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Stacy Gravano, CTC

TOWN CLERK
EAST HAVEN TOWN COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2019

In accordance with Chapter III, Section 6 of the East Haven Town Charter, the East Haven Town Council Hearing Committee held a public hearing meeting Tuesday, September 3, 2019, at 7:00PM at the East Haven Senior Center, 91 Taylor Avenue, East Haven, CT 06512.

Chairman Ken Mckay calls the meeting to order at 7:06PM.

Item #1

Roll Call for Hearing Committee-14 present - 1 absent (Butler III).
A quorum is present.

Item #2

To conduct Public Hearing #1 regarding "An Ordinance Amending E.H. Code Sec. 18-8, entitled 'Tax abatement for volunteer firefighters.'"

**AUTHORIZING ORDINANCE OF THE
East Haven Town Council**

**An Ordinance Amending E.H. Code Sec. 18-8, entitled "Tax abatement for
volunteer firefighters"**

BE IT ORDAINED that subsection (a) of E.H. Code 18-8 is repealed and replaced with the following:

"(a) Each volunteer firefighter and each emergency medical technician of the East Haven Volunteer Fire Companies, who meets the service criteria set forth in subsection (b) of this section, shall receive an abatement of any real and/or motor vehicle property taxes owed to the town by such firefighter or emergency medical technician in an amount equal to the lesser of the total amount of real and/or motor vehicle property taxes owed to the town for such fiscal year, or:

- (i) The sum of one thousand five-hundred dollars (\$1,500.00) for any real and/or motor vehicle property taxes due and payable for the period commencing July 1, 2019, and ending June 30, 2021;

- (ii) The sum of two thousand dollars (\$2,000.00) for any real and/or motor vehicle property taxes due and payable on and after July 1, 2021

Whereas, in consideration of the services provided by volunteer firefighters with less than one thousand-five hundred dollars (\$1,500.00) in property taxes due at the time of the abatement for taxes due and payable between July 1, 2019 and ending June 30, 2021 or less than two-thousand dollars (\$2,000.00) for taxes due and payable on or after July 1, 2021, the balance of funds shall be paid by the town in check form to equal the amount of benefit received by volunteer firefighters with tax bills of one thousand five-hundred dollars (\$1,500.00) or two-thousand dollars (\$2,000.00) or more, respectively depending on the due date."

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED that this ordinance shall be effective in accordance with the provisions of the East Haven Town Charter.

Submitted by:	Danelle Feeley, Council Clerk	Date: _____
Approved by:	Joseph Maturo, Jr., Mayor	Date: _____
Received by:	Stacy Gravino, Town Clerk	Date: _____

- Fire Chief Matthew Marcarelli indicates that tonight they will be deciding on whether to increase the tax incentive for volunteer firefighters and EMTs from the current \$1,000 up to \$2,000 gradually over the next fiscal years. He researched how the program came into effect. Chief Sandford was the Chief at the time and he and Mayor Maturo worked on the project from the beginning. They looked at surrounding Towns with similar makeup and they were posed with three options; pay per call plus a pension, a pension for volunteers and what we have today which is essentially a tax rebate for qualifying members of the Department. The program has been in effect for the past 18 years; during the past 10 years the program has pretty much laid flat at about \$44,000 per year. It initially started as a tax rebate program and it eventually morphed into a check being cut to qualifying members and one reason for that was to encourage younger members to join the volunteer fire department as well as retain their current members. A lot of the younger members didn't own real estate property and didn't own vehicles or they weren't worth much so they weren't really seeing that benefit. It was determined they would change it where they would get a check cut to them by the Town which are the mechanics now. The point system is fair; each member receives ½ point for training at a minimum of 2 points at a time per hour. If they have a four-hour training session they will get 4 points. EMS/Fire/Standbys for emergencies or public safety events are 2 points each, work details and company meetings are 1 point and personnel holding leadership positions such as Lieutenant, 3rd Lieutenant, Secretary, Treasurer, Captain or President get anywhere between 6 and 10 points as the Ordinance is currently read. In addition they have a length of service point system where 10-19 year members get 15 points, 20-29 year members get 30 points, 30-39 year members get 45 points and 40+ year members get 150 points. In order for anyone to receive the benefit they need 150 points in any combination. If they come below it, they don't get the benefit so they have a lot of members that go to some calls and don't receive it or they haven't completed the proper paperwork to receive the benefit and he has

