

The meeting is called to order.

I wish to first address matters relative to how this meeting will be conducted. There will be ample opportunity for those in attendance to voice their opinions before the Council adjourns to closed session at which time members of the general public will be asked to leave.

In keeping with standard practice, those wishing to address the Council are asked to please raise their hand in order to be recognized by me. I will recognize one person at a time. Upon being recognized, we ask that you please stand, state your name and address and please direct your comments directly to the Council rather than to other members of the audience.

As this is a public meeting, your name and comments will be entered into the official minutes of the meeting. Whether we have ten audience members or five hundred, this is the standard process we follow. In light of the significant number in attendance and to provide opportunity for all who wish to speak, I ask that you limit your comments to two minutes.

Only after all who wish to speak have spoken will a second two minutes be permitted, however, the public comment portion will be limited to one hour.

The issue before us this evening is obviously of great concern to all of us. These are urgent matters which require resolution at the earliest possible time which is the reason this Council is meeting the second time this week, the third time since last week. There

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is no greater concern to this Council, no greater concern to all of us, than the life safety of all residents and the safety of their homes and personal property.

This Council also has a responsibility to assure your tax money, yours and ours, is spent responsibly in the manner and amounts we collectively have authorized. It is this Council's responsibility to act as a guardian of our collective resources and to be vigilant for abusive, inappropriate or illegal activities, and when suspected or confirmed to take timely corrective action.

There is a significant amount of miss-information in the public domain and the Council hopes to dispel some of that this evening. First, Public Safety has not been compromised by the Council's decision to secure all Town property and equipment at the Chopmist Hill Fire Department ("CHFD").

The volunteers from the three departments, Potterville, Hope-Jackson, and North Scituate, are providing coverage for both fire suppression and EMS services. The rescue service between the hours 6 AM to 6PM remains unchanged by the events occurring on this past Tuesday. The 6 PM to 6 AM operations though currently without the availability of Chopmist Hill at this point, it must be thoroughly understood, there is has been no interruption in service thanks to the added efforts of our remaining stations and fire and rescue personnel regardless of their base operations

Let me go a step further, not only has there been no interruption of service, when service has been provided, it has been provided on a reasonably timely basis. Earlier this week I received a call from a concerned resident that there was a 40 minute response time to an accident in the northern section of town. This is simply

not true. Official police dispatch records indicate timely response with the first service on site within 5 minutes, first rescue within 7 minutes followed at 8 minutes by two more apparatus (special hazards and a tanker), and second rescue within 12 minutes, the latter from Hope-Jackson.

This evening we would like to clear up as much of the miss-information, to tell you what has transpired, what we hope to accomplish and to provide an anticipated time table within which to achieve those objectives.

First, please allow me to provide some factual information relative to the most recent events and the Council's actions in the face of the following general and specific allegations relative to inappropriate use of fire apparatus and properties owned by the Town of Scituate:

1. Water being removed from the hydrant system of the Town of Johnston, which was the subject of a Channel 12 story is the event which precipitated the Council's inquiry into the matter.
2. Allegations of water removed from the hydrant system of the Town of Smithfield remains an allegation and is currently under investigation.
3. Allegations of the most significance, center around the filling of privately owned swimming pools in Scituate with water obtained from municipal systems outside Scituate and charging Scituate residents for pool filling.

It should be noted that the normal source of water for practice is from ponds and other none municipal sources.

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The Town of Scituate has its own hydrants which could have been legitimately accessed, numbering approximately 50⁴⁴ hydrants in the Hope section of Town.

To our knowledge, the only Scituate Fire Company entering Johnston to access municipal is the Chopmist Department. Practice does not require potable water and if it did it is accessible within the Town of Scituate.

Regardless of the water source, it is eventual use of such water is the real concern.

4. Allegations of fuel removed from the Department of Public Works for personal or other than department-related use.
5. Allegations of threats to withhold life preservation EMS services by members of the Chopmist Department.
6. The disgraceful condition of the Chopmist Hill Volunteer Department building, replete with a lack of basic housekeeping, filth, violation of fire safety regulations, all as attested to by the photographs available here for your review. These photos were taken on this past Tuesday morning..
7. Presence and use of a propane tank within the interior of the building, a clear violation of fire safety laws, resulting in damage to the facility's kitchen floor and adjacent areas, with widespread gobs of grease

The foregoing must be contrasted with the conditions and conduct of the remaining volunteer fire departments. They are well-maintained, clean and used by multiple community groups. It should be noted that both Hope-Jackson and North Scituate

stations are owned by their corporations while Potterville is town owned. The differences between the condition of Potterville and Chopmist are the result of those who occupy those structures.

Our focus must be on the future. The Council must know embark upon and encourage others to embark upon a course to restore fire-fighting and rescue capacity to a higher level, a higher level not only in terms of the life-saving and protective man-power but also to restore integrity, honesty and trust to the bond that must exist amongst the community, those who have chosen to selflessly serve and the Town.

The TC actions in recent days have been linked by those supporting a union as efforts to attack the union. This is simply untrue. The path we now find ourselves upon started almost two and one half years ago when a small group of Chopmist volunteers unilaterally declared themselves to be employees of the Town and immediately affiliated themselves with the IAFF.

Let me make something very clear. The Town has no problem with unions. We have many unions in Town. We routinely negotiate with them. In fact, just months ago, every single union on both the Town and School side, with the exception of one small school union, reached a mutual agreement to freeze wages for one full year. A step all our non-union employees also agreed to. That's the type of relationship the Town of Scituate has with its employees and I commend them for their understanding and cooperation.

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The Town of Scituate has no beef with the IAFF. The only problem is the so-called employees are in fact, not employees, a fact attested to by the National Labor Relations Board.

That's where we've been, where we are now. Lets address what we do now and in the future. First, the police investigation needs to be completed and to be done with all due haste. Concurrently, the Council will continue in a cooperative effort in conjunction with the three fire companies to assure continuity of service and, most importantly, restoration of a staffed Chopmist station.

The Council is encouraging the public to come forward to the Police Department with any information that might contribute to the ongoing investigation and the Police Department will discuss the opportunity for immunity from prosecution under such circumstances.

A violation of the public trust is serious. The Council has an absolute obligation to look into allegations that demonstrate that a violation of public trust has occurred and to take whatever action is necessary to stem those violations, especially if the allegations pertain to either a pattern of activity or ongoing activities that violate that trust.

The Scituate Fire and EMS services are provided by a dedicated group of volunteers; in-turn, the taxpayers fund the operations by providing equipment and vehicles. However, if the vehicles and/or equipment, including the premises where the vehicles and equipment are located are implicated in or involved in allegations of civil or criminal misconduct, the Council has an obligation to look into the matter.

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Many of the allegations suggest a failure or breakdown of the usual internal mechanisms that one would expect to find within either a command structure or corporate structure, both of which the Department has. The Council wants to be absolutely clear, however, that it does not exercise any control over internal management or operations of any of the departments. The control and management is exercised by each department by their own set of By-Laws and regulations. The Town's role is to provide funding to the volunteers consistent with state law. If it appears that those funds, either directly or indirectly, are being miss-used, wasted, or applied to purposes inconsistent with the reason the funds were extended, the Council has a duty to the citizens to act to protect the taxpayer funds.

1. Chief Randall can encourage people with information to come forward.
2. Solicitor D'Agostino can address "legal" questions.

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