

Public Hearing
May 21, 2014

The Town Board held a Public Hearing to hear public comments for/against the proposed financing of equipment by the Garrison Volunteer Fire Company, Inc., at 7:30 p.m., at the Town Hall, 238 Main Street, Cold Spring, New York.10516.

PRESENT

Richard Shea	Supervisor
John Van Tassel	Councilman
Dave Merandy	Councilman
Michael Leonard	Councilman

ABSENT

Nancy Montgomery	Councilwoman
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Town Clerk Merando read the Public Notice.

Supervisor Shea asked if there were any comments from the board members. Councilman Merandy questioned why the recommendation of the individual assessment conducted on the existing tanker truck and it's potential roadworthiness, is now being ignored, and a lease/purchase of a new tanker is being considered.

Councilman Van Tassel responded that the appraisal was completed by Hatfield Brothers, who determined that the truck was indeed roadworthy with only a few items that needed to be addressed and done inexpensively. He added that in the event that the equipment failed, the town would feel responsible, as the truck is twenty years old. The firefighter who drives that truck stated that it's not dependable. Councilman Van Tassel added that it was his feeling that this truck should have been replaced four years ago. Originally, he believed that instead of purchasing an engine, the tanker should have been purchased. The vehicle is older and people's lives are depending on it. He also noted that Hatfield's indicated that the vehicle could last another twenty years, however, that's not how fire apparatus is secured.

Supervisor Shea interjected that now is the perfect time to borrow, as the rates are low. He also stated that he agrees with Councilman Van Tassel, and if the Chief comes to the Town Board to confirm that the tanker is not a dependable piece of equipment, that, to him, carries more wait than an outside assessment.

Councilman Van Tassel pointed out that if that were one of three tankers sitting in that department he would say it's perfect, but that is not the case.

Councilman Merandy once again stated that he is bewildered as to why then, did the town have an outside assessment done on the tanker. He added that he is sure that Hatfield is a reliable firm and know what they are talking about.

Supervisor Shea stated that the finer point is that it could be made roadworthy -- could it be made 100% reliable, no. Councilman Van Tassel added that nothing is 100%. A brand new truck could be delivered and it not start. He concluded saying that roadworthiness vs. life safety is a different story.

Councilman Leonard concurred that the evaluation had to be done in order to have another opinion. He stated that he values the opinion of those people involved in the use of the vehicle, but feels that the outside review was important.

Councilman Van Tassel noted for the record that the evaluation serves as an assurance that the truck can be used while the new truck is being built, which is almost a year away from delivery. It was also explained that the tanker was a used cab chassis, therefore, the 20 year plus roadworthiness is at question.

Supervisor Shea stated that the tanker has to be replaced, and this is a good time to finance as the rates are low.

Joe Regele asked if any of the Town Board members spoke to David Hatfield regarding the truck? Councilman Van Tassel responded that he had spoken with Mr. Hatfield. Mr. Regele stated that he also spoke with him and he explained that the \$2,000 figure he gave was to get the tanker on the road to meet federal highway standards. Mr. Regele asked Mr. Hatfield if anyone had approached him with regard to refurbishing the vehicle; his response was that no one had addressed that issue. Mr. Hatfield stated that if \$15,000 was invested in the tanker, it would be a sturdy, dependable vehicle. Mr. Regele noted that the purchase of this tanker would bring the total of equipment purchased in three years to one million dollars. Mr. Regele continued to point out different scenarios with regard to purchasing new equipment.

Councilman Van Tassel responded saying that even if you put 20 to 80,000 dollars into refurbishing the equipment, a catastrophic event could still occur.

Mr. Regele, stated that as a taxpayer he has a problem with the misleading representations made just two years ago - that this piece of equipment would be the go-to piece of equipment. Another piece of equipment was purchased at that time, and once again another piece of equipment must be purchased. There was some discussion with regard to the continuity of boards for both the town and fire department when it comes to budgets and truck replacement schedules.

Supervisor Shea noted that any statement made past and present should be honored as stated in the past, membership should have nothing to do with it. Mr. Regele stated that this is his point; the statement was made and two years later, it's not the case. Supervisor Shea agreed and commented that it puts the Town Board in an awkward position. Councilman Van Tassel concurred.

Mr. Regele commented that a discussion for the purchase of the tanker has been ongoing for a year now, however, that didn't stop the purchase of a \$50,000 third chief truck. He went on to say that at some point there has to be recognition that resources are better allocated elsewhere. How do you rectify purchasing the chief's vehicle when you know that you need to purchase a tanker? He strongly stated that there has to be some limits to these types of purchases. Councilman Van Tassel noted for the record, that they have stayed within the budget. He added that some things that were in the budget were replaced by this purchase, which they need. Discussion then turned to the 2013 budget and an increase of 9% as Mr. Regele sees it. Supervisor Shea stated that until the board has had the opportunity to review the audited budget that remains to be seen.

Discussion continued at length, at which time the Town Board made the decision to keep the public hearing open, allowing the Town Board time to review the fire company's audited report.

