6:54 o'clock PM.

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Louis P. Cirillo, CMC  
Council Clerk