

Town of Spring Lake
Board of Aldermen Workshop
Municipal Building
300 Ruth Street
Spring Lake, NC 28390

November 24, 2008

MINUTES

5:00

p.m.

The Spring Lake Board of Aldermen held a workshop in the Grady Howard Conference Room of the Municipal Complex with Mayor Ethel T. Clark presiding.

Board Members Present: Mayor Pro-Tem James O'Garra
Alderman Richard Higgins
Alderman Napoleon Hogans
Alderwoman McCoy
Alderwoman Sutherland

Others Present: Larry Faison, Town Manager
Robert Doberstein, Fire Chief
Rhonda Webb, Town Clerk

The purpose for this workshop was to discuss Fire Department staffing.

Mr. Faison gave an overview of what the workshop would address. He explained that the Fire Department faces some challenges with staffing. If the probation we are on now gets worse the outcome of that is that the Town's fire rating will go down and citizen's fire insurance will go up.

Mr. Doberstein gave an overview of what the Department of Insurance requires from the Fire Department. He explained the difference between the National Fire Protection Association and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Their requirements sometimes contradict each other. Mr. Doberstein explained how he staffs his department and how he uses part time firefighters to meet his requirements. There are times that he has scheduling conflicts due to the firefighters holding other jobs on their off time. He stated that additional full and part time employees will help ensure adequate staffing which is required to respond to calls. Currently there are not enough personnel to meet minimum requirements and he has to depend on part-time firefighters to fill the gap. Four full time firefighters are required to be on the fire scene to conduct interior fire activities. We currently have only three per operational shift. The Town falls under the 1710 rule which puts us in a higher staffing bracket.

Mr. Doberstein stated we have three options: we could stay status quo, we could hire four full-time firefighters and keep the amount of part-timers we have now or hire two full-timers and add some additional part-timers to give a larger pool to draw from when staffing is low. Mr. Doberstein explained it would cost the Town a total of \$198,952 to hire and train four new inexperienced full-time firefighters. The Fire Department has taken some corrective actions by using the part time employees more.

Alderman Hogans inquired about what procedural change happened that led to us not keeping up with what we should have been keeping up with. He stated that we need to make sure we are diligent. There was discussion about making the Board aware of issues and a communication problem between some Board members and the Manager.

Some of the Board members did not realize that the Fire Department situation was as serious as it is. It was requested that if a story will hit the paper let the Board members know before it comes out in the paper. If the community is under threat of being sanctioned, the Manager is requested to contact Board members, in addition to the Manager's report, as soon as he finds out. Make sure information is presented appropriately and not just skimmed.

It was explained that we were put on probation due to three issues that were noted during an inspection. The training records for the Fire Department were on the computer but the NC Department of Insurance requires that they be in paper form. Also apparatus inventory is supposed to be performed monthly and the Fire Department was not aware that they were supposed to be doing this. The final issue was the number of personnel on fire emergencies. All issues have been fixed except for personnel which presents the greatest challenge as it relates to resources allocated. Our probation will expire in July 2009 as long as we meet the minimum staffing requirements every day.

Revenues will increase due to the Pope/Bragg annexation. Staffing for Fire Department is high on the Manager's list of ways to use some of that money. The Manager recommended that we start working on the staffing issue now instead of waiting for the next budget year. The Manager recommended taking a middle of the road approach. He suggested presenting a funding plan for two full-time positions to the Board at the December 8th meeting and then look at this again during the budget process. The Board stated that this is something we have to do and agreed to proceed as the Manager recommended. They also wanted to make sure that following this recommendation will keep us out of trouble and Mr. Doberstein stated that it would.

Mr. Faison stated that there is a county wide study that is going on looking at how to staff and fund volunteer fire departments. He and Chief Doberstein are attending weekly steering group meetings. This initiative could benefit Spring Lake. The County is looking at alternate revenue sources. They are looking at doing away with the majority of the fire tax and going to a straight sales tax to fund fire departments. They will allocate those funds to the County agencies and municipalities according to the number of stations they have. This would mean an additional 1½ cent sales tax increase. If approved, the Board will be asked to support it. This could mean additional funding to the fire department and could allow you to lower your tax rate to equate to this amount.

Meeting adjourned at 6:39 p.m.

Rhonda D. Webb, CMC
Town Clerk

ATTEST:

Ethel T. Clark
Mayor