

Board of Fire Commissioners

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

April 1, 2021

Present: In person: Commissioner Longo, Commissioner Spencer, Commissioner Cafazzo, Commissioner Quagliaroli and Commissioner Higgins.

Absent: Commissioner Dutton

Others: In person: Chief Michael Thurz, Assistant Chief David Thurz, Deputy Chief Motowidlak, Deputy Chief Dennler in person.

By Zoom: Matthew King with Information Technology by Zoom

Commissioner Longo called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM

Approval of Minutes: Commissioner Longo asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the March 4, 2021 meeting. Commissioner Spencer made a motion to accept the minutes with Commissioner Cafazzo seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Chief's Report: Chief Thurz reported the following:

- On March 10th, the Department responded to a structure fire on Harris Street. One firefighter sustained a minor burn injury to his ear.
- There was a meeting with the Town Manager and Facilities Superintendent to discuss the next steps in completing the renovation work at the fire stations and training facility. The Facilities Superintendent will review what work town staff can complete, and what will need to go out to bid to a third party contractor(s). On March 19th, a tour with the Facilities Superintendent was conducted to review what items remain open based on a list that was established in 2017. Each Captain was provided with a list of the work that remained outstanding as well for their review.
- Oil samples on Rescue 14, Engine 32, Engine 41 and Engine 42 were completed. There was nothing out of the ordinary reported, with the exception of the Engine 41. Because the engine is so new, there were higher readings of metal and silicon found. The metal found is from the parts being new and still wearing in, while the traces of silicon are from the sealers and gaskets used during assembly. After a few oil changes, additional use and once the vehicle reaches 6,100 miles the readings should begin to show normal.
- The Town Council has adopted the Fiscal Year 2021-22 budget. There were no changes to the Fire Department budget.

- Members are beginning to review various records management software. Our vendor recently advised that their tech support of our records management system will be eliminated at year end. Rocky Hill Fire Department provided members with a demonstration of their system, called Red NMX. Members have also been asked to research other potential vendors as an alternative.
- The Department is working on a FEMA reimbursement associated with Storm Isaias from last August. The process is similar to what was involved with the Covid 19 reimbursement. FEMA will be reviewing our incident reports, which totaled 155 during a one-week timeframe, as well as reimburse for any tree removal, property damage, generator usage and repairs.
- The Unit Year ended on March 31st, and the second installment of payout will be completed in the coming weeks.
- The Department has contracted with PL Vulcan to provide a course entitled "Man vs. Machine" to be held in June. The training will focus on patient disentanglement in a variety of machines and appliances. Assistant Chief Thurz, Deputy Chief Dennler and Captain Yacka will oversee the logistics for the course. The training will consist of two-days featuring a classroom instruction (Zoom) and then hands on practical, which will be broken into two 4-hour training evolutions, with 20 participants in each.
- Other future training includes advance stabilization and basic rope rescue presented by CT Custom Fire Training. The advance stabilization will be conducted once the remaining air bags have been delivered, which is anticipated to be by May 14th.
- Review of monthly operating expenses:

Old Business:

- None

New Business:

- Commissioner Longo noted that at the previous month's meeting there were several questions and comments pertaining to the Fire Chief's position. Initially, there was going to be a "Special Meeting", but was subsequently cancelled. He noted that there was another meeting that he attended with Commissioner Spencer and Chief Thurz with Town Manager Richard Johnson regarding the Fire Chief's position. Commissioner Longo felt that the meeting went pretty well, and was civil. The Commissioners received some explanations on the position, which he and Commissioner Spencer relayed to the other commissioners afterwards. The meeting, in very generic terms discussed the position returning to full-time, with both Commissioners Longo and Spencer providing their thoughts on the idea. The Town Manager gave a brief overview in what he was looking for in the position. Essentially the Fire Chief would focus on managing the Fire Department, as well as assuming some other responsibilities centered in risk mitigation for the town. Those other

responsibilities would be out of the purview of the Fire Commission, but did emphasize that the priority of the Fire Chief would be the Fire Department. Commissioner Longo felt that it was now up to the Fire Commission to discuss and come to a consensus as to whether they were going to endorse a full-time Fire Chief position or suggest some other type of arrangement. Commissioner Longo wished that the Commission was more informed, and better prepared to discuss the matter but that is in the past. He did note that the Town Manager acknowledged that there were some bumps along the road in getting to this point.

