



TOWN COUNCIL

Work Session

Town Hall
April 20, 2011
5:30 p.m.

At approximately 5:35 p.m., Vice Mayor Chris Bannon, having established a quorum, called to order the Work Session of Town Council. In addition to Vice Mayor Bannon, present were Councilmen Evans and Veber and Councilwoman Natali. Mayor Sullivan and Councilman Sullivan arrived at 5:36 pm. Councilman Bennett was not in attendance. Also present were Town Manager Heather Arcos and Town Clerk Libby Hume. In attendance representing the Cape Charles Volunteer Fire Department (CCVFD) Board of Directors were President Nick Braatz, Treasurer Hollye Carpenter, Chief Steve Wilson and Board Member Alex Kennedy. There was one member of the public in attendance.

Vice Mayor Bannon announced the business for the evening would be to meet with the Board of Directors from the Cape Charles Volunteer Fire Department.

Mayor Sullivan arrived and presided over the remainder of the meeting.

After introductions were made, Mayor Sullivan turned the floor over to Nick Braatz who stated that he and the Board of Directors were here to answer any questions that Council had after reviewing the financial information distributed at the April 14th Council meeting.

There was some discussion regarding the amount of the building permit fees forwarded by the Town. Hollye Carpenter stated that she did not have the information for 2010 since she took over as treasurer on January 1, 2011. Heather Arcos stated that she would obtain this information from the Town Treasurer. Hollye Carpenter added that the CCVFD received \$1,917 from the Town for the last three quarters, \$800 of which was for the first quarter 2011.

Vice Mayor Bannon stated that in the past, there was some tension between the Town Council and the CCVFD but the current Council was sympathetic to the CCVFD's situation.

Mayor Sullivan asked how often donation letters were mailed and how much was typically generated from these letters. Hollye Carpenter stated that she did not have information readily available for prior years. Nick Braatz explained that he was working with the previous treasurer to get the information for past years. Steve Wilson added that the CCVFD used a company in Pennsylvania to send their donation letters. Vice Mayor Bannon asked how much this company was paid to send the letters to which Steve Wilson replied that the company received a percentage of the donations. Councilwoman Natali added that the financial data from 2010 showed that \$2,898.35 was spent for "Professional Fundraising Fees." Councilman Evans asked what kind of support was received from out-of-town property owners. Steve Wilson stated that good response was received from the out-of-town owners.

Councilman Veber asked what fund-raising activities had been planned. Steve Wilson responded as follows: i) a Poker Run for motorcycles was scheduled for June; ii) the Seafood Fest was scheduled in July; and iii) Tool Mania was scheduled for December. Hollye Carpenter added that they were still working on something for the Buy Boats in August and monthly Texas Hold'em games were held at the American Legion.

Councilman Veber asked about Bingo games to which Steve Wilson responded that these games proved to be too costly and after expenses were paid, the CCVFD lost money. Several other fire departments held bingo games on the same nights which decreased the participation.

Vice Mayor Bannon asked whether the CCVFD had considered a booth at the harbor parties. Nick Braatz stated that the possibility had been discussed. Hollye Carpenter added that there was a lot of expense involved with purchasing the supplies before an event of this kind could be done and in many instances, after all expenses had been paid, it was not worth the effort.

Nick Braatz mentioned that Mayor Sullivan had offered to take the lead regarding an auxiliary and planning activities and fundraisers. Hollye Carpenter stated that their building was a problem for many events due to heating and air conditioning issues. Mayor Sullivan stated that many activities could be planned outside such as car washes, etc. Hollye Carpenter added that in many activities there was competition from other organizations.

Councilman Veber stated that on several occasions, he had offered to hold an auction to raise money for the CCVFD and the Board should take him up on his offer. Mayor Sullivan stated that there were many possibilities for fundraisers and she and Council were here to help in any way. Hollye Carpenter stated that the CCVFD was open to whatever help they could get and they lacked someone that could plan these activities. Nick Braatz agreed that the CCVFD lacked motivated individuals to pursue fundraising ideas and the department needed people that would go forward and help get things done.