denied them as not qualified. There has been a lot of talk about life members or social members and he clarifies that there is no such thing as a social member as far as this Ordinance is concerned; no social members have received or will receive this benefit. Some companies have bylaws as they are all independently operated companies, Company 1 has a social member clause in their bylaws but none of those people are eligible for accruing points for any reason. There are four volunteer companies in Town and they receive \$2,500 each from within the Town budget. Company 6 receives \$12,500 in rent plus the \$2,500 for a volunteer contribution, which is basically seed money that they can disburse to buy equipment, to maintain the station, etc. as long as it benefits their operation. That was an increase of \$3,500 in this budget from last budget. In the last 5 years the four volunteer companies physically responded, on the trucks, to 2,304 calls. If you break that down, it equates to \$.005 per resident to pay for that incentive they have been paying. In comparison to a \$91 million dollar budget, it is a small number to see that there is anyone arguing to vote up or down on this. He understands why some of them have concerns but when the research was conducted and a committee was formed made up of Town people, volunteer firefighters and chaired by Chief Sandford at the time and the Board of Fire Commissioners- all of those things were taken into consideration. Because the Town did not have a pension for volunteer firefighters as an incentive program like our neighboring communities such as North Branford, we added the 40 year requirement to entice members; some members are here tonight that responded to a plane crash and still have nightmares. If we are going to argue over \$1,000 stipend for people like that for public safety, we have a serious problem. As the Chief, he completely endorses this program, \$2,000 as far as he is concerned is not enough but they will take what they are given. He encourages them to take a vote tonight, not table it and put the issue to bed tonight so that his members don't have to worry about this further down the road.

Public comment:

- Joseph Piccirillo- 32 Edgehill Drive, East Haven- Mr. Piccirillo says he has been a volunteer firefighter for 55 years with this Department and one of the reasons why he got away from being active is because he got appointed to the Board of Fire Commissioners and he thought it would be a conflict of interest by staying. He does help out in any way he can still. The service they get out of these volunteers who have to go to school, get certified, etc. it is just peanuts for what they have to pay so he hopes they pass it.
- Sal Maltese- 11 Holland Road, East Haven- Mr. Maltese says the Chief did a great job and he endorses the \$500 going forward and \$500 for the following year. What these people do and go out there and risk their lives we could never do. He supports them and everyone on the Town Council should also support it, their lives are on the line every minute they are out there.
- Wayne Sandford- 350 Mansfield Grove Rd, East Haven- Mr. Sandford says he agrees with what Matt said. Over the years it has proven out what they had thought would happen and the dedicated members that serve the Town get some benefit. He encourages them tonight to not change the Ordinance. If they want to increase the value, he thinks that is fine. But if they change the tax abatement program and tie it to a motor vehicle tax, he thinks you are hurting the volunteers.

Not many here drive a brand new car so the value of their tax bill is never going to be the \$1,500 or \$2,000 they are proposing. He would rather see the Council not change the Ordinance but change it in a way that changes the benefit from \$1,000 to \$1,500 and then from \$1,500 to \$2,000 the following fiscal year. He thinks if they change it to motor vehicle tax abatement program, many of the people sitting in the room would be injured because they won't receive the benefit they used to receive. Today it is based on hours of service and if you have a taxable bill in the Town you can get \$1,000 back. For example, someone with a 2007 car, which is not unusual, they are probably paying \$400 per year in taxes on the vehicle, which means if they received \$1,000 this year, next year it would drop to \$400. They looked at motor vehicle early on when they developed this proposal because they thought it might be fairer, but when you looked at the value of taxes on vehicles it is so low it wouldn't be a motivating factor or benefit for the volunteers. He urges them to change the dollar value but not in the award.

