

**TOWN OF DEERFIELD
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
WORK SESSION
May 10, 2007
MINUTES**

Roll Call:

Present: Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, Stephen R. Barry; Vice Chairman, R. Andrew Robertson; Joseph E. Stone and John Reagan, Selectmen
Absent: Walter C. Hooker, Selectman
Also Present: Cynthia Heon, Town Administrator; Alex Cote, Highway Agent; Lt. Michael Greeley, Officer-in-Charge; Colleen Guardia, Overseer of the Welfare; Mark Tibbetts, Fire Chief; Richard Pelletier, Code Enforcement Officer; Donna Cisewski, Human Resources-Finance

10:00am Chairman Barry convened the meeting explaining the objective is to complete the After Action Report regarding the April floods. The Work Session was opened for comment.

Rick Pelletier, Code Enforcement Officer, began by mentioning his recent attendance at preparedness meetings for health and believed the same principal applied to this catastrophe.

The strengths he saw were people taking the initiative.

Areas to improve upon are: Build a plan that outlines specific duties and functions. Key people are kept informed of the status of the emergency and assigned specific duties so they can move forward with their tasks. The tasks at hand are then accomplished.

For 24 to 48 hours one or two people hurried here and there handling everything. It worked fine but would not have held up for a longer period of time. People tire and there was no provision for who would step in and help. Vice Chairman Robertson pointed out that it could be more serious if something happened to one of them because they were tired.

Tools seemed adequate from Mr. Pelletier's perspective but supplies were running out.

People were not used to their fullest abilities. An Emergency Management Director could delegate who is responsible for the shelters, the food and so on. The Food Pantry had food but wasn't contacted. It was learned later there was food available at the Deerfield Community School (DCS). A generator was brought in to save the food supply at DCS.

Mrs. Guardia agreed planning is important and suggested creating a tree of resources so that everything is in place when needed. Selectman Barry added a plan and a person in place to carry out the plan.

Selectman Stone thought it best to have a full understanding of where the communications broke down.

Mrs. Guardia indicated it wasn't communicated food was needed until beyond the event. There were not that many that were being fed in the shelters. Emergency workers were fed. There was an obvious breakdown in communication from officials at the higher level to those at the lower level.

Mr. Pelletier reiterated that developing a plan, having the Command Center in place, specific directives in the event something happens would help things run smoother. An Emergency Management Director would locate people, and backup staff, if someone is out of town or unavailable.

The Building Inspector looks at buildings for safety or the need to take them down or see if they are salvageable. As Health Officer, in a health emergency, Mr. Pelletier would direct who and what should be done. The Emergency Management Director makes the calls to those who can provide the assistance.

Alex Cote, Highway Agent, could see some of what Mr. Pelletier was talking about because of the work done on the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Not having a Director, the timing couldn't have been worse.

It would be an improvement to have one overall Director but Mr. Cote believed the Highway Department, Police Department and Fire Department pulled together and did the best with what they had. It is too much to expect that someone could work 24/7 two or three days in a row. The Highway Department worked in shifts and rested when they could.

The Office of Emergency Management was asked for help and it never came. The National Guard was called for traffic control but they did not arrive. Three days later the agency called back. Fire Chief, Mark Tibbetts made several calls but to no avail.

There was a lack of road cones and signage. East Coast Signals graciously set up signal lights. Vice Chairman Robertson noted the Town used its resources on State roads.

Mr. Cote said resources were used as effectively as possible. The Selectmen and some Department Heads were briefed about road closures and expected areas of concern. The Highway Department had an incident board but was unable to keep information up to date. The Nextel phones went down making communication even more difficult. He didn't have a problem getting contractors to get the roads open to one lane. Mr. Cote would like to see a contact list be established.

Vice Chairman Robertson stated that effectiveness, and control, of an incident rests with the Board of Selectmen. Making excuses or accepting fault comes back to the Board for not appointing an Emergency Management Director. That responsibility rests solely with the Board of Selectmen.