Councilman Sullivan asked where the CCVFD purchased their fuel. Steve Wilson stated that the fuel was purchased at the Sunoco. Councilman Sullivan suggested looking into purchasing fuel from the Town to see if there could be a cost savings.

Town Manager Heather Arcos asked about the frequency of insurance payments and when the equipment loan payment was due. Hollye Carpenter responded that the insurance premiums were paid on a quarterly basis and the equipment loan was due in December.

Councilman Veber asked if the fire departments in the County had ever considered a joint fundraising effort. Hollye Carpenter responded that they did not have any fundraising-minded people in the fire department.

Mayor Sullivan asked when the CCVFD realized they needed assistance. Hollye Carpenter stated that it was realized when she became the treasurer in January 1 of this year. When she took over, the CCVFD had \$2,855 in the bank and \$12,859 in bills. Nick Braatz stated that the CCVFD reduced their spending in 2010 and reduced their budget to \$99K. Hollye Carpenter added that anyone could see by looking around the fire department that the money had not been frivolously spent but the poor economy was catching up and all the departments in the County were experiencing similar issues. Vice Mayor Bannon agreed and stated that hopefully, Mr. Ron West's article in the paper would alert all residents to the struggles of the fire department and added that unfortunately, people did not think about the fire department until their home caught fire.

Heather Arcos stated that she had spoken with an insurance agent earlier to get an idea regarding the effect of the proximity of a fire department on insurance rates in Town. The distance from a fire department did not directly impact the rates but any resident in Cape Charles got a better rate because of the fire department and the fire hydrants in Town. The agent could not give her a definite percentage of increase.

Councilman Evans assured the CCVFD Board that this was not an inquisition but Council was just trying to get an understanding of the situation to see how they could help. Councilman Sullivan added that the Town needed the fire department as much as they needed the Town. Councilman Evans stated that after Nick Braatz' presentation at the Council meeting last week, he sensed a significant amount of support from the attendees.

Nick Braatz stated that a resident had approached him and suggested placing a donation box in the businesses in Town for people to donate their change to the CCVFD. Council felt that was a great idea and Councilman Sullivan even suggested using an old boot. Councilman Sullivan

stated that he would put one in his store. Mayor Sullivan reiterated that Council was here to help in any way possible. Mayor Sullivan suggested having a uniformed fire fighter at events with a boot asking for donations. Vice Mayor Bannon stated that a fire fighter did just that at the Epiphany Party and raised a considerable amount in donations. Vice Mayor Bannon added that in Norfolk, fire fighters would stand in intersections with a boot asking for donations and suggested that the CCVFD might want to consider this type of fundraiser on occasion.

Nick Braatz stated that he was on board with having Mayor Sullivan lead the auxiliary and agreed that something needed to be done to increase community involvement and reinvestment in the fire department which was the key to success. Mayor Sullivan suggested an "Adopt a Fire Hydrant" program which was well-received by the other Council members.

Councilwoman Natali stated that she would be very happy to promote events and activities in the *Cape Charles Happenings* and would even send out a special issue asking for help for the CCVFD if someone would get with her regarding the language to explain the situation.

Councilman Veber suggested the Town hold a fundraiser for the CCVFD to get everyone on board and added that he would go door-to-door to raise awareness.

Heather Arcos asked if the Town determined that it could help with financial support to the CCVFD, could the Town be provided copies of the monthly financials for Council review. Hollye Carpenter responded that she could provide the financials without any problems.

