

February 22, 2016

To: Board of Selectmen

From: Fire Chief Giovannacci

We thank the committee for their work. We appreciate the spirit of volunteerism and community service. The Board of Selectmen asked for our feedback on this report. There are many inaccurate or incorrect statements in the report. It is vital to have correct information when discussing such an important topic. Concerns about the functioning of the Topsfield Fire Department have been expressed for years by Chief Giovannacci, Local 3250 and the Call Firefighters Association. The changing nature of the science of firefighting, recognized safety standards and the changing economy have brought these concerns to a forefront. The old way of managing a public safety department are no longer efficient, safe or practical. For all of these reasons, the committee stated that they would not unanimously recommend any specific course of action they would only offer possible approaches to concerns raised by the Chief and the Committee.

STAFFING

Overall statement: The report states in several places that the Chief in his summary of his recommendations "made it clear that he believes that the Department needs twelve additional full time firefighters to allow the Department to meet national standards." The Chief's summary does not mention the addition of full time firefighters, but does mention full time equivalents. He has stated that it is important that current call firefighters be offered the opportunity to be part of the process. The report states the "some fire departments, including the TFD are full-time by day, but call by night and/or on weekends." This is incorrect. The Topsfield Fire Department has fulltime staffing on weekend days. The organization of the department which is listed on page 3 is incorrect. The Call Staff is comprised of 1 Captain, 1 Lieutenant and 1 Acting Lieutenant. To be clear "Call Out" is 24/7. We simply cannot manage these incidents with only two firefighters. The call back of personnel is necessary even when the station is manned for the safety of all.

The map of the defibrillator locations in Topsfield that is referenced in the report and used by the RECC includes privately owned units as well that the department is aware of. It is not exclusively 'town facilities'. This allows the dispatcher to give greater and more specific instructions to callers in the event of cardiac arrest.

LEVEL OF CARE

The report lists the levels of EMS care that staff are certified to. The correct staffing is in addition to the two full time paramedics, one full time intermediate, and two fulltime basic EMT's including the Chief; the call department actually has three

firefighters that are certified paramedics. One call firefighter paramedic has chosen not to complete the process of credentialing through Lahey Health Systems. The call department also has an intermediate. There is a full time firefighter and a call firefighter who are currently through with their didactic part of paramedic school and are now in the clinical setting. We have another call firefighter who states that he has been accepted to paramedic school, but has deferred his admission. Lastly, we have one call firefighter/EMT who will be challenging the paramedic program as she is a Registered Nurse and that is allowed by the National Registry of EMT's with some additional training.

SERVICE ZONE PLAN

The report states that our system was created by the Service Zone Plan. This is incorrect. The Service Zone Plan was created by the stakeholders at the time to describe the current EMS system in Topsfield. Members of the Board of Selectmen, Police Department, Environmental Police, Masconomet Nursing Home, the Elementary Schools and the local physician offices that were in Topsfield participated and agreed on the plan based on the provision of EMS services at the time that it was written. Selectman Gandt made a motion at the December 7, 2009 BOS meeting to accept the Service Zone Plan and that motion passed unanimously.

The response statistics quoted by the report for members of the Topsfield Fire Department are incorrect. The committee included our Senior Tax Volunteer and our Administrative Assistant in statistics for responses under 1%. Both of these people appear on our report due to their access to entering data and issuing open burning permits. Neither of these people have a responsibility or ability to respond to emergencies.

The report questions whether strategies for recruitment have provided "fruitful gains." Using several media outlets, we advertised for call firefighters. We have received several applications and have interviewed those applicants. Initial impression is that less the half of the applications received will result in new call firefighters. Thus our concern grows and this plea for help. We believe the activities listed in the report have aided in the retention of staff.

OUR TEAM

The report implies that call firefighters are not respected for their services. This could not be further from the truth; this is a team, and a paramilitary organization. At times it is necessary to do work to help the team, the mission, or the unusual circumstance. Anytime that a firefighter voices a need to leave a call before the formal end of the call, they are always let go and paid in full for their time. There has never been a formal complaint brought to the Chief regarding this issue.

DRIVER TRAINING

The report states that Topsfield Fire Department does not provide driver training to their firefighters. Topsfield Fire Department absolutely trains its firefighters to operate the apparatus. This year alone, we brought in a MIIA Driver Trainer twice. We also received a grant last year which allowed those who wished to go through pump training, to be 1:1 with a pump simulator and an instructor. An invaluable training to say the least. Driver training is the number one category of training recorded by Topsfield Fire in our ISO survey. We did 45 sessions of driver training last year alone. In the section regarding modifying training programs, the committee suggests bringing the entire group up to qualification to drive all apparatus. Training is welcome all the time; the Department has an open door policy. Whenever training needs to be rescheduled due to a person's absence from regular training, it is always done. Some training sessions that require group work are more difficult to reschedule, but it is done. The committee recommends we make all members be trained to drive the apparatus. We disagree that all members should be made to drive all apparatus. Some people are just not comfortable driving and operating such large equipment. We believe that if a member is simply not comfortable with the truck, it is in the best interest in the safety of all to not force the issue. Training by other recognized, qualified agencies is recommended for consideration by the report. This training is already encouraged by this Department. Several members are employed by such agencies.

The basic components of doing this job safely require so much training, that when it is offered Firefighters they feel that it takes too much of their time.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

The report states that the Topsfield Fire Department has an agenda to "Expand" into EMS. We have documented that since 1973 we have provided EMS and Fire Services there has been no transition to Fire/EMS, we have always provided both services to our community. See attached timeline of EMS in Topsfield.

The use of the standards for 1710, by the committee, is for fulltime departments. Comparison to 1720 would be a more appropriate comparison. By the admission of the committee, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of the Fire Department based on response times. Response times do not take into account the training or experience of the personnel, the equipment arriving and timing, or other resources needed to mitigate a problem.

