

Board of Fire Commissioners

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

October 18, 2021

Present: Commissioner Longo, Commissioner Quagliaroli, Commissioner Cafazzo, and Commissioner Dutton

Absent: Commissioner Cavanaugh

Others: Town Manager Richard Johnson and Fire Chief Michael Thurz

Commissioner Longo called the meeting to order at 6:31 PM

Discussion and possible action pertaining to Fire Chief's position:

Town Manager Richard Johnson requested a meeting with the members of the Fire Commission to provide an overview and discuss the return of the Fire Chief's position to a full-time basis.

Mr. Johnson noted that in the mid-1990s it was established that the Fire Chief's position be full-time. From that time, until 2008 there have been three full-time Fire Chiefs. In 2008, the position transitioned to part-time because Chief Thurz, who was Assistant Chief at the time, was willing to do the job on that basis. Therefore, from 2008 until today, the position has been part-time. However, the position continued to be authorized, and funded as full-time, which continues to be this way today.

Approximately a year ago, and before the current budget year was put together, Chief Thurz and Mr. Johnson discussed the potential to build into this year's budget the return of the position to full-time, despite it always being authorized as such. Chief Thurz expressed an interest in working in a full-time capacity. Therefore, to ensure funding was appropriate, and to maximize the return to a full-time position, Chief Thurz and Mr. Johnson talked about taking on additional responsibilities. Those additional responsibilities would include emergency preparedness and system-wide risk management. Mr. Johnson felt that the Fire Chief's position had a number of similarities to the emergency management function, as well as loss control, which is the responsibility of each Department Director to ensure a safe work environment and lessen the town's liability.

In March 2021, Mr. Johnson met with Commissioner Longo, and former Commissioner Spencer to discuss the Fire Chief's position returning to full-time. At that meeting, Mr. Johnson shared his thoughts on the Fire Chief's position with the additional responsibilities that would be included in a full-time capacity.

Mr. Johnson concluded his remarks with a review of the Fire Commission's minutes from the April 2021 meeting in which it appeared, by consensus that the members were in support of the position returning to a full-time status. However, before proceeding forward, Mr. Johnson wanted to make certain that there were no other concerns or questions that still needed to be addressed, or as it may relate to Chief Thurz. Whether or not there were still concerns about the position, or

Chief Thurz, Mr. Johnson noted that he has not heard of any to date. Therefore, out of fairness for all involved, an Executive Session was included in the meeting's agenda, if necessary.

Commissioner Quagliaroli asked Mr. Johnson to elaborate as to what system-wide risk management entailed. Mr. Johnson noted that the Fire Chief would be part of a team responsible to review losses incurred on behalf of the town and to recommend and implement changes. The goal would be to limit the town's exposure and insurance cost.

Commissioner Dutton felt that the communications within the various town departments have improved, and that Chief Thurz effectively communicates with everyone. Commissioner Dutton inquired how Mr. DiBella would fit into the additional responsibilities taken on by the Fire Chief. Mr. Johnson replied that the Fire Chief would work in collaboration with the Emergency Management Director in improving the town's emergency preparedness. In addition, the Fire Chief, like in most communities would represent the town at the Capitol Regional Emergency Planning Council.

Commissioner Quagliaroli inquired if the idea was to re-establish the full-time Fire Chief or some form of a hybrid position. Mr. Johnson replied that it would be to re-establish a full-time Fire Chief, which would have the primary responsibility to the Fire Department's operations, with emergency preparedness and loss control as added responsibilities.

Commissioner Dutton stated that he understood how the overlap fits into the Fire Chief's role and assumed that the Fire Commission would not have input into those other duties. Mr. Johnson noted that the Fire Chief is a Department Head that has certain responsibilities, which includes working with the Fire Commission, similar to how other Department staff members works with their boards and commissions. The Fire Chief has latitude to work with the Fire Commission in what needs to be accomplish for the betterment of the fire service. Mr. Johnson further stated that it is probably common in other communities where the Fire Chief serves a role in both emergency preparedness and loss control.

Commissioner Dutton initially had some concern that there would not be enough work to do on a full-time basis. However, was happy to see the added responsibilities to fill some of the gaps, and the benefit to the town. Commissioner Longo echoed Commissioner Dutton's comment that initially he did not feel there was enough to do, and was unaware of the additional duties that would be tasked of the Fire Chief. Commissioner Longo questioned if there could be additional responsibilities passed on to the other Chief Officers to lessen some of the Fire Chief's tasks. Commissioner Longo also thought an Administrative Assistant could assume some of the administrative responsibilities put on the Fire Chief. Commissioner Dutton noted that having a full-time Fire Chief, with his current staff would create more efficiencies for the department. Mr. Johnson noted that this was his thought. It would also allow the Fire Chief to interact with other Department Directors during business hours, and would be an overall benefit for the town.

Commissioner Cafazzo noted that there was a lengthy discussion at a previous Fire Commission meeting regarding the Fire Chief's position returning full-time, and that there was a vote to send a letter in support of concept. Commissioner Quagliaroli noted that there was a letter sent supporting the concept and to re-examine the full-time Chief position, not that it was a specific endorsement. Commissioner Cafazzo felt the meeting was in support of the position. Commissioner Quagliaroli inquired if this discussion was moot, and a decision already made and the purpose of the special

meeting is just to explain it, or is it up for discussion and future consideration? Commissioner Dutton noted that his thought of the letter was for a full-time position with the additional duties, which made him comfortable. Commissioner Cafazzo inquired if Commissioner Quagliaroli wrote and sent a letter to the Town Manager? Commissioner Quagliaroli acknowledged sending a letter, at which point Mr. Johnson interjected that it was unclear to him based on the minutes and the letter received as to what direction the Fire Commission wished to take. In reading the Commission minutes, the interpretation was to support a full-time position. However, the ambiguity in the letter is what prompted Mr. Johnson to call Commissioner Longo and schedule a meeting to get a better understanding on the matter. Mr. Johnson conclude that it was up to the Fire Commission to vote on whether or not they wanted a full-time Fire Chief, as it was not his decision as the Town Manager.