Chairman Barry followed up indicating that the scope of this event was large and everyone did a fine job. He agreed a plan is needed which would allow everyone to know where they stood. The Chairman of the Board of Selectmen is named as Director in the interim.

Mrs. Guardia noted that Fire Chief, Mark Tibbetts was assigned the responsibility of Acting Director. With the small part the Overseer played in this event, Mrs. Guardia's contact with Chief Tibbetts was minimal.

Fire Chief, Mark Tibbetts stated that in a time of disaster the responsibility falls on the Fire Chief if there is no Director. Mrs. Guardia understands the responsibility could fall on either the Fire Chief or Police Chief in small towns where there is not a lot of manpower.

There was an incident recalled that the Principal of the Deerfield Community School (DCS) declined an offer to view the damage with the Highway Agent. It wasn't clear to the principal why school would need to be called off. The Highway Agent, Officer-in-Charge and Fire Chief wanted the Principal to see that the roads were seriously undermined and that a school bus full of children wasn't a good idea. The Highway Agent requested that school be canceled for the week.

Mrs. Guardia shared her insight on what the DCS Principal may have been thinking; it is the principal's job to have the kids in school no matter what. Once the information reached the public, people were shocked to see power and communications down, no cable or dial up available. It wasn't until three days later the State realized what had happened in Deerfield.

Chief Tibbetts indicated Officer Amber Marchio e-mailed WMUR with information but accuracy and timing was difficult because things changed so fast. Vice Chairman Robertson didn't think people understood roads were under water. Mr. Cote agreed because everyone was going around barricades.

Mr. Cote mentioned having set goals but they were not preset goals. Support was received from Vice Chairman Robertson, Chairman Barry, Selectman Stone, Selectman Reagan, residents and contractors. Roads were opened at 2am for one lane traffic. Communication from the Highway Agent flowed through the Selectmen. Mr. Cote's recommendation was that tasks be set and responsibilities assigned.

Fire Chief, Mark Tibbetts found the strengths to be key people and knowing who could do the job. He contacted people who would get the food not knowing it could be obtained across town. If there was a contact list, it would have been helpful. People donated food and the Fire Department Auxiliary fed everyone for seven days.

The Fire House is small. Diane Kimball handled the radios and phones. Briefings were moved to the Police Department.

The State Emergency Management Office did not respond as expected. They waited for cots which didn't come. If they didn't have them, they should have mentioned that in the beginning. Lack of communicating back and forth was a definite issue. Several days later Cindy Richard, State Department of Emergency Management, apologized and agreed the communication breakdown was at the State level. The National Guard did not arrive.

Incident command was set up with a liaison in the field. There were two zones. Different radio channels were used. Fire Trucks were used to block roadways. Things were happening so fast decisions had to be made quickly. The briefings were a big help. Chief Tibbetts believed goals were met but improvement is always good.

Lt. Michael Greeley, Officer-in-Charge said the strengths came from the people working together with what they had. Communication went well for a day, and then the Nextel phones went down.

The improvements Lt. Greeley thought were needed is assistance from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT). The Highway Agent and the Fire Chief bailed the State out. At one point, the NHDOT indicated the Town was not helping them.

Selectman Stone did not like NHDOT's attitude. Chief Tibbetts noted the attitude was more positive later on during the flooding. Selectman Stone reminded everyone of a conversation the Town had with NHDOT last spring. The NHDOT failed to repair the State road system.

Lt. Greeley agreed a list would be helpful. The High Schools became an issue when they wanted to release the students and there was no way back. Mrs. Guardia added and the Deerfield Community School was closed. An emergency phone line for the Fire Station and Police Station would have been helpful. Mrs. Guardia added there is also a need in the Town Offices.

Complications happened when Verizon went down. Selectman Stone noted that personnel moved between departments to cover the phones. Lt. Greeley added 911 wasn't working and calls came into the Police Department and Fire Station. The failsafe way would have been enough radios.

The tools were used properly with all cruisers out on the streets. There was backup from the Grafton County Sheriffs Office. It would have been nice to have the National Guard. More barricades and signage were needed. Thankfully East Coast Signal assisted. Spray painted plywood and piles of dirt worked.

