

Article stays on warrant: Chief steps up for ambulance in Southampton

BY CATHERINE BAUM STAFF WRITER

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SOUTHAMPTON - When the Board of Selectmen considered removing an article from the Oct. 30 Special Town Meeting warrant that requested \$150,000 to purchase a new ambulance, Selectman Douglas Blanchard said they should ask the fire chief to stop by.

"This could save somebody's life," Blanchard said. "I'd rather not play with this."

Selectmen, who ended up approving 11 articles to be voted on at the Special Town Meeting, originally considered removing the ambulance article because the need for a new one was unclear.

"It shouldn't be spent without knowing where it's going," said Diana Schindler, town administrator. "The idea is that the money is just sitting in the ambulance fund, so there's almost a sense of entitlement that we should buy an ambulance."

David McDougall borrowed a cell phone from Mark Gerard, who was sitting in the audience, to call the fire dispatcher. The dispatcher passed the message along to Fire Chief Stephen Hyde, who showed up at Town Hall within 15 minutes.

"Every day it's (the ambulance) becoming more and more unsafe to use," Hyde said.

Hyde said the 1999 Ford E450 ambulance is unreliable due to "wear and tear."

"You can hear this thing; it gets creakier and creakier," Hyde said. "If it's your personal vehicle, fine. But if it stops and we've got somebody with a life-threatening situation, a minute or two is going to make a difference."

The town ambulance used to be replaced every four years, but this one hasn't been replaced in nearly nine years, Hyde said. The department has two ambulances, which have been used simultaneously, he noted. The full amount in the ambulance fund may not be necessary, Hyde said.

"If we can get a good deal on a demo and save \$30,000, we'll do that," Hyde said.

Mark Gerard, diesel instructor at Dean Tech, said he supports getting a new ambulance, as the old one's suspension, engine, body and transmission are "time-wise on their edge".

Selectman Michael Phelan asked what the ambulance's mechanical and structural problems were.

Gerard said parts are likely to crack due to age and temperature.

Other articles to be voted on at the Special Town Meeting include a five-year lease for a new Town Hall copier, approving Golden Circle as a town road, and changing the annual Town Meeting date from the first Saturday in June to the third Tuesday in May.

The board voted to appoint Bill Kaleta, 54, 106 Gilbert Road, to the Capital Improvements Committee; to approach the Community Preservation Committee to fund the construction design study for the Larrabee building; and to consider a building use plan for the Town Hall outlined by the town administrator, according to Robert Floyd, town moderator. The Special Town Meeting will be held Tuesday, Oct. 30, at 7 p.m. at the William E. Norris Elementary School.