- Commissioner Spencer noted that he personally felt that there appeared to be decisions made between the Chief and the Town Manager, and then brought back to the Commission. However, that necessarily is not what happened, but it looked that way from the Commission's point of view, because they were not initially involved with the whole process. However, the Town Manager did offer to consider having meetings with the Commissioners to address things as they come up in the future on a quarterly basis.
- Commissioner Longo asked for everyone's thoughts on going forward.
- Commissioner Cafazzo said he was in favor of the Fire Chief's position returning to full time. He personally does not see how anyone can keep up with the demands on a part time basis and provide the appropriate oversight. This position is already budgeted as full-time, and that has not changed.
- Commissioner Spencer believes it is time for the Fire Chief's position to return to full time. The Fire Commission needs to move on, and stay with the concept, which passed many years ago as a full-time position. He felt that the Commission should move forward with a decision by taking a vote on the matter and sending a letter, stating that the Fire Commission either endorses the position returning full-time or not, so that the Town Manager can forward that on to the Town Council.
- Commissioner Quagliaroli replied that as a Commissioner, a member of the department and as a friend, he was not very happy with how it came down, but with that said, he does think it is time to go back to a full time Chief. Also, based on the Town Charter it states that the recommendation does need to come from the Board of Fire Commissioners.
- There was discussion between Commissioners Quagliaroli and Spencer as to whether a vote was required. Commissioner Spencer stated that a vote was not necessarily required because the position is open, and that it would be going back to full-time from part-time. However, he felt that an endorsement was more appropriate. He further stated that the Fire Commission, like all other commissions of the town are gradually being phased out. The Fire Commission is either going to act or not, and if not then we are all wasting our time. Commissioner Spencer felt that it was important for the Fire Commission to act, and that this is a perfect point to inform the town's officials that the Commission is willing to step up to the plate. That the Commission feels there is a need, and that they looked at the situation. The letter provides the Commission with the opportunity to inform the Town Manager whether we want to endorse this decision or not.

- Commissioner Higgins said he believes it should become a full time position. There is too much going on for the position to be part-time.
- Commissioner Longo replied that he understands where Chief Thurz was coming from with his time commitment, and we all know that he has gone above and beyond a whole bunch of times, and continues to do so. Commissioner Longo also agreed that this could have been handled slightly different, but we are at a point in which we need to move along. Commissioner Longo has felt for a long time that there may have been other ways to accomplish this, but he is not against the full-time Chief's position. He wished other people might have examined other options, like some sort of assistant to handle ancillary items. Commissioner Longo stated that these are his opinions and that he is not against the commitment. Commissioner Longo questions if a vote was even necessary, or if a written, unanimous endorsement was sufficient.
- Commissioner Cafazzo questioned if a vote was necessary. If the Town Manager wanted to add an additional 20 hours a week to the position, then that is his prerogative as the position remains approved as full-time.
- Commissioner Quagliaroli inquired if this is a negotiation between the Fire Chief and the Town Manager, and whatever the Commission thinks is a moot point, or is it an upgrade to the existing position at the discretion of the Town Manager. Chief Thurz replied that with the appointment of the first full-time Fire Chief back on September 26, 1995 the Town Council made a motion that the Fire Chief would report to, and supervised by the Town Manager under Section 407 of the Town Charter. Chief Thurz stated that in negotiating the position, he is willing to take on additional responsibilities and receive additional compensation for the extra hours. However, Chief Thurz informed the Commission that he has not been offered the position, that there is no letter indicating he will be the next full-time Chief. Chief Thurz stated that after 12 years in the position, on a part-time basis that he can no longer fulfill his responsibilities. However, Chief Thurz would consider the position if offered on a full-time basis. This is how the negotiations began as Chief Thurz viewed it as an employer/employee relationship. Commissioner Quagliaroli stated that this ultimately is a moot point. Chief Thurz countered that if the Commission felt it wanted to go in a different direction, and not have a Fire Chief, then the Commission would need to go to the Town Council with an alternative option. Commissioner Cafazzo agreed that if the Commission wanted to go with an alternative it would need to go to the Town Council, and unless they were in agreement, it would be a hard sell.
- Commissioner Spencer mentioned that as far as he could recall the Fire Chief falls under the Fire Commission with certain responsibilities to the Town Manager. Chief Thurz advised that that was no longer the case, and that the Fire Chief reports directly to the Town Manager. Commissioner Spencer inquired when that changed. Chief Thurz replied in 1995 when the position became full-time.
- Commissioner Longo noted that the Town Manager is aware of Commission's fears of the department needing to go paid, and doesn't want to see it happen anytime soon like the rest of us. However, he does understand that the town's demographics are changing, and is aware of the growing demands of the department. While he recognizes that there may need

