

CONWAY VILLAGE FIRE DISTRICT
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING
Thursday, April 21, 2022, 5:00 P.M.
Fire Station

Meeting was called to order at 5:00 P.M.

Commissioners present: Steve Bamsey, Mike Digregorio and Tom Buco
Staff present: Amy Snow - Municipal Bookkeeper and Chief Solomon
Superintendent Vallieres joined the meeting at 5:04 P.M.
Valley Vision was also present.

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Mr. Bamsey made a motion to ratify a., and b. Seconded by Mr. Digregorio.

- a. Ratify Payroll Manifest and sign checks for week ending 4/17/2022
- b. Ratify A/P Manifest dated 4/20/22 and sign checks dated 4/22/2022

Discussion: EJ Prescott \$2,227.52 – Inventory and meter replacement parts.
Quick Med Claims, \$1838.10 – Monthly 7.5% paid for Ambulance billing.
Ti Sales, \$2504.46 – Inventory
Wind River, \$2,350.00 – Vac truck cleaned all the wet wells.

Motion passed 3-0-0.

Mr. Bamsey made a motion to approve the chief's timesheet for week ending 4/17/2022, seconded by Mr. Digregorio. Motion passed 3-0-0.

Mr. Bamsey made a motion to approve the minutes for week 4/07/2022, seconded by Mr. Digregorio. Motion passed 2-0-1.

A typo was corrected on the 4/07 minutes.

Mr. Bamsey made a motion to approve the minutes for week 4/14/2022, seconded by Mr. Buco. Motion passed 3-0-0.

FIRE CHIEF'S BUSINESS

Chief Solomon had nothing to report.

SUPERINTENDENT'S BUSINESS

Bruno stated that this week they had been working on Chase, Farrington, and Wilder Street.

He said there is a stake driven roadway from the Fire Station to the Park ready to look at.
Discussion ensued.

Bruno next presented Usage Abatements. The first abatement is for 37 West Main Street Extension in the amount of \$11.62.

Mr. Bamsey made a motion for a sewer usage abatement in the amount of \$11.62 for 37 West Main Street Extension. Seconded by Mr. Digregorio. Motion passed 3-0-0.

The second abatement is for Cornerstone Park in the amount of \$897.92

Mr. Bamsey made a motion for a sewer usage abatement in the amount of \$897.92 for Cornerstone Park, LLC. Seconded by Mr. Digregorio. Motion passed 3-0-0.

BOOKKEEPER'S BUSINESS

Mr. Bamsey made a motion for a bookkeeping adjustment in the amount of \$157.06 for 370 Poliquin Drive. Seconded by Mr. Digregorio. Motion passed 3-0-0.

Meeting was recessed at this time. Meeting resumed at 5:30 P.M.

32 people of the public were present for the informational meeting including Selectmen and Staff from the Town of Conway.

The Commissioners made introductions to the public and reiterated that this is a public discussion. Also, Valley Vision is here to record this meeting.

Mr. Bamsey then informed the public that the Commissioners had approached the Board of Selectman of the Town of Conway and asked them what their thoughts would be regarding taking over Fire and Rescue. The Selectman then came back to the Commissioners saying, what if the Town of Conway were to take over the entirety, Fire, water, and sewer. Discussions have ensued. The possibility of dissolving the district was broached at the Budget Hearing and Annual meetings. Currently the commissioners see four possible scenarios.

1. Do nothing and continue as we have been doing.
2. The Town of Conway takes over the Fire and Rescue.
3. Dissolving the district with the Town of Conway taking over Fire, Water & Sewer.
4. Selling to a Private company.

Mr. Bamsey stated that it comes down to finances. We run a tight budget, and provide excellent Fire, Rescue, Water, and Sewer services, but costs keep escalating. A few of the issues that the district faces are, the fact that while there is some development here, it is limited. Fire & Rescue continues to increase, and staffing continues to be a problem. Upgrades have put water and sewer where they need to be. However, there is only so much we can do to keep the cost down.

Next Mr. Buco stated that his first instinct was to oppose giving up our autonomy and that he felt he had not been elected to dissolve the district, that was not his platform. He went on to say that he does not want to support dissolving the district unless the voters decide to do so.

Mr. Digregorio began with the fact that he has always been an advocate for a town wide Fire Department. It makes sense for resources as well as financially. He added that they have worked hard to get the taxes down. If the town does absorb the district, the challenge then will become that town wide decisions will directly affect the district. There have been conversations regarding expanding the water and sewer as well. It would be less complicated for the town to do. He stated that going forward he is torn regarding the town taking over management, however, he does support the Fire Department going to the town. He feels that to maintain the current level of service changes do need happen for the Fire Dept.