- Town Attorney Joseph Zullo says he is absolutely correct and the only things changed in this amendment are the dollar figures. The Ordinance as it is written now technically does not provide for the Town to just cut a check; he thinks that has just become the practice. Technically, by the strict letter of the Ordinance, you could only do abatement for motor vehicle or real estate. For legislative intent purposes, when the Council recommends this to the full Council for action he thinks it would be appropriate to note that the practice is considered okay to carry on. In 2010 it began where the Town just started cutting checks. They just changed the dollar figures of the Ordinance but they can note that as well.
- Mr. Sandford says some Towns provide volunteer pensions for their members. There are a couple of Towns in this State that provide medical coverage for their members because they know they can't get coverage as young individuals. In reality, we are getting a pretty good deal.
- Ronald C. Toothe- 61 George Street, East Haven- Mr. Toothe says he is there to support the bump up in money for volunteer firefighters. They are well worth it. We banter around the word volunteers, but they are unpaid professionals. They are trained; he has seen them in action since he was a kid. Back in the day the blue lights would be following the fire trucks. They answer the call every time whether it is day/night convenient/not convenient. He mentions Councilman Deko, Mckay and Palladino who worked in emergency services like he did and the difference between them and the volunteers is they got paid for being professionals and volunteers don't. Anything we can give them is very well deserved, we are getting away cheap. If we had to hire another 100 firemen, we would be talking a much bigger tab than we are now. He thanks them all personally for what they do and implores the Council not to just think of dollars and cents but think about the dedication of these volunteers and do the right thing.
- Alphonse Delucia- 173 Atwater Street, East Haven- Mr. Delucia explains that volunteers have to do the same training as career firefighters. So they work during the day, go home for dinner, see their families quick and then out the door to training 2-4 hours minimum one night a week; every Wednesday night they are out for training and then there are live burns, you have to be State certified and pass the Firefighter I exam to go inside. Most of them are now EMT's so they are growing in their knowledge along with the career members. When you call 911,

you might have a volunteer rescue unit showing up, not career, and you wouldn't know the difference. They go through the training, they are dedicated and they care. This is a nice benefit, when August comes around you feel appreciated for the time and knowledge and accountability you put in. He thanks the Council for bringing this matter up and resolving it, when others are home Wednesday night they are at training, or going out at 2am when it is icy and snowing so they can get to the calls.

- Town Attorney Zullo reads a technical correction that the Council can recommend action on including when they recommend action to the full Council. The final paragraph should read:

"Whereas, in consideration of the services provided by volunteer firefighters with less than one thousand-five hundred dollars (\$1,500.00) in property taxes due at the time of the abatement for taxes due and payable between July 1, 2019 and ending June 30, 2021 or less than two-thousand dollars (\$2,000.00) for taxes due and payable on or after July 1, 2021, the balance of funds shall be paid by the town in check form to equal the amount of benefit received by volunteer firefighters with tax bills of one thousand five-hundred dollars (\$1,500.00) or two-thousand dollars (\$2,000.00) or more, respectively depending on the due date."

- Attorney Zullo states that the reason for that technical revision is because as written right now when the amount switches to \$2,000 after 2021 inadvertently we would have limited the amount of rebate to \$1,500 for someone that would be eligible for \$2,000 if they didn't own real estate or motor vehicles. As former Chief Sandford was speaking he re-read it and thanks him for saving a lot of volunteers that \$500.

Council comment:

- Councilman Joseph Deko makes a disclaimer that he is a social member of Riverside Company 6. He spoke with Attorney Zullo today who cleared him of any conflict of interest to vote on this matter. With that said, he thinks we need to consider what these men and women do. He was a volunteer before he got on the paid Fire Department in Guilford and it is exactly the same qualifications and training that the careers have to do but with a full time job. It is difficult and he thinks this is the minimum we should give to our volunteer members that are active and give back to the community. He encourages everyone to give back to the community and he applauds the members that came tonight to support this. He asks for a round of applause from the Council for them doing what they do.
- Councilman Joseph Carfora asks if anyone experienced a structure fire at their own home, because back in July of 2011 he did. He got that unbearable phone call at 11:00 at night that his home was on fire, he was going through a divorce his ex-wife was leaving and he didn't get back in the house in time. There are a lot of firemen that were there that night; his house would have been a total loss if it weren't for the volunteers also being there to help. He is 1000% for them.
- Councilman Louis Pacelli says his dad was ill for a long time and many nights they had to call and some volunteers were there to help his father. He thanks them all personally, he has in the past as well, but without their services the Town would not be where they are. He fully supports this and agrees they should

be given as much as they need because they serve this Town unselfishly and work very hard so it is our duty to make sure we take care of them.

