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Study Committee Finds Five Options For Fire Departments

By Jane Hubbard
Fire Department Study Committee

At the 2010 Town Meeting, warrant article 16 was approved by voters. This article was submitted by petition to appoint a study committee to analyze the "present model of delivering services town-wide" and to report to the Selectmen "whether it is desirable and practical to combine the Andover Fire Department and the East Andover Fire Department into one entity."

In April 2010, the Board of Selectmen appointed a volunteer committee comprised of Stephen Barton, Chris

tee agreed that having one station to serve the entire town could increase the response time, and that many residents would oppose this option. Whether the precincts and/or the departments were combined or not, it was agreed that the two stations should remain.

Finances: If the precincts combined, the tax benefits or costs to the residents of the two precincts would be marginally affected. However, the committee is still looking into those exact figures. The committee agreed that having only one station to serve the entire town, while economically beneficial, would not be in the best interest and safety of the residents.

Training: For this purpose, the committee found combining departments might be the most beneficial. Currently the two departments have separate training, and it was agreed that combining training, whether in one department or two, would be a good thing for everyone involved.

Five Options

Ultimately, the committee identified a mission statement and five options to consider for recommendation to the Selectmen. The mission the committee assigned to themselves was: Can service and/or finances be improved by combining the precincts and/or departments?

The five options that are currently on the table are:

- Option 1: Stay the same, with two precincts and two departments
- Option 2: One precinct and two departments
- Option 3: One precinct, one department, and two stations
- Option 4: Two precincts, one department, and two stations
- Option 5: One precinct, one department, and one station

However, as mentioned earlier, Option 5 will likely not be the favored choice of the committee.

The committee will be holding one more meeting in September and a final meeting in October (date to be determined) to review and approve the final report for submittal to the Board of Selectmen by November 1. The Board of Selectmen will then consider the committee's recommendation at a Selectmen meeting in November or December. If there are any proposed changes to the current structure of the two fire departments, there will then be public hearings and opportunities for public involvement.

The fire departments may or may not be combined, but "it was agreed that the two stations should remain."

Bengivengo, Glenn Haley, Roger Kidder, Les Fenton, Andre Parenteau, and David Powers. The Selectmen also recruited the volunteer services of Jane Hubbard to facilitate the committee meetings and to prepare the final report to the Selectmen. The committee has met twice and will be meeting for a third time on September 29. Some of the particulars discussed were:

Precincts vs. Departments: When the committee discussed "combining," it first had to be determined if we were talking about combining precincts or combining departments, as these are two very different entities. A precinct is a kind of "mini town government" that holds annual meetings, elects officers, and approves budgets, appropriations, and resolutions. The precincts support the departments with buildings, equipment, mutual aid membership, etc. The departments have their own personnel, organizational structure, and operating procedures.

As it stands, we have two precincts, each with its own budget and tax rate, and two fire departments, each with its own chiefs and personnel. So combining precincts would mean having a single operating budget for the town, and combining departments would mean there would be one chief for the town. It was agreed by the committee that when we discussed combining, we had to address both the precincts and the departments.

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