

# **Town of Princeton, Mass. – Jan. 17, 2017**

## **Executive Session Minutes - BOARD OF SELECTMEN**

**6:30 PM** Selectmen took roll call vote in regular session and opened executive session. The Selectmen continued discussing the Fire Chief's contract with John Bennett. Nina explained a misunderstanding relative to an incident in which Jon F. expressed concern to Dep. Chief Tim Kelly about the department losing two key staff recently. John B. subsequently heard from Tim K. about the conversation and interpreted the message as selectmen considering a full-time fire chief and considering Tim K. in that position. Stan went into a lengthy explanation about BOS goal-setting sessions that totaled about 10 hours and considered long and short-term goals, but didn't include anything about changes in fire chief status.

John B. started with the department in 1979 and has experienced how the town went through six fire chiefs in about a dozen years. Edith and Jon brought up John B's. skills and his success at stepping into the position after the David Cobb debacle. John B. commented about the cost of a fulltime chief, the related skills of some of his staff and the fact that he may be giving up corporate life, to pursue other projects, or if there are managerial changes at FlexCon.

Selectmen then turned to the terms of the contract, to run through June 30, 2018 and included salary increase of 2 percent per year since 2014. These terms don't match what John B. had requested but he was willing to accept them. The current (expired) contract has a provision for automatic renewal and the group agreed to keep that provision in the new contract.

Selectmen voted all in favor to enter into a contract with the fire chief under the terms of the previous contract but extend it through June 30, 2018; add increase in salary as discussed and include same provision for automatic renewal. Also, selectmen can re-establish terms of the contract if federal law concerning overtime and hourly pay rates is ever enacted.

Stan noted the town's Hazard Mitigation Plan and John B. outlined how his department is proceeding with the requirements. He has also prepared the department to do what's necessary to be eligible for grants. Chief Bennett left the meeting.

**7:10 PM** Selectmen then turned to police union requests and Nina reported on meetings she's had with Chief Michele Powers and Adv. Cmte. member George Handy. The union had a long list of requests including buyback for health insurance if an employee uses a spouse's insurance. They asked for 50 percent buyback but group preferred a fixed amount, as done in other towns, such as \$1,500 (single) or \$3,000 (family). Getting pre-paid for clothing allowance was another request; also, asking for a percentage increase on shift differential and 4 percent/year raise. They asked for a sick-time incentive to get paid one day for every three months not using sick time. When on duty alone, officers want extra \$2./hr. for serving as "officer in charge," but the chief explained that in those situations, officers call her for guidance anyway and she is literally and effectively the officer in charge.

Jon F. noted that Princeton is at top of list of Central Mass. communities for high police expense per capita. A way to cut costs is to offer 75 percent (town contribution) of health insurance coverage instead of the current 80 percent. Group discussed low inflation and cost of living up 1.7 percent this year, and salaries and fixed incomes stagnant, making it difficult to take advantage of 2.5 percent budget increase under proposition 2 ½. Group also discussed a longevity bonus which pays several hundred dollars extra each year after 10, 15 or 20 years of service.

As an alternative, Selectmen voted all in favor to propose a 2 percent cap to apply to the entire police budget.

**7:42 PM** Selectmen closed the executive session with Stan making a motion to adjourn, Jon seconded and in roll call vote they adjourned with Jon, Edith and Stan each saying “aye.”

Respectfully submitted, Marie Auger, admin. assist.

**BOS Referenced Documents:** Fire Chief's contracts; list of police union requests