Councilman Bannon asked whether a member of Council could have a position on the Board if the Town was able to provide the requested \$30K in funding support. Steve Wilson stated that the make-up of the Board was in their By-Laws which would have to be revised to accommodate this request. Hollye Carpenter stated that if this could be done, the individual would probably have to join the CCVFD and that there were three types of membership: i) fire fighter; ii) staff member; and iii) auxiliary member and auxiliary members were not permitted to sit on the Board. Heather Arcos stated that she was an auxiliary member of the CCVFD. Steve Wilson explained that auxiliary members were strictly used for fundraising and did not attend meetings or have voting rights. Nick Braatz added that the Board was in the process of revising the By-Laws and this issue would be discussed. Nick Braatz encouraged all Council to join the CCVFD as staff members and attend meetings. There was some discussion regarding membership. Councilwoman Natali stated that she had lived in Cape Charles for 11 years and had never heard of being able to join the fire department. Councilman Evans added that he had lived here for 19 years and thought that the only way to join the fire department was to become a fire fighter. Councilwoman Natali asked about the process for an individual to join the CCVFD. Nick Braatz explained that the individual needed to submit an application and there was no cost to join.

Councilman Evans stated that a big event was needed to support the CCVFD and to unite all the property owners and residents and the CCVFD. Nick Braatz stated that with Councilman Veber's auction and Mayor Sullivan's auxiliary, he felt this would be a good start. Heather Arcos added that the Seafood Festival in July was very popular. Mayor Sullivan suggested that the CCVFD permit the local business owners to help them sell tickets to the Seafood Festival in an effort to get more attendees. Councilman Evans added that members of Council could help at the event to cook, serve, etc. Nick Braatz stated that the first step was for Council to join the CCVFD.

Councilman Veber stated that he believed that the first step in being successful was to utilize the people and their expertise in the best way possible. The CCVFD had a built in group willing to help them: i) Mayor Sullivan could spearhead the fundraising ideas; ii) Vice Mayor Bannon knew a lot of people and he could generate interest in the auction, etc.; iii) Councilwoman Natali was involved in practically all the activities around Town; and iv) Councilman Evans and his wife have lots of experience and knowledge on raising money, and the department needed to utilize the members of Council, who were all willing to help. Councilman Evans added that there was a great pool of talented people in Town and we needed to work as a unified team to succeed.

Councilman Evans suggested the Board consider, since the By-Laws were being reviewed, that auxiliary members be given the opportunity to attend meetings and permitted to voice their ideas to the Board. The auxiliary members were going to want to be part of the team and not just wait to be told what to do regarding fundraising.

Vice Mayor Bannon expressed his concern of how the active fire fighters would feel with Council getting involved and reiterated that Council would do anything to help the CCVFD. Steve Wilson stated that he could not speak to how they would feel but he felt that if Council was coming in to help them, they would be accepted.

Councilman Veber stated that once the word got out regarding the seriousness of this issue and the amount of time, effort and their own money donated by the fire fighters, he believed there would be an outpouring of people to help because the fire department was not something people thought about or heard about. The people see the fire trucks and believe everything was okay.

Councilman Veber asked if the CCVFD billed for their services to put out a fire, etc. Steve Wilson stated that only the use of the Hurst tool, which was more commonly known as the “Jaws of Life,” was billed. Councilman Veber asked whether a letter was sent to the family afterwards or whether donations were ever received from the residents who received their services. Steve Wilson responded that letters were not sent to the families after a fire nor were any donations received. Mayor Sullivan stated that many people sent donations to the Rescue Squad after receipt of services. Hollye Carpenter added that it was a different situation since it was a bad time in someone’s life when they lose their house.

Mayor Sullivan stated that she was motivated and asked whether there were any other comments.

Hollye Carpenter stated that she would like to discuss the Seafood Festival. The CCVFD needed a location to hold the festival this year. The fire house was not conducive for the festival and it was preferable to hold the festival outdoors. There was too much construction at the Harbor to hold it there. In previous years, the festival was held on the Tavi property but they no longer had a contact person to deal with. Council advised that they would provide the contact information since the Tavi property was the best suited location for the Seafood Festival. Hollye Carpenter continued to state that an outdoor location increased the expense of the festival since a large tent would have to be rented. Councilwoman Natali suggested Central Park, but Vice Mayor Bannon countered that the Harbor front provided a nicer setting for the festival. Heather Arcos stated that she would obtain information regarding the property. Steve Wilson stated that Heather Arcos should contact him or Doug Walker who was in charge of the Seafood Festival committee.