Mr. Jim Erickson addressed the Town Board as a taxpayer commenting that monies are always being discussed, but hasn't heard any comments with regard to the performance of the fire company. He pointed out that just recently they were at a scene where mutual aid responders needed to leave for calls of their own, and Garrison was the only one on site, with the only tanker. He strongly reiterated the fact that it is important that a tanker keep moving, picking up water and coming back. He also stated that this tanker should have been replaced in 2012 as per the truck replacement schedule. He noted that as a taxpayer, he wants the best and wants to be protected.

Councilman Merandy, acknowledging that he has been on the board for only a brief time, however, he has noticed that there have been concerns about bookkeeping and monies being spent, which made him wonder as to what was going on. It's because of the past history, which gives him pause when discussing financing, etc.

Mr. Erickson also stated that the fire company has hired a new auditing firm to better review their finances in an effort to show good faith and answer any questions that may arise.

Rodney Tudor addressed an off-the-cuff comment from a board member who stated that the vehicle was a forty-year truck. He reiterated that fact that this truck was not meant to be operational forever. It was a refurbished truck twenty years ago, an over-the-road truck with many miles on it. There were further comments from Supervisor Shea and Councilman Van Tassel as to that comment and the fact that it was an official meeting of the fire company and no one disagreed with it at the time. Mr. Tudor strongly stated that the comment was not an official comment from the Garrison Fire Board.

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Supervisor Shea stated that the Town Board needs the audit in order to make determinations, not a draft, but the final. It was promised that the final report would be delivered Friday.

Mr. Regele interjected that he has respect for the fire companies, its volunteers and their commitment. With that said, that has to be kept separate, as the town has a certain amount of money and there are competing interest that effect all taxpayers. He went on to say that the fire company hired a bookkeeper to streamline the process and have the financial information available in a timely manner and here it is May and there is no financial report.

Discussion then turned to allocation of taxpayer's monies if fire company monies are removed from their budget and distributed to other areas/departments. All this and keeping within the 2% tax cap.

Stan Freilich asked if someone from the fire company could explain the need for this piece of equipment. Mr. Erickson responded saying that this is a replacement item, which is on the replacement schedule. He noted that the fire company has followed the town contract as notification was given to the Town Board. The fire company feels that it's following it's schedule of replacement vehicles.

Mr. Regele asked if the purchase was a foregone conclusion? Supervisor Shea responded stating, "absolutely not," noting that the replacement schedule is always open for discussion. Mr. Regele then asked if monies have been put down on the tanker? He was told that no, there are no monies at risk. Mr. Freilich asked if an interest rate has been established as of yet? Supervisor Shea thought that until it's approved, the rate couldn't be locked in.

Brad Miller quoted sections of the IRS Code, which states that once the Town Board approves the lease/purchase, the fire company can borrow at a rate that municipalities can as opposed to being a private company.

Mr. Regele addressed revenue reporting from the fire company that does not appear in the budget. He noted that revenues should be reflected and considered during the budget process. Supervisor Shea noted, for the record, that their budget was reduced by 25% three years ago. Councilman Van Tassel stated that even with a small increase each year, the fire company is operating at an 18% reduction, while overseeing two firehouses. Mr. Regele then declared that based on the audit, there are reserve funds that can be used to offset the cost of the tanker and the financing.

Discussion continued with regard to reserves, at which time Mr. Regele proposes that there is approximately a \$200,000 surplus that could be used as a down payment against the tanker. Supervisor Shea responded saying that if that is the case, the funds will be used to offset the cost of the tanker.

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Rodney Tudor asked that the letter submitted to the Town Board in February be read into the record. **See Attachment "A"**

Mr. Regele commented that the fire company should be asking, not telling the Town Board what they intend to do. He pointed out that the Town Board is in control of finances for the fire company. Supervisor Shea responded saying that the Town Board has had a collaborative relationship with the fire department for the past year and a half.

Supervisor Shea announced that the public hearing will remain open and there will be no vote on this matter until the Town Board has reviewed the audit.

Councilman Van Tassel made a motion, seconded by Councilman Merandy and unanimously carried to adjourn the Public Hearing at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,

Tina M. Merando
Town Clerk

Garrison Volunteer Fire Company Inc.

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Garrison, NY 10524

Chief's Office (845) 424-3709

February 6, 2014

Philipstown Town Board

via email to townclerk@philipstown.com

Dear Town Board Members,

I'm writing to let you know that we plan to purchase a new tanker, to replace our existing one. As you know, tanker replacement in Garrison is somewhat overdue, so I'm very pleased that we're finally going to do it.

The fire company put out a 53-page request for proposals to thirteen truck providers. Only one responded with a bid: US Tanker. (Some vendors, such as Spartan, 4Guys, and Pierce, did express strong interest, but ultimately they declined to bid, for a variety of reasons.) After careful consideration, we've decided to accept the US Tanker proposal. The new tanker will cost \$308,627, and after financing is arranged and a contract signed, the vehicle can be delivered in another 8 months.

I want commend our Truck Committee for their very thorough evaluation of the fire company's needs in this matter. They spent months examining every aspect of the tanker's role in emergency response, met with several vendor representatives, examined many trucks, and finally created a set of specifications which are well matched to the duties of the new tanker.

Very truly yours,


Donna Corsi

President

cc: board@garrisonfd.org

* Established 1929 *