

PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE
SECOND INTERIM REPORT
December 2009

The Public Protection Committee (PPC) offers the Board of Selectmen two options to resolve previously identified deficiencies in public protection. The Board is reminded that the PPC places the resolution of the Police Department deficiencies as first priority with the Fire Department and Public Works Department deficiencies as second and third respectively.

The recommendations are:

1. Option one: Construct a Public Safety Building to fulfill PD and FD facility needs; accommodate Town administrative needs in vacated Town Hall space; staff a combination FD when volunteer force becomes inadequate. Increase FD recruitment and retention funds as necessary to maintain volunteer FFs.

2. Option two:

Construct a two-story addition to the Town Hall to accommodate present Town administrative needs, PD needs and FD needs.

Invest in a recruitment and retention program for volunteer FD.

If the expanded recruitment and retention program fails to provide an adequate FF force then:

A. Hire full time FF to provide core staff for a combination FD.

B. Either add on a second story to the present fire station to accommodate the space needs of full time FF, or, if equipment and apparatus space in present FD equipment space is inadequate in the future, then build a new Fire Station and abandon the present FD space.

The PPC has spent nearly one year establishing priorities and solutions reported elsewhere. Briefly, the PD facility is grossly inadequate for reasons of public privacy and safety as well as employee safety and is the first priority for resolution. The second priority is a long-term resolution of FD staffing needs. The PPC concludes that all reasonable effort should be made to ensure that a volunteer department with a full time

Chief is adequate for the foreseeable future. To reach the goal of a successful long term volunteer fire department the PPC recommends:

1. Increase the recruitment and retention budget for volunteer firefighters to \$75,000.

2. Adopt a metric or metrics to be reported quarterly to the Board of Selectmen that would demonstrate the adequacy of volunteer fire fighter staffing. The Board should adopt a threshold at which the Board would consider the recruitment and retention program to have failed and therefore the Board would consider hiring full time fire fighters.

The PPC has found that a FD including four full time firefighters would add a minimum of \$212,000 annual cost to the town budget. This figure represents no costs of seniority, overtime and includes healthcare costs at a level less than the town now pays. New facilities would have to be constructed to support full time FF. There would likely be some offsetting savings due to reduced equipment replacement costs reflecting centralization of equipment and a more certain response time. The PPC has not performed a financial model of a combination FD with 4 full time FFs to test the financial impact of savings that full time FFs could achieve by assuming maintenance duties now paid for in other ways or income than could be generated by offering new services to the community. Also the impact of full time FFs on the availability of Emergency Medical Services is presently unknown.

Other communities with combination FD (full time and volunteer) also provide ambulance services. The PPC review of the Bar Harbor FD revealed that an active ambulance service is key to keeping full time FF busy and that an ambulance service also helps offset the costs of maintaining the department. The Town of Mt. Desert has an independent ambulance service and the PPC assumes this arrangement will not change.

Few present town employees actually live in the Town of Mt Desert. It is likely that new full time FFs, if not recruited from the present volunteer pool, would also not reside in the town. Volunteer FFs are much more likely to reside in the town and in fact anticipated recruitment and retention methodology would make town residency more affordable to the Volunteer FF. Town funds would stay in the Town.

Anticipated improved recruitment and retention program requires more widespread community involvement in support of and recognition of the FD. Social functions aiding recruitment and retention would also include town citizens previously not involved with the FD.