

Board of Fire Commissioners
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
October 12, 2023

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

Others: Chief Michael Thurz, Assistant Chief David Thurz, Deputy Chief Motowidlak,
Executive Officer Dennler and Firefighter Steven Bemer

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 August 3, 2023 meeting. Commissioner Cavanaugh made the motion to approve with Commissioner Cofiell seconding the motion. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chief's Report:

Chief Thurz reported the following:

- Members of the Fire Commission should maintain a separate email for Fire Department business, as any department business conducted through their personal email is subject to the Freedom of Information Act.
- Department responded to two structure fires, one at 142 Naubuc Avenue and another at 453 Strickland Street. The fire at 453 Strickland Street were outbuildings camouflaged by trees and bamboo. An after-action review was being conducted following the commission meeting, and the Commissions was invited to attend.
- Buildings
 - Chief Thurz corrected a previous statement pertaining to the replacement of the sprinkler pipe at Station 4. It was cooper pipe and not black pipe that needed to be replaced.
 - The window replacement at Stations 3 and 4 was completed. Needed to follow up with the lower windows at Station 2.
 - Contractor is working through Station 4's bathroom punch list.
 - Bathroom renovation work at Station 3 has started.
 - Exterior doors jambs at Station 3 are in the process of being replaced.
 - Kitchen work at both Stations 3 and 4 will commence once the cabinets are fabricated.

- Contractor has committed to being completed by Thanksgiving with both stations, with the exception of punch list items.
- 37 fire helmets will need to be replaced. Cost to replace is approximately \$16,000.
- Swearing in ceremony was held on September 27th at the Riverfront Community Center. There were eight members sworn into new positions, with two Fire Marshals and four new firefighters. Commissioners Cofiehl and Quagliaroli were thanked for attending the event.
- The Recruitment Committee met on September 21st. Five candidates were interviewed with the recommendation that four will move on to the next phase of the process.
- A Request for Proposal was issued for the proposed improvements at the fire training facility. Three proposals were received, two of which were from preferred erectors of Fire Facilities. The quotes ranged from high five to low six figures. Chief Thurz asked for a representative from the Commission to serve on the review panel to score the proposals and interview the candidates. Commissioner Cavanaugh offered to serve on the panel. The objective is to review the proposals quickly as the material is schedule to be delivered in mid to late December. The goal is to have the burn building functional by March 2024. Commissioner Quagliaroli asked if the material was purchased separately from the contractor? Chief Thurz replied the material was purchased on a cooperative purchasing agreement, and that the Request for Proposal was just for labor. Commissioner Cafazzo asked if the existing building was going to be knocked down and replaced. Chief Thurz replied no, the required work consisted of gutting the two existing burn rooms to the frames and putting in new panels, as well as turning the annex portion into a third burn room.
- At the request of the Town Manager, a quarterly report of the Department's activity was provided to the Town Council. The report was reviewed by members of the Strategic Planning Committee to provide feedback prior to submission. The report provided information on:
 - Today's fire service and its challenges with a correlation to the department
 - Recruitment and retention efforts
 - Firefighter I training requirement
 - Challenges the Department faces
 - Review of Department personnel
 - Response time
 - Six-month review of call volume, as well as comparison to 2022
 - Upcoming fleet replacement
 - OSHA consultation
 - ISO rating

Commissioner Cofiell inquired if the report and each paragraph would be updated quarterly? Chief Thurz replied future reports would be based on information that occurred during the quarter. Commissioner Cofiell asked if the report would be available to the public? Chief Thurz replied that it was part of the Town Council packet, which is available to the public.

- Review of September's operating expenses

Old Business:

None

New Business:

- Commissioner Longo advised the other Commissioners that he asked for the Town's bid process to be added to the agenda. Commissioner Longo noted he liked what he heard in the Chief's report about the status of the construction project at Stations 3 and 4, and that the bidders for the training facility will be vetted. However, for months and months, the Commission has heard about the construction project at Stations 3 and 4, and while he can't speak for everyone, he can safely say no one has been satisfied with the project. The point Commissioner Longo was trying to make was about low bid. While he didn't know what happened, and the contractor that performed the work at Stations 1 and 2 is no longer in business, the work seemed to be satisfactory. Commissioner Longo felt something was a muck with Stations 3 and 4, which is the general consensus. Commissioner Longo always felt that low bid may not be the necessary way to go. While he understands there is a fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers, low bid is low for a reason. He question if the town staff does enough investigation and research, and speaking for himself would like to see maybe improvements or conduct additional research before signing on for low bid.
- Commissioner Dutton mentioned there are other bidding methods, such as qualification, which may not always be the cheapest way, but the individual has the right qualifications.
- Commissioner Cofiell responded that going with the Request for Proposal for the training facility maybe an offshoot from the difficulties with the two stations, figuring it would be a better way to vet it and get better stuff, or trying something a different way.
- Chief Thurz replied the Request for Proposal for the training facility was done because of the flexibility it offers, as opposed to the bid process, which would result in selecting the lowest bidder. This was no different when the Department went to purchase the apparatus. There are multiple ways to purchase items. When Stations 1 and 2 were being renovated, the Town elected to pursue a cooperative bid process. Within the cooperative the pricing was already predetermined. The vendor we used elected to get out of the cooperative. The next closest vendor was from Brookfield, Connecticut, and their pricing structure was based on Fairfield County's rates which blew the budget apart. This essentially resulted in the need to go out to rebid the work for Stations 3 and 4. The bid process resulted in

multiple vendors submitting proposals. The contractor doing the work had done other work for the town, and was within budget. Some of the other vendors were over the budget. Chief Thurz noted there are multiple ways to bid a project, and reiterated that a Request for Proposal was done for the training facility because it provided for more flexibility. Chief Thurz concluded that during a recent job meeting with the contractor it was relayed that the Commission was not pleased with the quality and slowness of the work to date. The architect for the project has been engaged to prepare a punch list of the items that need to be corrected.

Committee Report:

Strategic Planning Committee:

- Commissioner Quagliaroli noted the Strategic Planning Committee met on September 18, 2023. At the meeting, committee members continued to discuss Fair Labor Standards Act, as well as department physicals in concert with OSHA compliance. As it pertained to the physicals, the conversation centered around members completing the requirement within a one-year time frame. The concern is members who go to their own physician would not be able to meet this required, so there was discussion about possibly requiring members to only see the Department's physician. However, this still remains a work in progress.
- Commissioner Cafazzo inquired if the OSHA requirement was based on age? Chief Thurz replied it could be, but the Department went to an annual physical several years ago to keep it simple. Chief Thurz informed the Commission he is working with a former physician, who has made a proposal to just perform fire department physicals. Chief Thurz attended a meeting with Rocky Hill and Newington Fire Departments on this proposal. Chief Thurz is working to have the physician attend a Strategic Committee meeting to outline the proposal in how he would envision providing physicals for the Department. The objective is to provide an easier solution for the members, with the goal to get full compliance. Tracking down members to complete their physicals in a timely manner is a challenge. OSHA is looking for members to complete physicals and fit testing within 365 days to be fully compliant.
- Commissioner Cafazzo asked if it was the member's responsibility to know when they need to complete their physical? Chief Thurz replied no, that the Department tracks the physical dates and provides notice as to when they are due. Chief Thurz suggested that not completing a physical would be tied to the tax abatement. However, to be eligible for the tax abatement one needs to be a member in good standing. Therefore, not completing a physical would mean they are not in good standing already.
- Commissioner Longo asked if the physical provider offers varying schedules to accommodate members? Chief Thurz replied that is not an option. Physicals are completed at an urgent care facility, so a member maybe at the mercy of the staff if there are other medical emergencies taking place.

- Commissioner Dutton did note that members still needed to complete the bloodwork and an x-ray in addition to the physical.
- Commissioner Longo inquired if Chief Thurz could elaborate anymore on the status of the Fair Labor Standard Act? Chief Thurz replied that a plan has been established, it has been presented to the Finance Director, and the next step would be to discuss with a labor attorney. Once that has been vetted, Chief Thurz will bring back the recommendation to the Commission, discuss in executive session, and if in agreement, vote on the plan to move forward to the Board of Finance and Town Council for approval. There are still a number of unknowns that need to be addressed before any more discussions can take place.

Meeting Adjourned: Commissioner Cofiell made the motion for adjournment, which was seconded by Commissioner Cavanaugh, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:05 PM.

Next Regular Meeting: November 2, 2023 at Company 1, 2825 Main Street, 7:05 PM.



Deborah Torres
Recording Secretary

c: Fire Commission (6)
Fire Chiefs (4)
Fire Captains (4)
Jonathan Luiz, Town Manager
Michael Makuch, Fire Marshal
Gina Consiglio, Purchasing Agent