

TOWN OF LINCOLN –OP-ED.

T. Joseph Almond, Town Administrator

September 27, 2010

Re: Lincoln Rescue provides safe, excellent, and effective service to all Lincoln residents.

The Town of Lincoln is approximately 20 square miles, has a diverse housing density, and a population of about 21,000 residents. The town is currently going through the process of evaluating the fiscal viability and effectiveness of maintaining independent fire districts. This same process has occurred in various communities throughout New England in the past two decades. Experience has demonstrated that this process is often both an emotional and contentious issue for all parties involved.

I would like to stress that I am not attempting to make an evaluation as to the service level provided by any individual district or specific personnel system. I can state very confidently, that I would trust my life to any one of the competent men and women serving in any of the Lincoln Fire Districts. Each district has unique and diverse characteristics of housing density, call volume, geographic area, and varying abilities to elicit tax revenues.

Nevertheless, as these budgetary and consolidation deliberations occur, I would like to address two central issues effecting all Lincoln residents and taxpayers: the capability and effectiveness of rescue coverage, and the current cost of providing fire and rescue service to residents of the town utilizing individual fire districts.

The Town of Lincoln provides two full-time rescues and our response times meet, or exceed, all reasonable expectations of a life safety provider. Therefore, as budget deliberations unfold within individual fire districts, I would caution any individual district representative from attempting to invoke false and irresponsible fears among its taxpayers. I will not allow the Lincoln Rescue Service and its excellent level of medical care to be questioned as a means to secure and/or justify a fire district budget.

The cost of providing two full-time rescue vehicles is currently 1.4 million dollars a year, while the combined cost of the collective districts providing various levels of full-time service is currently 5 million dollars per year. This represents a combined annual fire/rescue expenditure of 6.4 million dollars under the current "independent district model." In comparison, the town currently expends 3.5 million annually or 85% less, to provide effective police services, inclusive of full-time emergency dispatch employees.

I welcome scrutiny of my claims as they relate to the effective capabilities of our town's rescue service, or the cost to provide public safety services. I possess all statistical information related to police, fire, and rescue budgets, incident volumes, type, location, time, and outcome. I have comparative data available of like, larger, and smaller communities. I am happy to provide and/or present this information to any individual or group in need.

In closing, again I have the upmost respect of the men and woman in all of our fire districts and complete confidence in their professional skills. However, I believe the financial analysis as illustrated will dictate the need to consolidate town-wide firefighting services consistent with equities in property assessment, taxation, and service levels, while addressing the inefficiencies of providing personnel and equipment within independent districts. I want to especially assure the residents of all fire districts throughout the Town of Lincoln that they are receiving safe and effective rescue services no matter which fire district they reside in.