The report states that the Commonwealth requires that a paramedic level ambulance must be staffed with two paramedics. 105 CMR 170.305 actually states the

ambulance must be staffed with a minimum of two EMTs, at least one of whom is certified at the Paramedic level, provided that the conditions set forth in 105 CMR 170.305(C)(2)(a) through (f) are met.

The committee states that they spoke to Topsfield Police and Beverly hospital regarding our transports. Neither Topsfield Police nor Beverly Hospital would have data regarding our number of transports in any detail. A review of the transports by Topsfield Fire in calendar year 2015 demonstrate complete adherence to SOG #2013-01 which is attached. Of those transports:

1 was mutual aid to Lyons

1 was mutual aid to Ipswich

10 were patients who walked in to our fire station for treatment

7 were mutual aid to Middleton

1 was mutual aid to Beauport

4 transports were due to the fact that there were multiple patients needing multiple ambulances.

The rest were transports because NERA was either unavailable, did not have the level of care needed for the patient, were delayed, had a mechanical failure, or came upon another emergency and could not leave that scene safely. All of these responses fell under our SOG and were appropriate.

The staff at NERA have been a valuable part of the EMS system in Topsfield and their management of resources makes our system more efficient and allows better patient care.

NIGHT TIME STAFFING

The committee notes that the only difference in the situation at night now is that there is a poor turnout by call firefighters at night and that the inherent risks of an all night-time call department have always existed. We agree that there always has been a great risk of insufficient response by relying on a call fire department at night. We agree and have documented a decreased turnout of call firefighters at night. The reasons that they are not turning out has been documented by the Chief and supported by the committee's work. Additionally, though the number of fires are down, fires are much more dangerous now; buildings are made of composite materials that burn faster and hotter. The contents of buildings are more dangerous as well. This makes the tactics and strategies of responding to incidents at all times more hazardous to all involved. It is even more critical that responding personnel have the correct equipment and skill set for the situation.

UNION ACTIVITIES

The committee notes that there is a poor history of labor relations between the Chief and the call department and that it is unusual for call firefighters to be represented by a separate bargaining unit from the full-time firefighters. There is no evidence of poor labor relations. Chief Giovannacci supported call firefighters first attempts to unionize in 1991, and then again most recently. There have been no grievances filed by the call firefighters against the Chief and no firefighters have resigned their positions due to labor relations. The bylaws of the International Association of Firefighters which are what is accepted by the Professional Firefighters of Massachusetts and attached to this document, strictly prohibit membership of anyone that is not a Full Time employee performing firefighting, EMS or rescue. There is no way for call firefighters to be members of the bargaining unit that the full time firefighters belong to. Both strategies mentioned by Chief Parow and Chief Rogers have been suggested many times by Chief Giovannacci, Local 3250 and the Topsfield Call Firefighter Association and were rejected by the Board of Selectmen.

The Chief's frustration regarding the lack of call firefighters to fill shifts or complete training as described in their contract is not about their unwillingness as stated in this report, but about the system which does not work. For all of the reasons stated previously, call firefighters are not able to fill shifts or complete training as needed. It is frustrating to have to revisit this issue over and over again. No one has suggested eliminate dependence on an active call force. We continue to very aggressively recruit call firefighters, but the pool of qualified applicants is very limited.

The reports states it is apparent that the Chief and full-time officers in the Topsfield Fire Department, would like for TFD to be the primary EMS service in Topsfield. The fact is that Topsfield Fire is the primary EMS service in Topsfield, we have been since 1973. As documented in the timeline of EMS in Topsfield and many many town reports, we have sought to provide the highest level of care to our "customers" in all aspects of our service. We have complied with all Commonwealth of Mass Regulations in this process.

The report states that the request for the 2005 Annual Town Meeting was for 8 FTE's and the purchase of two ambulances. The warrant articles are attached it actually states that it was for two ambulances and one was for four full-time firefighters. The allegation in the report that we have expanded our "agenda" to decrease utilization of NERA has no factual basis. See documentation of transports in Topsfield ambulances. The committee states TFD Command personnel often cancel NERA's response and opt to transport. The committee recommends transport by NERA except when they are unable to respond in a timely manner. That is exactly what our current practice is. Housing a private ambulance in town will not happen without a lot of planning, preparing and money. We as tax payers do not believe that subsidizing a for-profit vendor's business is appropriate. Again the report suggests that Topsfield

Fire has expanded their services to providing EMS. Simply, we have always provided emergency medical services. The requests for these services are increasing annually. NERA states they have never offered to station an ambulance in Topsfield Fire Headquarters. Email is attached. Currently two Topsfield Fire Trucks are stationed outside year round. There is no room for any more vehicles.

VOLUNTEERS

The section regarding modifying the current call firefighter response model mentions volunteer firefighters six separate times. There are no volunteer firefighters in Topsfield. All firefighters are compensated for their time. There are full time and there are call firefighters. The suggestions in this section are valid and have already been presented to the Board of Selectmen in budgeting and union negotiations by Chief Giovannacci, Local 3250 and the Topsfield Call Firefighters Association on many different occasions and were rejected by the Board of Selectmen.

The Town of Topsfield hired a consultant to update all job descriptions. We are waiting for the final versions. The Chief has never received any complaints of favoritism over qualifications as suggested by the report. Members should be aware that the non-civil service police and firefighters are subject to MGL 41 section 99A and must live within 15 miles of the community they serve.

We feel the management of the Fire Department should remain with the subject matter experts and the elected officials with the oversight of the town administrator. We believe that the Strong Chief status is important for the operations of the Fire Department and is the current industry standard.