Chief Solomon then presented a slide show, showing that in 2021 the Fire Departments cost to the district taxpayers was \$1.43 per \$1,000, plus 7.5 cents for ambulance. If the town of Conway owned the Fire Department the cost would have been \$1.18 per \$1,000.

The total tax rate for the district was \$1.83.

Non-precinct tax rate was \$1.09 for same coverage and 7.5 cents for ambulance.

Albany paid \$1.03 for Fire and Ambulance coverage.

The Chief, as requested by the Commissioners, then presented fabricated numbers for 2024. He added two full time staff and stated that if nothing changes this will drive the Conway Village tax rate to \$3.34 per \$1,000. If the town owned the Fire Department, it would cost \$1.54 to provide the same coverage. This is based on the premise that the tax rate is equalized among all portions of towns covered as well as the town of Albany.

The Chief, again as requested by the Commissioners, presented options if we are to keep the Fire Department.

- Do nothing. There will still be staffing, and scheduling issues and the tax will be \$2.05 per \$1,000.
- Adding two full time staff, the tax rate will be \$3.34.
- Get rid of the Ambulance. Reduces revenue. Getting rid of the ambulance and keeping the current level of coverage the tax rate will be higher than adding staff.
- Get rid of the Ambulance and eliminate overnight staffing would reduce the tax rate to \$2.79 but, that would reduce the coverage.

Explanation of the other .40 cents in taxes.

6 cents is Park maintenance, if owned by the town this would be absorbed by Parks & Recs.

19 cents has been removed for 2022 by sewer.

15 cents is for the Commissioners Fund. This fund is for the Commissioner salaries, legal fees, building maintenance, and other general items.

Mr. Bamsey went on to say that if the town were to own the water and sewer that there could be a pooling of resources including, possibly moving the Public Works Department into the Conway Village Administration building making it a town building.

If we are to dissolve, we are still responsible for paying off current debt. The residents will still be paying the same water & sewer bill.

Jeff Goddard - we have recently spent a lot of money on infrastructure, are we going to give all of that away and not get a rate reduction? And we're still paying the same amount. Do we have an estimate of what we're going to give away? Why can't we sell it to anybody we want?

- Mr. Bamsey: It was talked about possibly selling it to the town. We see two potential issues with that. If the infrastructure is worth, ballpark, \$10 million, first, it would have to go to vote, asking the town to spend \$10 million. Second, the district has already paid for it, we would be paying for it again. And if you sell to a private entity, you lose all control. We elect the town officials, and he has faith that they will make good decisions.
- Mr. Digregorio: The people will still have the assets. He states that if he has a car loan and the bank sold that loan, he still has the car, he still makes the payment, someone else is managing the loan. The town can do things at a cheaper rate.

Jeff Goddard - The assets for water and sewer are all or nothing, correct? Prior to dissolving could the building be sold to someone else?

- Mr. Bamsey, yes, the district could liquidate assets, such as the buildings, but that would be counterproductive as Fire, water and sewer all need homes. He doesn't see that as the best way to go.
- Paul D added economy to scale is more efficient. You're still getting water and sewer just under new management.
- Amy Snow made several points regarding assets. Water & sewer are proprietary funds, and they are run like a business. The RSA's specifically state that water & sewer revenues cannot comingle with town tax revenues. The water & sewer revenues will stay where they are to run the water & sewer departments just as they are now. The other assets that the district has are the trust funds of which there are several. These trust funds will all stay intact to maintain the water, sewer, equipment, and infrastructure and to help us pay for our debt. Because it is proprietary fund money it cannot be used to reduce taxes. She also pointed out that there is a Fire Truck Replacement Trust Fund and an Ambulance Replacement Trust Fund which is tax money but should also stay in place as we will still have to buy new vehicles. Now the cost will be shared by the town not just the district. The recently purchased ambulance cost \$230,000. The next fire truck to be purchased will be approximately \$700,000.

There is also a Park Maintenance Trust Fund and Building Maintenance Trust Fund. The town has a Park & Recreation and building maintenance department. The district voters could decide to close these district trust funds, repurpose those funds and possibly help lower the betterment fee. She also stated that it is important to educate the budget committee and the public so that everyone understands the budgets.

Mr. Bucu then reported the total value of assets from the 2020 audit.

