

Board of Fire Commissioners
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

March 2, 2023

Present: Commissioner Longo, Commissioner Dutton, Commissioner Quagliaroli, Commissioner Caffazo, Commissioner Cavanaugh and Commissioner Cofield

Others: Chief Michael Thurz and Assistant Chief David Thurz

Absent: Deputy Chief Motowidlak and Deputy Chief Dennler

Commissioner Longo called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

Public Comment: None

Approval of Minutes: Commissioner Longo asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the February 2, 2023 meeting. Commissioner Cavanaugh made the motion to accept with Commissioner Cofield seconding the motion. There was no discussion. The motion passed, with Commissioner Dutton abstaining as he was not present at that meeting.

Chief's Report:

Chief Thurz asked for a moment of silence in remembrance of former members John Weir and Edward Mockus.

Chief Thurz reported the following:

- Captain Michael Yacka submitted a letter of resignation from his position. However, he will be remaining a member of the Department. Chief Thurz acknowledged Captain Yacka for his seven years as Captain, and the integral role he played on the Strategic Planning Committee.
- The Captain's position at Station 2 has been posted. There was one candidate who applied. Commissioner Cavanaugh and Chief Thurz will interview the candidate, as there will be no outside oral panel.
- On March 31st Deputy Chief Dennler will be stepping down from his position based on the Department's By-Laws. The upcoming Deputy Chief's opening was posted in each station. There were three candidates that applied. One candidate was not eligible based on not having enough years of service with the department. The other two candidates will be moving forward. Letters were sent out to the three candidates; two for Deputy Chief and one out to the Captain candidate. An outside oral panel is scheduled for March 15th, which Commissioner Dutton will serve as moderator. The Chief's interview will take place on March 22nd with Chief Thurz and Commissioner Dutton.
- Facilities is still negotiating with the lighting contractor on the alternative lighting fixture for the apparatus bays. The cost for the alternative fixture is \$9,000 more than the original proposal. Facilities does not have an installation date.

- The FEMA Assistance to Fire Act Grant application was increased from \$297K to \$531K. The additional cost reflects 93 portable radios as opposed to the 75 originally reported, as well as 23 tri-band mobile radios. Chief Thurz is looking at the possibility of switching to tri-band radios, which will allow to operate on three different frequencies with one radio as opposed to a single band system. When reviewing FEMA's Notice of Funding Opportunity, it was noted that portable radios could be purchased based on the total number of members within the organization.
- The budget is nearing completion. The proposed operating budget was recently reviewed by the Town Council, and a few questions were raised. Chief Thurz noted that Councilman Cavanaugh inquired about one of the future initiatives pertaining to developing a sustainable model for staffing to ensure adequate fire protection in accordance to the national standard. Chief Thurz advised the council that there is a concern with the decline in volunteers, and that some form of a hybrid model might need to be established. Chief Thurz noted that Councilman Gullotta asked what the cost would be for a full-time department, which he estimated at \$8MM, based on 80 members being hired. Chief Thurz noted the figure was based on 16 members per shift, with four shifts. There was a question raised about other improvements, which Chief Thurz noted buildings would need to be modified to accommodate sleeping quarters. Councilman Cavanna inquired about other incentives, which Chief Thurz referenced a pension program, which was previously discussed in the early 1990s. Chief Thurz informed the Commission that the State legislature is also looking into this matter, not only from a volunteer prospective, but with the career service, as well as law enforcement. The legislature's Public Safety committee has proposed two bills on recruitment and retention that will go to public hearing on Thursday, March 9th. Chief Thurz plans to attend the hearing in support of both bills. One of the bills is for recruitment and retention, which could include a pension, recruitment, and funding for fire training. Chief Thurz will be representing the Connecticut Fire Chiefs Association
- Department's annual awards dinner will be Saturday, April 15th at the Villa Louisa. Invitations were recently mailed. Brian O'Connor and Michael Kravontka will be recognized for 50 years of service.
- Commissioner Quagliaroli asked what the timeframe would be for the new Deputy Chief and Captain being filled? Chief Thurz replied the plan would be to have them in place by April 1st.
- Commissioner Quagliaroli commented that he thinks it is good that the staffing issue was brought before the council, as it desensitize them to the concept, and is something that needs to be considered in the near future. Commissioner Dutton ask if there were any surprise to the council? Chief Thurz replied that it was hard to gauge, but that he referenced the huge decline in volunteerism experienced in Pennsylvania. Commissioner Cofieff noted that the news media has helped a lot as there seems to be an article on the matter once a month on television. Chief Thurz stated that even the legislature is concerned about the declines being experienced and is trying to implement legislation. Commissioner

Quagliaroli replied that it is good that the awareness is now at the local level, and that the situation is coming to a head. Commissioner Longo echoed all of the comments made by the other commission members. He wondered if Chief Thurz was able to soften the impact based on the figure provided, and if other alternatives were discussed? Chief Thurz replied that the Town Manager noted there were other staffing models to consider, and that \$8MM was a worst-case scenario. Chief Thurz utilized 80 people at \$100K, but that might not be the correct staffing level. The thought would be to staff just one apparatus at each fire station. Commissioner Quagliaroli noted that the \$8MM is just for staffing, and does not factor in the other annual reoccurring operating expenses.

- Review of monthly operating expenses.

Old Business:

- None

New Business:

- None

Committee Report:

- Planning Committee – No comment as the meeting was cancelled due to the weather.
- Fire Marshal's Position - Commissioner Cafazzo made a motion to add to the agenda an Executive Session for the purpose of discussing the candidates for the Fire Marshal's position. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cofiell. There was no discussion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session:

- Present for the Executive Session were Commissioner Longo, Chairman, Commissioner Dutton, Vice Chairman, Commissioner Quagliaroli, Secretary, Commissioner Caffazo, Commissioner Cavanaugh and Commissioner Cofiell.
- The Executive Session ended at 7:03 PM. No votes were taken following the Executive Session.

Meeting Adjourned: Commissioner Cofiell made the motion for adjournment, which was seconded by Commissioner Cafazzo, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:04 PM.

Next Regular Meeting: April 6, 2023 at Company 1, 2825 Main Street, 6:30 PM.



Deborah Torres
Recording Secretary

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