Mayor Sullivan asked when the vendor forms would be available for the 4th of July events. Steve Wilson stated that he couldn’t answer the question and had thought the forms were already available. Mayor Sullivan stated that she had two vendors that wanted to participate and needed for the forms. Steve Wilson informed Mayor Sullivan that he would contact her tomorrow to get the contact information of the vendors. Mayor Sullivan also asked Steve Wilson to provide auxiliary member applications for her to distribute to Council and other residents.

Ron West suggested that the CCVFD ask for donations during the events surrounding the Tall Ships’ visits. Heather Arcos stated that the first Tall Ship was expected June 2 – 5 in the Town Harbor and tours would be offered for one day at no cost to the public. The ship was planning to ask for donations, but donations could also be requested on behalf of the CCVFD. Vice Mayor Bannon suggested that the CCVFD could have a concession area for visitors to buy food and beverages. Heather Arcos went on to state that on Tuesday, April 26th, a meeting regarding the Tall Ship visit was scheduled at the Northampton County Chamber of Commerce and asked that a representative from the CCVFD attend the meeting.

Steve Wilson stated that he realized that \$30K was not a small amount of money but he wanted to remind Council that the CCVFD saved the Town over \$2M every year by being a volunteer force

and asked that Council consider this fact. Councilman Evans added that all the money in the Town budget came from the taxpayers and Council needed to justify how the money was spent. The discussion this was to enable Council to understand the issues to make an informed decision regarding the budget.

Nick Braatz stated that the operating budget was at least \$130K per year which came from donations from the Town, County, and residents in Cape Charles and their coverage area. Hollye Carpenter added that this figure did not include repair or replacement of any equipment, some of which would need to be replaced in the near future. Nick Braatz went on the state that the CCVFD was restructuring in order to survive in this economy and were trying to look at ways to cut costs in any way possible. Nick Braatz added that their goal was to create a better relationship with the Town and community reinvestment. The CCVFD belonged to the community and it was the community that donated their time and/or money to support the fire department to enable it to survive. What the CCVFD needed now was money to pay the bills. If the bills did not get paid, there would be no truck, gear, building, etc.

Councilwoman Natali asked whether Northampton County contributed to the CCVFD. Steve Wilson explained that the County contributed annually and last year gave \$19K to the department, \$8K of which was a pass-through from fire programs. The County also paid the \$1K User Fees for all the volunteer fire departments allowing the departments to utilize the Regional Fire Training Center at no cost. The County also contributed \$6,700 annually for the Regional Burn Center programs. Steve Wilson added that the Town used to contribute \$1,500 to the CCVFD until Council agreed to donate a portion of the building permit fees. Initially, this amount was greater than \$1,500 but the last several years, the amount had dwindled due to the economy.

Councilwoman Natali asked how much interaction there was between the CCVFD and the other fire departments in the County. Steve Wilson responded that the fire departments met monthly except during the summer months to discuss various issues.

Nick Braatz summarized the discussions as follows: i) Councilman Veber was organizing an auction; ii) Mayor Sullivan would lead the auxiliary and fundraising; iii) Council would join the CCVFD; iv) the CCVFD would be promoted in the *Cape Charles Happenings*; v) boots would be placed in businesses for donations; and vi) the “Adopt a Fire Hydrant” program. Councilman Veber added that Ron West would write an article for the newspaper. Councilman Sullivan stated that Council was in the budget review process for next year and the \$30K request and these discussions would be included as part of the process.

Councilman Veber thanked the CCVFD Board and informed them that Council would be discussing this issue during the budget review and would get back to them. Vice Mayor Bannon added that the important thing was to keep the open dialogue and enthusiasm.

Motion made by Councilwoman Natali, seconded by Vice Mayor Bannon to adjourn the Town Council Work Session. The motion was approved by unanimous consent.

Mayor Sullivan

Town Clerk