Bayard Kennett – The asset values that you cited, are they book values, depreciated values, or original costs?

- Mr. Bucu answered that these are the depreciated amounts as of 12/31/2020.

Bayard Kennett – Is there any discussion or intent of consolidation of Fire Prevention in Conway?

- Mr. Bamsey stated that that is one of the pieces that has indeed been discussed. It is possible that if the Fire Department becomes Conway Fire Department, some of the other departments might decide to join in. We feel that this a good move for the town.
- Chief Solomon added that this is the fourth time in his 15 years here that this option has come up. This time he sees it a little different. The other times it was all five Fire Departments or nothing, this time the Selectman have told us they would take on just Conway Village becoming a town entity. The Chief stated that they frequently get calls from outside Conway Village looking for non-emergent fire service that we can't provide because we don't have the jurisdiction. He thinks that this is a great opportunity. He then said that he has had a discussion with the East Conway Fire Chief, they are interested in joining in as a town Fire Department. He will be reaching out to the other Fire Departments as well but wanted to see what voters of Conway Village had to say.
- Mr. Digregorio then added that the Fire Department is now debt free, so the timing is good.
- Mr. Bamsey asked that if the town takes over the Fire Department and the Chief is running inspections all over Conway, would a portion of his salary be paid for town wide? Paul D agreed that it would be.
- Paul D said that the more customers coming on, you dilute the rate, and you get back to economy to scale. He then added, to answer Mr. DiGregorio's earlier comment, He feels 99.9% sure that the town would continue to run the Fire Department.

Mark Hounsell – There are a couple of complications that will need to be addressed, the payment to the North Conway Water Precinct, the current arrangement, and the impact on that arrangement if the district dissolves. He is concerned that North Conway Water Precinct will be making decisions that will impact the Conway rate payer. Can you divide the issue,

can you dissolve the Fire Department and keep the discussion on water and sewer open until we get further clarity? Is it all or nothing for the district, either you dissolve and go home, or you can dissolve just the Fire Department?

- Mr. Bamsey answered the second question first; Yes, we can just turn over the Fire Department by resident vote. To answer your first question, North Conway has no authority in anything that we do beyond what is stated in the IMA. The IMA is the authority in what happens with the sewer department.

Mr. Bamsey went on to reiterate that there is limited land to expand within Conway Village yet in Center Conway there is 400 plus acres going to be developed. One reason we wanted to bring this up now is that if we were to dissolve and become municipal water and sewer then the town has the authority to say to any development over a certain size that they have to be connected to water and sewer no matter where they are. We can't do that as Conway Village. Paul D confirmed this.

Louise Inkell – Does the IMA need to be rewritten with a change of ownership?

- Mr. Bamsey stated that we are very confident that it will transfer to the town. Mr. Digregorio agreed.

If the village dissolves the town will take all the assets and the debt remains with Conway Village, so at \$14 million debt would that debt be spread out the residents of Conway Village in an increased tax rate?

- Amy Snow stated that it would not be on taxes, it would be on the rates just as it is now.

Louise Inkell – But the rates are no longer part of Conway Village Fire District as the debt is, the town now owns the revenue base and any future debt.

- Mr. Bamsey answered that quite honestly things are going to stay basically the same. You will still receive quarterly billing, the betterment fee, demand fee and usage fees are still going to be the same. Within the Town of Conway, you have different parts of town paying different amounts, depending on where they are and what the service is. The town would be sending out the bill, but the bill would be the same.
- Amy Snow added, if a loan was taken to provide water and sewer to a new development, there would be a separate betterment fee for those residents to pay for that debt. Right now, we are paying a betterment fee for all the work that we've had done since 2006. This is the same regardless of who owns the assets. With the dissolution the rates could go down.

Louise Inkell – The betterment fee is going to be the same, it will be collected by the Town of Conway and given to the Village Precinct debt? The Town of Conway will be billing the water and collecting a betterment which is not theirs but goes back to the debt, so there's going to have to be a separation is that what I am understanding? And any future debt taken on by the town is a different betterment going back to the town as opposed to the district dept.

- Mr. Bamsey answered, yes.
- Amy Snow said, it would just be another department

Louise Inkell – There are other towns that are under one umbrella. This is usually the tax collector's office that bills.

- Amy Snow addressed this; There are two ways that the town can run the water and sewer department, it can be under the town clerk tax collector. The advantage of that is that they can put a tax lien on residents that don't pay their water bills. Right now, Conway Village can only do a mechanics lien and if not paid in six years must be written off. Water and sewer can also be run under the finance department which mean we would continue to do mechanics liens. That would be a decision that the Selectman would have to make. There are things that have to be worked out, but it will not change how we pay our bills.