to be changes in the future, he does not envision that happening anytime soon. Commissioner Spencer commented that is why it is important to have someone in the Chief's position to be fully aware of what is going on.

- Commissioner Spencer went on to comment that with the change as presented, he questioned the future of the Commission and having any say in the Fire Department. Chief Thurz replied that the Commission still provides oversight as it relates to the rules and regulations of the Fire Department through the By-Laws. Commissioner Cafazzo commented that if the Commission had an issue with something the Fire Chief was doing that they could go to the Town Council.
- Commissioner Longo commented that the Commission should set into motion some form of a letter endorsing that the Fire Chief's position becomes full-time. Commissioner Spencer felt the letter should elaborate that the town has grown, and that the job is beyond a part time position. Chief Thurz has pursued a number of grants and has saved the town money. The letter should further state that the Commission is looking towards the future of the town. Commissioner Cafazzo felt that the letter was not necessary, as the position is already there and that it's more of a feel good thing. Commissioner Spencer felt strongly that the Commission should needed to correspond to the Town Manager, which should then be sent to the Town Council. Commissioner Longo also agrees that sending some form of correspondence was a good idea as a follow through after the meeting with the Town Manager and would reflect better on the Commission. Commissioner Longo asked if everyone was in agreement with the Fire Chief's position being full-time, which everyone agreed it was. Commissioner Longo, asked Commissioner Quagliaroli, as the secretary to draft a letter for this review.

Committee Report:

- Commissioner Quagliaroli and Commissioner Spencer provided an overview of the latest Strategic Planning Committee meeting, held on March 23, 2021. The discussion focused on developing job descriptions for the various positions within the department. The Committee reviewed various job descriptions from other fire departments. Chief Thurz will be developing drafts of the Lieutenant, Captain and Deputy Chief's positions for the committee to review at their next meeting. Commissioner Longo inquired how often performance evaluations would be conducted, which Commissioner Quagliaroli advised once a year in conjunction with the year-end unit year.
- Commissioner Longo asked if there was any progress in establishing a Truck Committee. Chief Thurz mentioned possibly in the springtime. Chief Thurz was thinking that members of the Strategic Planning Committee would provide oversight, while each company would establish a working group. The hope would be to involve some of the younger members who have not been involved in building an apparatus before to give them some experience. Commissioner Quagliaroli felt it would be a good idea to get one person outside of the Company who is receiving the truck to be involved as well.

Correspondences:

- None

Next Regular Meeting: May 6, 2021, 6:30 PM via Zoom.

Meeting Adjourned: Commissioner Cafazzo made a motion to adjourn, which Commissioner Longo seconded and approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:25 PM.



Deborah Torres
Administrative Assistant

c: Fire Commission (6)
Fire Chiefs (4)
Fire Captains (4)
Richard J. Johnson, Town Manager
Chris Siwy, Fire Marshal
Mary Visone, Purchasing Agent
Robert DiBella, Civil Preparedness