

COMMON COUNCIL/FIRE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

February 7, 1996

A special meeting of the Common Council was held at 7 pm on February 7, 1996, at the Higley Building.

Present:

Mayor Joseph Biviano
Ald. George Carnrike
Ald. Patrick McNeil
Ald. Robert Rabinowitz
Ald. Barbara Schermerhorn
Ald. Mat Thall
Ald. Charles Angelino

Also:

Fire Chief Mark Rice
Asst. Fire Chief Graydon Titus
Russell Mosher
Jim Williams
Tom Grady
Richard McNulty
Eugene Yesko
Steve Benenati
Andy Pratt
Bill Roberts
Deputy Clerk Donna Russell

Ald. Carnrike summarized the steps leading to the meeting, being held for the purpose of discussing the formation of a Fire District. He indicated the need for an agenda with strict adherence to the items being discussed. Mr. Mosher stated the Public Safety Committee discussed the matter at their last meeting and the following items are in need of clarification:

- A. Budget
 - 1) Development of Fire District Budget
 - 2) Adoption of Budget
 - 3) Method of Taxation
 - 4) Amount of Budget
- B. Taxation - how different tax rates are dealt with
- C. Fire Equipment

Mr. Mosher suggested the budget would be developed much like it is currently and would be submitted by the Fire Chief. Mr. McNulty said each department would submit its wish list. He said the cost to operate the building is already known and noted there is a capital reserve for maintaining the equipment. Fire Chief Rice noted that previous years budgets could be used to help in determining the budget. Mr. Mosher noted the only difference is that the budget would go to the Fire Commissioners rather than the Public Safety Committee.

Mr. Mosher explained the computation of spending limitation. He noted the maximum debt limit without going to referendum is \$1.2 million, a maximum debt limit of \$16.6 million would require a 2/3 vote of taxpayers and a maximum debt limit of \$9.9 million would not require 2/3 vote of the taxpayers. Mr. Mosher stated that monies in the reserve fund cannot be dispersed without the approval of the voters. He noted that another system of "checks and balances" is that it would have to be approved by a majority of the full board.

Ald. McNeil questioned the method of assessing buildings and land and the difference in the rates of the Towns and the City. Mr. Mosher said the difference is primarily due to there being a greater number of buildings in the City and Town of Norwich; the Towns of North Norwich and Guilford have fewer buildings and more land. Mr. Williams recommended one assessor for all the district.

There was discussion regarding fire equipment. Mr. Mosher noted that although the City owns the fire equipment, the Towns have contributed towards the equipment. Ald. McNeil stated that until seven years ago, the Towns did not contribute towards any equipment. Mr. Williams noted that the Towns did contribute to the tanker over seven years ago. Mayor Biviano indicated the Towns have paid for a service, not for equipment. There was additional discussion regarding the formula used to determine that the City's portion is 50%. The group agreed that an appraisal of the City's fire equipment should be done and the cost would be shared. The Mayor suggested the Council authorize the appraisal of the fire equipment at the Council work session scheduled for February 12, 1996.

There was discussion relative to beginning the legislative process needed to form a fire district. The Mayor questioned whether this should be done before a decision is made. Mr. Mosher noted that until a final application is submitted to the Board of Supervisors, the process can be halted.

The group discussed who and how many could serve on the Commission. Mr. Mosher said the only volunteers that could not be on the commission is the Chiefs. He noted the Secretary and the Treasurer are paid positions, the commissioners are not paid.

Andy Pratt, City taxpayer, said he was impressed that this group has come together to look into this matter. He said there appears to be a coordinated effort in attempting to put this together.

Ald. Carnrike suggested that another meeting be scheduled next month and requested the Mayor invite the Supervisors of the Towns to attend. Mr. Williams said the Towns are in favor of the Fire District, it is the City that is in need of clarification. Mr. Benenati noted that he and the other members of the committee were representing the towns. Ald. Carnrike recommended that the Mayor send a letter to the Supervisors addressing the City's concerns. Ald. McNeil stated the Council must protect the interests of the City taxpayers. Ald. Rabinowitz said the City would like to avoid duplication of services and we will come to a point where there is no alternative but consolidation.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 6, 1996 at 7 pm in the Higley Building. A lawyer will be on hand to answer any questions that may be asked. Please come prepared to address any concerns.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm.