

We all understand the necessity of resolving the problem of enlarging the Fire Dept facility on Winnacunnet Rd and constructing modern sub-station at beach

Last year, the Budcom voted to recommend the proposed Winnacunnet Rd construction bond with many misgivings, but felt that the manager had done the best he could and time is pressing. Circumstances out of our control - the economy, the length of the warrant, a 2nd bond for a beach station – resulted in failure to get approval for either.

As a result of no money to make a definitive plan, a new manager trying to pick up the pieces after incompetent managers, and a change in attitude with more demand for green technology, prior attempts have not worked. This year the Budcom had hopes that a plan could be pulled together, and agreed to give all necessary support. I even made a personal plea to the Precinct Commissioners and voters at their annual meeting in March. Some of our members have participated in public comment opportunities at your meetings and at the charette. We invited Chief Lipe to make a presentation at our June monthly meeting, and he did a good job in outlining the needs of his dept.

At that meeting we asked a number of times when we would see the new plan, without extra office space, focusing strictly on the Fire Dept. (Our members and the public were upset at having a bond request appear in mid-December of 2007, with no real time for consideration.) Mr. Nichols said he expected his Board to have a plan pulled together by mid-July. So it was with great interest that I watched your meeting on July 14. Unfortunately the result of that meeting clearly demonstrated to me that the “Emperor has no clothes”.

I then contacted Mr. Lally and asked for an emergency meeting of your Board to explore the possibility of petitioning for a special meeting to get funding for an architect to draw up a specific plan. After polling you Mr. Lally did not call an emergency meeting as apparently counsel thought it was too late for the process to take place, and he is probably correct.

What went wrong:

- 1) No money for adequate planning anywhere in this process
- 2) Unrealistic expectations of employees in pulling plan together
- 3) Seeming lack of understanding of the increasing danger to lives and property with all of the delays in presenting adequate plan with an associated danger of presenting inadequate proposals that continue to be voted down by the public

The Chief is professionally qualified to present to you the needs of the department, not to demonstrate cost per sq. ft. and calculate cost of construction. You keep asking him to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

The Town Manager is trained to give guidance but not to prepare the plan itself and you appear to keep changing your minds. That does not inspire public confidence. And asking the Manager to chop a million dollars off the non-proposal gets us nowhere.

The final cost of the bond must be determined by qualified professionals, taking into account the site, cost of demolition, functions outlined by the Chief, and the square footage required by those functions according to current building codes, plus special

circumstances like ADA requirements for handicapped accessibility. At this point in time, the Budget Committee and the public deserve and will demand nothing less.

There is now no chance of getting a bond article recommended by the Budget Committee or approved by the public in March 2009. Too many times to the well draws no water. Your July 14 presentation demonstrated too much uncertainty, too much fumbling and guesswork. Time is the enemy. While public participation is desirable, the public in general doesn't really know or care how the station should be built, only the amount of a bond coupled with a sensible and transparent plan will matter. Then the manager can calculate the figure that the public really needs to hear – what per thousand increase will we face on our tax rate?

In order to properly protect the beach, a sub-station must be built, and Winnacunnet Rd is the obstacle. Even after a bond issue passes it will take up to at least 2 years to complete the construction on Station 2 while the department continues to operate out of that location during the building process. Only then can we start the new sub-station. Every one of you is intimately familiar with the beach, and the nearly impossible task of operating an efficient fire service from the current ancient facility. It is inconceivable that we do not have a ladder truck housed in the most intensively populated and built up area of the town. The severe damage to some of our NH towns on July 24 should be a wake up call. Do we have the capability to handle natural disasters on that scale? I was speaking with a person at the market on Sunday who said "I don't care about the beach". Well, we all do need to care about the beach, if for no other reason than its millions of dollars of assessed valuation. What a shock it would be to look at your tax bill with even part of that value removed!

I have requested that our Finance Director, Mr. Schwotzer, open up a line in the Fire Dept section of the operating budget for capital planning money. I will be recommending to the Budget Committee when we meet in October, to work on the 2009 budget, that we insert a figure adequate to fund the hiring of a professional architect to develop a comprehensive plan for the Winnacunnet Rd facility, specifically including the cost of installing radiant heating capability at the time of construction. There should also be a side list of other "green" enhancements which might be added in the future and their associated costs. We will look to Mr. Welch for his best estimate of an appropriate figure to insert. As was the case with the 2008 budget, we would never propose this without full faith and confidence in the ability of this manager to use the funds for the purpose intended, like the funding we inserted for the addition of four firefighter positions.

What you need to focus on - beginning now - is acquiring land at the beach to site the sub-station. Either fix a specific spot owned by the town or precinct, or find something suitable in the area. The land site will need to be locked in before planning the actual bldg. Selectmen in 1980's appointed a committee to study and propose a Recreation Center. The committee worked hard, with great enthusiasm, and proposed a \$3 million bond - except the selectmen made no provision for the land to build it on. Obviously the proposal failed.

If we are all being asked to make a commitment to work together to accomplish the upgrade of the fire dept facilities, we will need something substantive to work with, and it is your job to provide the leadership to make it happen.