- Councilman Nicholas Palladino says back in 2008, the worst day of his life, his son Mark was killed in a motorcycle accident and the gentleman sitting next to him was the first volunteer on scene trying to save his life. He can't think him and all of them for what they tried and they did their best. He is with them 100%.
- Vice Chairwoman Linda Hennessey thanks all of them, it seems sometimes people hear the word volunteer and they run and want a price. All of them out there are not looking for that, they are looking to serve their community. As young adults, if you don't know what path to take in life and this is of interest, you have made something for yourself and gave back and helped your community. She thanks them all and says good luck.

Item #3

Adjournment of Public Hearing #1.

Councilman Joseph Deko makes a motion.
 Councilman Joseph Deko seconds the motion.
 Voice vote: all in favor-none oppose-none abstain. Motion carries.

Item #4

To conduct Public Hearing #2 regarding "An Ordinance Accepting 'Letis Court' as a Town Road."

**AUTHORIZING ORDINANCE OF THE
 East Haven Town Council
 An Ordinance Accepting 'Letis Court' as a Town Road**

BE IT ORDAINED that East Haven Legislative Town Council hereby accepts Letis Court as a public roadway within the Town of East Haven;

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED that the Town Engineer is directed to add said roadway to the list of public roadways maintained in the office of the Town Clerk;

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED that Mayor Joseph Maturo, Jr., or his designee, is authorized to execute any and all documents to effectuate the intent of this ordinance;

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED that this ordinance shall be effective in accordance with the provisions of the East Haven Town Charter.

Submitted by:	Danelle Feeley, Council Clerk	Date: _____
Approved by:	Joseph Maturo, Jr., Mayor	Date: _____
Received by:	Stacy Gravino, Town Clerk	Date: _____

- Town Attorney Zullo says this is the first time in 8 years that the Council has officially approved a Town road. He notes that his firm has represented JJ Russo, the owner of the subdivision. He believes all but two houses are sold but he wanted to make them aware and if there is a conflict in any way they can table the item. He has an email from Kevin White, Town Engineer, which is dated August 6, 2019. It indicates upon final inspection of the above referenced road Letis Court, he finds it acceptable; therefore we will add this road to the Town accepted roads list. This was introduced for an 8-24 referral back in September of 2018 to planning and zoning who then issued a favorable referral to this Council. We waited almost a full year because a condition of the referral was that Kevin White signs off in writing on the acceptability of the road. It was signed off as acceptable so it is coming before them procedurally to accept the road.

No public comment.

Council comment:

- Councilman Joseph Deko asks what constitutes a road to be accepted as a Town road.
- Attorney Zullo says a Town road can be accepted via a number of mechanisms; it can be based on length of time and service, most of the newer roads are accepted via the Town Council. Prior to that they were codified/accepted by usage.
- Councilman Joseph Deko asks if there is anything out there where the Town of Kevin White says yes this should be a Town road because it meets x, y, z?
- Attorney Zullo says for the time he has been here public roads have been accepted when they meet the Town built road criteria. This includes it being a certain width, sidewalks being a certain length, curbing, etc. and that is all included in our code of ordinances.

Item #5

Adjournment of Public Hearing #2.

Councilman Robert Parente makes a motion.

Councilman Big Steve Tracey seconds the motion.

Voice vote: all in favor-none oppose-none abstain. Motion carries.

Item #6

Hearing Committee report(s) to the full Town Council and recommendation of action on Public Hearings #1 and #2.

Councilman Nicholas Palladino makes a motion to recommend action on Public Hearings #1 and #2 and include the amendment to #1.

Councilman Louis Pacelli seconds the motion.

Roll call vote: all in favor-none oppose-none abstain. Motion carries.

Item #7

Adjournment of Hearing Committee.

Councilman Louis Pacelli makes a motion.

Councilwoman Loria Jaffe seconds the motion.

Voice vote: all in favor-none oppose-none abstain.

Meeting is adjourned at 7:43PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Danelle Feeley

Danelle Feeley, Clerk, East Haven Legislative Town Council