

Emergency Services Meeting Minutes
West Dover Firehouse
August 12, 2015

The Emergency Services Group will meet on Wednesday, August 12, 2015 at 11:30am at the West Dover Firehouse. Speakers will include Bill Weston, Fire Chief in Bellows Falls and Drew Hazelton of Rescue, Inc.

Present: Richard Werner, Bill Weston, Michelle Mann, Heidi Taylor, Drew Hazelton, Dave Moulton, Dave Meeker, Stephanie Conrad, Jeannette Eckert, Bob Holland

Meeting called to order at 11:30am

Bill Weston, Fire Chief spoke about his Dept.'s model in Bellows Falls:

- 38 years in fire service
- Chief for 21 years in Bellows Falls and also served in Putney
- Knows & researched different models throughout the years
- BF has a contingent of full time help—5 positions
- Paid on call positions—23 or 24 on staff but it varies
- Extremely hard to get help these days
 - 100's of hours of training for EMS are required now
 - For full time fire service it is required which means more hours of training
- My model is one full time firefighter certified for firefighting & EMT on duty 24/7 365 days
- Difficult to get people to come in on holidays and weekends
- Busy enough where we can't always guarantee someone will be available
- In order to provide a minimal level of service—currently have one person on duty at all times
- During the week Bill works an administrative schedule that varies
- Deputy Fire Chief works a 7-3 flexible schedule
- May be as many as three on duty at once but not the norm
- 10pm every night to 7am—night coverage shift to man the station and sleep over with a full time firefighter—maintain a list of people with higher qualifications for this type of coverage
 - \$15.00 per night plus hourly rate per call—1 hour minimum
- Last year's budget year was a difficult one—looking at cutting the full time officers—up to the Trustee board to make that decision
- Call priority system in place—code system
 - Code 1—can handle with on duty staff
 - Code 2—need station coverage
 - Code 3—need initial help with call
- Frequent fire calls for false fire alarms or other issues
- Urban setting community due to closeness of the buildings
- Structure fires include fire alarm calls whether false or not
- ISO insurance rates, to maintain a preferential rating—min. of 4 trained firefighters & two apparatus must respond to a call to receive their preferential rating—need to play by their rules; This is a struggle to maintain
 - Can cancel call when arrive if necessary for a false alarm
 - Change response incident form—as long as it states time of cancellation
- A lot of fire alarms---burnt cooking is considered a fire; shower steam setting off smoke alarm
- Pulling alarm box in Town is considered false

- Call volume: averages 850-900 runs per year

EMS model:

- Bellows Falls is an incorporated village in the town of Rockingham
- Separate government entity except for Hwy, Recreation depts.
- Full time police and fire depts.
- Ambulance service contract— Golden Cross a for-profit ambulance service—services 7 or 8 communities —1 ambulance staffed 24/7, 365 with ability to call back a 2nd unit—flat fee per year \$72,000 contract then each call is billed separately
- Mutual aid from Walpole and Springfield
- All BF staff are EMT basic trained; augment the ambulance staff
- Implemented policy 10-12 years ago—respond to all medical calls
- Because they are private ambulance we don't have access to call procedures --can cause issues
- Response time within the village: 2-5 minutes
- 60% of BF fire calls are medically related
- If motor vehicle accident or serious medical incident—will provide assistance
- Police dept. does not respond to medical calls—choose not to
- Public Safety concept where “everyone is everything”—is just too much to ask—looks good on paper but not very efficient
 - Thoughts about implementing in Dover—significant liability issues to consider
- Expectations for ongoing training are higher today
- Desire to be there to help but sometimes it is beyond our means
- When not on call—station chores—maintain/clean equipment—each truck has an assigned day—cleaning/ trash/ lawn/ shoveling—maintenance on building, shared with Police dept.— keeps people busy
- Public education—many station tours, community events, local hero program at library, school presentations usually during fire prevention week; Old Home Days etc.
- Recruitment at these community events? Yes. trial period of 6 months to observe, get their feet wet—tough part is getting them to stay
 - Not everyone should be in emergency services—only 5% of population is volunteering
 - Have to be careful now a days—criminal background checks
 - Best way is word of mouth
- Pay rates for call guys—start at \$10.00/hour; \$12.00 with interior firefighter certification; \$13.50 for driver apparatus operator; \$14.00 Officers—based on cert. level of activity/experience
- Daily Dispatch on fire service topics—every week read stories about the lack of volunteers across the country
- Regional emergency services:
 - Two or three communities that band together
 - Mutual aid system is huge
 - Shared calls are looking for more manpower—not more apparatus
 - Combining forces—Manchester & Dorset