Lt. Greeley indicated some areas have already been covered and did not have anything additional to add.

Colleen Guardia, Overseer of the Welfare summed up the strengths as no loss of life or major property damage. She suggested a mutual aid agreement with the Deerfield Fair Association and the Inn of Deerfield as facilities to provide shelter.

Mrs. Guardia saw improvements as creating a shelter separate from the Emergency Management Command Center. Having to carry an elderly resident upstairs in the Fire Station was not appropriate. Everyone did an awesome job but in the future a more appropriate shelter separate from the Command Center would be preferred.

Mrs. Guardia praised coordination but it became taxing after a few days, which meant if it went on longer, a plan should be written to share the job responsibilities. As the Welfare Officer, she could be responsible for the shelters. A generator should be purchased.

The Town Offices could have been better utilized and shared the responsibilities. All in all the community did a great job.

Vice Chairman Robertson pointed out the problems began the midnight before. Some people were already 12 hours into the storm and then it got worse.

Mrs. Guardia said that some workers knew what was going on and were briefed around the clock but not everyone knew what was going on. The key players also need to be trained and pass the National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) course.

Donna Cisewski did not wish to repeat a lot of what was already said but described what occurred within the Town Offices. In the Administrator's absence, Mrs. Cisewski was trying to keep in touch with Fire Chief, Mark Tibbetts. Living in another town and with all the communication issues, this was difficult. On Monday, the day began with Mrs. Cisewski and one other employee on board. The employee was later excused from work leaving Mrs. Cisewski by herself. The building was now leaking and the buckets were filling. This combined with a lot of phone calls made the task was suddenly more than one person could handle.

Multiple phone lines rang all at once so some calls went unanswered while some residents were assisted. The scenario was bleak, Mrs. Heon was out of Town, communication was poor, there was a lot of flooding and people were trying to get in touch with someone from the Town by phone. She tried to get the information to help the people but it was frustrating.

On Tuesday, communication was not much better when she attempted to find out what was happening in Deerfield in order to know if the Town Offices should or should not open.

There was discussion regarding calls being transferred to a central location. This would require some research as to the feasibility of working this out. Mrs. Guardia added that essential functions should be part of the Emergency Management Plan and what they need to operate.

Mrs. Cisewski concluded she was very willing to help the people and could only hear the desperation in their voices and couldn't help.

Selectman Stone stated he had the utmost respect for the three major departments involved in the recent storm. He was unaware of the road situations to and from Raymond and the difficulties Mrs. Cisewski may have had. He suggested a command post be set up at the Deerfield Community School and a generator be purchased because there are facilities and a kitchen there. A list of numbers is important. The Emergency

Management Van could be better equipped. The NHDOT should be put on notice. The NHDOT indicated they would repay East Coast Signals.

Selectman Stone restated that Fire Chief, Mark Tibbetts became the Emergency Management Director and he and Alex Cote, Highway Agent and Officer in Charge, Lt. Michael Greeley worked very well together.

Vice Chairman Robertson stated he was glad Mrs. Cisewski was in the Town Offices to be the voice on the other end of the line when people called.

Selectman Stone brought up the Transfer Station. He thought a directive should be issued as to what is expected when there is an emergency. Vice Chairman Robertson said the key is the Emergency Management Director not being in place.

Cindy Heon, Town Administrator, was away for the worst of the flooding but brought forward some observations. The one thing that stood out was the issue of communication. Until the phones are re-directed to a central location, the Town Offices will have a role to play during emergencies. People call any number they know and the Town Offices is a number they know. They will seek information from whatever source they can. The need for an Emergency Management Director, an Emergency Management Plan, mobile radios to be placed strategically with the Town Channel are also things to be considered.

Lt. Greeley said that he and Ms. Heon were working on bringing the reverse 911 program forward for the 2008 budget process. It works on land lines, calling and leaving a prerecorded message. The preliminary cost estimate is \$25,000.

11:35am The Work Session concluded.