Commissioner Quagliaroli felt there were two issues that the Fire Commission need to address. Does the Fire Commission want a full time Fire Chief, and do we want Chief Thurz to be the full-time Fire Chief? Mr. Johnson replied that perhaps there are two issues. Commissioner Cafazzo inquired if Commissioner Quagliaroli was suggesting the Commission goes back to evaluate the need for a full-time Fire Chief? Commissioner Cafazzo felt that it was already resolved months ago and that this was the direction needed to move forward. Commissioner Quagliaroli felt that there should be a process as to who should be the Fire Chief.

Mr. Johnson noted that there were never any concerns expressed to him about Chief Thurz's ability to assume the position in a full-time capacity. Since Chief Thurz expressed an interest in the position, and was already doing it on a part-time basis, it appeared to be a natural progression. However, if the Fire Commission has a concern about Chief Thurz's performance, or if there are reasons as to why he should not assume the role as a full-time Fire Chief that is why Mr. Johnson requested to meet. Mr. Johnson noted that the process could not continue to go on, as it is not fair to Chief Thurz or anyone else involved.

Commissioner Dutton expressed that his only concern was that Chief Thurz approached Mr. Johnson first about the position returning full-time before the Fire Commission, but noted that he understood the employee/employer relationship and that matter had been resolved. Mr. Johnson concluded that he was not looking to force anything on the Commission. He is simply looking to understand if there is support for a full-time Fire Chief, and if there are concerns about Chief Thurz, that it be discuss out of fairness for everyone involved.

Commissioner Longo noted that Chief Thurz provide the Commission with a document dating back to the mid-1990s that the Fire Chief reported directly to the Town Manager, and questioned the Commission's role going forward. Mr. Johnson noted that the Town Charter provides language that Department Heads reports to the Town Manager. Furthermore, he noted that the previous Fire Chiefs worked with the Fire Commission. In the past, Mr. Johnson told the previous Fire Chiefs to take care of fire service and to go forward in working with the Fire Commission. In addition, when there were issues in the past, the Fire Commission would raise those concerns directly to the Town Manager, so it made sense from an organizational standpoint to provide oversight, while not interfering with the fire service. While the Fire Chief works with the Fire Commission, the Town Council at that time wanted a reporting structure to the Town Manager.

Commissioner Longo asked if the matter pertaining to the Fire Chief's position could be resolved, or if there remains any reservations. Commissioner Quagliaroli questioned delaying the decision

until there was a full commission in place, as this was a big step. Commissioner Longo understood the concern, but noted that there was no timeframe as to when that would be. Commissioner Caffazo inquired how long they were going to wait, as Chief Thurz was already doing the job with no issues, and now he is going to work a few more hours a week and questioned if there is an issue with him. Commissioner Cafazzo felt it was not fair to Chief Thurz. However, Commissioner Quagliaroli felt it was an important step to have a full commission involved. Commissioner Longo felt the Fire Commission could not sit and spin their wheels forever. Therefore, Commissioner Dutton made a motion to support Michael Thurz in the role of full-time Fire Chief for the Town of Glastonbury, which Commissioner Cafazzo seconded. Commissioner Longo asked for a vote on the motion, which passed unanimously.

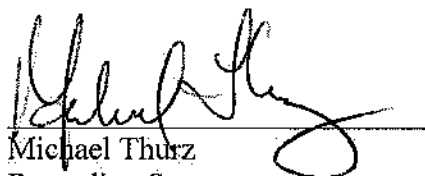
Chief Thurz requested to enter into Executive Session to discuss any performance related matters that the Fire Commission might have. Chief Thurz felt that the discussion was necessary for the overall betterment of the Glastonbury Fire Department and Town of Glastonbury. Commissioner Quagliaroli wanted to make it clear that his intentions was not to drag the issue out any longer and wanted to get behind the matter. However, Commissioner Cafazzo stressed that waiting for newer commissioners unfamiliar with what has transpired would only delay the process. Furthermore, he reminded everyone that the Fire Commission already voted on the matter to move forward. Commissioner Dutton noted that with one of the commissioners being new, and awaiting for the appointment of another, that it provided no benefit to waiting based on the lack of understanding. Commissioner Dutton believed that the four members present had sufficient background knowledge to take action on the matter. Mr. Johnson provided insight as to why the Executive Session was included in the agenda. While Commissioner Longo did not feel Executive Session was necessary, and Commissioner Quagliaroli noted he would speak with Chief Thurz outside of the meeting, Chief Thurz felt it was important for everyone involved to be part of the conversation.

Executive Session – Personnel Matter:

The Commission entered into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter at 7:18 PM. The Commission adjourned from Executive Session at 7:33 PM with no action taken.

Adjournment:

Commissioner Cafazzo made a motion to adjourn, which Commissioner Longo seconded and approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:34 PM.



Michael Thurz
Recording Secretary

c: Fire Commission (5)
Fire Chiefs (4)
Fire Captains (4)
Richard J. Johnson, Town Manager