Drew Hazelton spoke about Rescue Inc.'s model:

- EMS models that have been working:
- Law enforcement, Fire service, First response
- Operate out of Brattleboro and Townshend—covering 15 different towns down to Mass and over to NH

- Hinsdale used to run emergency response out of Police dept. Fire dept. does not want to do it either—believes it will take so much time away from staff that they won't have staff to respond to fire calls
- Currently only first response we have is EMR's associated with the fire dept. licensed through Rescue Inc. that provide services. Police have bowed out of it due to increased training requirement—will still do scene security
- Brattleboro has full time fire dept. respond on Priority 1 calls—immediately life threatening situations, they will respond with Rescue Inc.
- Hot topic over the last months—person who dials 911 after falling out of bed—does that make them a patient?
- If we help that person back in bed, there are legal expectations that we provided a medical evaluation
- Not an issue yet in Deerfield Valley but it is coming
- Marlboro, Dummerston—will respond and do initial medical evaluation
- Putney has full time fire chief—have that guaranteed respond all day but still struggling with attendance
- Newbrook—Brookline, Newfane, Townshend, So. Newfane—only respond to critical calls in Townshend because we are based there
- Wardsboro & Jamaica—similar to Marlboro, Dummerston that have own first response teams
- Rescue Inc. bills each town for services—2.6 million base operations—20% comes from town subsidy
 - Not uncommon to be out on 4-5 calls at once
 - Medicare reimburses at a rate of 13 cents per dollar
 - Non-profit organization
- Depend on Town subsidy—difficult to hire and maintain staff—constant move of people to higher paying states
- Increased wages and benefits to compete with NH and MA
 - \$11.50/hour and cap out at \$15.00; health, life & disability insurance, vacation, retirement
- \$380 cost per call just to roll out the door
- Public expectations are getting higher along with the cost of health care
- Fundraising takes place for all capital expenses
- 3 months to complete an applicant's hiring process
 - Background checks for Medicare & Medicaid fraud; licensing in two states
- Pushing to make more education available in communities that are struggling
 - Target these areas to get more people trained
 - Spread the wealth among the communities

Additional thoughts:

- Fire alarm ordinance in Dover
 - 2 year registration fee of \$25.00—false alarm penalties incurred after a certain number
- Fire Association will assist with certain expenses
- \$12.00/hr. to start up to \$14.00/hr. with firefighter one certification; Officers \$15.00/hr.
- WDFD will pay for training over 3 year period
- Offer retirement plans?
- Combine forces with East Dover?
 - EDFD is private; WDFD is municipal
 - Policy in place to only work for one dept.
 - Training issues
 - Many staffers don't live in Dover

- Will have to do a series of things to solve the issues—finding *one* thing isn't going to make change happen
- Ski patrollers can help but licensing is different
- Provide affordable housing availability to encourage residency
- Safety response team on the mountain—do a lot of their own responses
- Police training, if on duty anyway, can respond and determine need of fire service
- Days of volunteer emergency services are coming to an end

❖ Aug 24th Officers Meeting—Drew Hazelton from Rescue Inc. will discuss ropes rescues

Meeting adjourned at 1:08pm

Respectfully submitted by Jeannette Eckert, Recording Secretary

Minutes are posted on the Dover, Vermont website: www.doververmont.com