

**TOWN OF SPRINGFIELD
SELECTBOARD HALL – 96 MAIN STREET – THIRD FLOOR
PUBLIC HEARING – RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS FIRE CHIEF AND DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF
MONDAY, 7/10/2023**

APPROVED MINUTES

A. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chair, Kristi Morris, called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Selectboard Members: Chair, Kristi Morris, Vice Chair Michael Martin, Walter Martone, and Everett Hammond were present in-person. Crissy Webster joined via Zoom.

Administration: Town Manager Jeff Mobus, Town Clerk Barbara Courchesne were present in-person. Library Director Sue Dowdell was present via Zoom.

School Board Liaison: Steve Karaffa was not in attendance.

Residency Requirements for Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief

Chair Kristi Morris discussed that this Public Hearing was to discuss Ordinance 18-24 Residency Requirements and the Ordinance Committee has recommended changing the requirements from residency in Springfield to response time of 30 minutes. Chair Kristi Morris added that we had this at a previous meeting for introduction and this will serve as a second review and hopefully we will have some public input.

Town Manager Jeff Mobus read the recommended change to the ordinance “The Fire Chief and the Deputy Fire Chief shall reside within a 30-minute response time to the main firehouse in Springfield. The Fire Chief shall have control and command of the company and equipment.” Town Manager added that the original ordinance read as, “the Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief shall be residents of the Town.”

Bill Handly in-person commented that he was curious how many times in the years past they have gone towards the same thing while trying to change this for the Town Manager, Fire Chief, and other staff. Bill Handly added that they had to put it up for the Town to vote to change the ordinance, because the Selectboard could not make that decision. Bill Handly further added that the Town got to vote on it, and they always voted it down. Bill Handly inquired why they are trying to change it again and if the Town still had to vote on it. Michael Martin responded that the town did vote on it, and we passed a new charter. Michael Martin added that the Town voted to accept the new charter and the new charter removed the residency requirement for the Town Manager. Bill Handly inquired if this happened last march (2022). Michael Martin responded that it was two years before because it had to be approved by the Legislature after the Town passed it. Michael Martin added that the town did vote on removing the residency requirement for the Town Manager and that was the only place where residency requirements were included in the Town Charter. Michael Martin Continued that all of the other places where residency requirement was listed are part of the ordinances or policy manuals that the town and do not require to

public vote and this matter here is an ordinance and requires Selectboard action only not a Town wide vote.

Bill Handly commented that he believed this was a bad idea because you need to have them here before 30 minutes. Bill Handly added that for anybody that has ever had a major fire in this Town, as he has, you need those people here, you do not need them showing up 30 minutes later when somebody else is running things and having the wrong people making decisions. Bill Handly further added that you are just asking for trouble if you change that. Bill Handly continued that 30 minutes is a long time and a fire can roar and you have lost everything.

Crissy Webster via Zoom inquired why the recommendation was to move to 30-minute response time. Crissy Webster added that typically the Chief and the Deputy Chief have the command vehicles, and inquired if the expectation would be that the command vehicles would be left for somebody to be able to take from the fire station who would be taking command at that point. Crissy Webster further added that she agrees that a 30-minute response time seems a bit excessive. Crissy Webster continued that she knows that it is inconvenient to always live right in the town, but there is a point that they have to be able to respond in those positions within a timely manner.

Michael Martin discussed that there are a number of factors to this recommendation. Michael Martin added to address the concerns about immediate response, we do have a full time Fire Department and there are people that are at the station and other people that are on call, noting that he is not concerned about the response time to an incident. Michael Martin further added that there are no other residency requirements for any other Town employees, the Fire Chief and the Deputy Fire Chief are the only two remaining staff members that have a residency requirement, so they are trying to make all Town staff the same requirements with a response time we feel is adequate to be able to provide the coverage as needed. Michael Martin continued that nowadays it is difficult to find qualified people and by removing the residency requirement, we open ourselves up to a wider array of possible candidates when we need to replace staff. Michael Martin further discussed that it also gives our staff the ability to find housing that is nearby and not necessarily in the community.

Crissy Webster discussed that she understands the reasons, but she strongly feels that for first responders such as fire and police, we just need to be mindful of those positions. Crissy Webster added that there might be qualified staff to be able to respond, but they are essentially the ones in command, and they cannot have just any firefighter take over command there is a lot to it. Crissy Webster further added that regarding the town vehicles will they then stay at the Town offices, Fire Department, Police Department, or whatever, because she does not think it is realistic for somebody to move to Claremont and have the Town vehicle go there as well. Bill Handly added that he has heard those comments around Town, and he inquired if this means that they are going to be running the Town vehicles back and forth these long distances. Chair Kristi Morris responded that is a good question that he also had but noted that he did not think they had gone into that depth yet.

Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded that it does not mean that and added that one of our other employees in another department who generally had taken a Town vehicle moved to Claremont and he told that person they could not take the vehicle over there for just normal incidences. Town Manager Jeff Mobus continued that the police chief has a vehicle and the lieutenant asked if he could also take his vehicle home, and he told him that he could only take the vehicle when he was primary response and he could take the Chief's vehicle. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added that he lives in Chester and the Police

Chief lives in Springfield, so he believes that the idea is that there should be somebody who is responding directly, and it should be somebody in Springfield. Town Manager Jeff Mobus further added that the other thing we haven't mentioned is what happens if you have a Fire Chief or a Fire Deputy Chief who is in the position, who then moves to Charlestown or moves to Center Road, or outside of Town limits will they therefore have to give up their jobs, when it's hard enough to find these people.

Town Manager Jeff Mobus discussed that we do not want to have them feel trapped that they cannot move, whether it be 10 minutes or 15 minutes down the road. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added that there are parts of Charlestown and Weathersfield that are closer to the Fire Department than out on Pleasant Valley Road for example. Town Manager Jeff Mobus further added that like the two members of the Ordinance Committee said, these are currently the only two positions that are required to live in Town. Town Manager Jeff Mobus continued that we do have 24/7 people coverage down at the station and they will respond right away, they will not wait until the chief shows up. Town Manager Jeff Mobus further discussed that for example, if the Chief goes on vacation, we do not always have the Chief in Town. Town Manager Jeff Mobus noted that employees have the right to go on vacation, and then at that point they still are delegating decisions to the deputy or to the captain who is in charge of that shift.

Everett Hammond inquired how the 30-minute response time compares to other Towns such as Hartford, Brattleboro, or other Towns our size. Town Manager Jeff Mobus commented that he was not sure. Walter Martone responded that he cannot speak to this comment, but he can say that there was extensive debate about this as it related to the Town Manager residency with the Charter Review Committee and deciding whether or not to change the charter. Walter Martone added that one of the things that we are trying to recognize is as the Town Manager mentioned it is hard to recruit people, but also the whole nature of families, working, and children is different now than it was back when these requirements were in place. Walter Martone further added that oftentimes, you will have both parents working and both of them could be equal providers of the family and they could be working in different places. Walter Martone continued that oftentimes, what will happen is they choose their residence somewhere in between. Walter Martone further discussed that for example, if someone is living in Weathersfield, Weathersfield is definitely within 30 minutes of getting to the downtown area, but as the Town Manager mentioned before, if you were way out on Pleasant Valley Road or way down Eureka Road you may not make in 30 minutes, the important thing is that you can get there in the time that we are requiring, as opposed to where your addresses is per say.

Walter Martone discussed that when we were doing the search for a Town Manager, there were some people that were in areas that it just was very unlikely that they would be able to meet the requirement, and as even though we hired a Town Manager who lived out of the area the requirement was that within 6 months they had to move to Springfield but they didn't do it and that person's gone. Walter Martone added that we have to recognize the times that we are in right now and we are trying to change something that is more taking into consideration being reasonable as opposed to just a line in the sand that does not necessarily have relevance. Walter Martone further added that if there was a perfect radius that you could put around our town boundaries around the downtown or around the Fire Department or something like that it would be a different story, but our boundaries are irregular. Walter Martone further discussed that a different point in Town could make it difficult to get there by that time whereas other Towns are actually closer, and the voters overwhelmingly approved of the change for the Town Manager.

Bill Handly commented that he believes a lot of people did not realize that they voted for that change for everybody in Town to not have to live in the area and he does not think those should have been changed. Chair Kristi Morris clarified that the Selectboard members do have to live within the Town, and they have to be registered voters of the Town of Springfield. Chair Kristi Morris added that regarding the Town Manager now with the charter change the Selectboard has authority to negotiate the Town of residency with a Town Manager candidate. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added that the Town has to be in Vermont no matter what.

Everett Hammond commented that it sounds like response time might have been an issue with Mr. Handly's property and he inquired if we know of any or are aware of any issues with the captain not being there. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded that he was not aware of any problems and to be clear both the Chief and the Deputy Chief do currently live in Springfield.

Chair Kristi Morris closed the Public Hearing for the ordinance review and noted that the issue will be taken up in regular board meeting immediately after as item 14.

No further discussion. The Public Hearing was closed at 7:19 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carrie M. Kellow, Recording Secretary