Janine Bean – Two questions. My concern is that if the IMA is reopened for renegotiation, I'm not sure you really want to go there. I would be very careful of that. The second is, Are we going to be guaranteed, in Conway Village to get the same quality service that we pay for or is that going to be changed so it's going to be like the rest of the town where you call an ambulance to transport you and that's all you get? You call Conway Village and get your life saved.

- The Chief stated that there is a thought that the town doesn't want to be in the Ambulance business, it can be a headache, staffing problems, ambulance billing, and all these other components to it. Privatization is easier. That doesn't make it better. It would be up to you the residents to let the Selectman know that you want **better**. It will take time to sort it all out as current contracts expire. He added that towns all over the country are going away from private ambulance. We do have to educate people on this.
- Mr. Digregorio added that is going to be up to all of us to make it clear what we expect from the Selectman. I intend to hold them to the fire at paramedic level service. That is what this precinct provides.
- Mr. Bamsey stated that the Fire Station building will stay Fire and Rescue. He totally agrees with what the Chief and Mr. Digregorio have said. The whole town deserves

that quality of service not just Conway Village. Municipal anything is the money staying in the community. Private business sends the money elsewhere.

Daymond Steer – Can there be a covenant placed on the Conway Village infrastructure saying that if we give this to the town, thou shall give paramedic level coverage in perpetuity?

- Mr. Digregorio said that we are trying to find that out. We are not sure how that works. There are some legal questions there.

Daymond Steer – If in the future Conway Village dissolves and this Fire Station needs a new truck. Would other precincts, North Conway, and Redstone, not be taxed for that purchase until they join the town, or would they somehow have a vote whether this area of town gets a fire truck even if they're not paying for it?

- Paul D answered, if we bought a new fire truck and Redstone was still a precinct, we would not be providing service to Redstone and they would not be paying for the fire truck, neither would North Conway presumably their fire department still being intact.

Daymond Sheer – Would voters town wide be voting on the fire truck for this end of town.

- Paul D stated yes.

Daymond Sheer – The term IMA was tossed around, and I don't know what the means?

- Paul D explained that it stood for Inter Municipal Agreement. Conway Village and North Conway made an agreement to utilize the capacity in North Conway it was all spelled out in that agreement.
- Mr. Digregorio followed up with if the other precincts didn't join, they wouldn't be paying for a new truck. There is vast majority of this town that is non precinct, and they would be voting for and paying for it as well.

Daymond Steer – If you are North Conway resident and you see a \$700,000.00 fire truck for Conway Village, you might not catch that you're not paying for it.

- Mr. Digregorio stated that it wouldn't say Conway Village it would say Town of Conway.
- Amy Snow offered that we are already in this situation as the Town of Conway has a non-precinct contract with Conway Village. The entire town votes on it but it only affects the non-precinct areas. Same thing with the Ambulance. They also have a contract with the for-profit Ambulance, we don't get coverage from that, but we vote

on that contract as Conway Village residents, and they vote on ours even though they may not get the service.

Mr. Bucu thanked everyone for coming and for asking good questions.

Mr. Bamsey added that you certainly can contact them before the next meeting with any questions that you may have.

John Johnson - If the dissolution does pass, is there a check in place that would prevent an overwhelming majority of voting for a pull on our water district for development of another area where it might take a little bit more of the resources from this area that could have been put into development of a more localized environment here? What kind of checks could be in place to stop resource depravation from waters being pulled from this area? Is it all the same?

- Overheard – DES
- Mr. Digregorio stated that we do have plenty of water for growth and, we have in our contract the ability to send a certain amount of sewage to North Conway and we are well below that number. So, with growth we still have enough capacity to send to North Conway.
- Amy Snow added that DES has oversight over developments as well.
- Mr. Bamsey also added that we are guaranteed 600,000 gallons of sewage treatment at the North Conway plant and we are currently sending about 150,000 gallons per day. We are well under our established limits.
- Paul D mentioned that we are connected to the water system as well.
- Mr. Digregorio reiterated that we have plenty of capacity for growth both in water and sewer.

Mr. Bamsey thanked everyone for coming.

The next meeting will be Thursday, May 5, 2022, at 5:00 P.M. at the Admin Building meeting Room.

There being no further business to come before the Board, meeting was adjourned without objection at 7:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Chisholm, Office Assistant