

Board of Fire Commissioners  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

February 1, 2024

Present: Commissioner Longo, Commissioner Bemer, Commissioner Cavanaugh and Commissioner Cofiell

Absent: Commissioner Cafazzo and Commissioner Dutton

Others: Chief Michael Thurz, Assistant Chief David Thurz, Deputy Chief Cody, Executive Officer Dennler and Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal Makuch

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 January meeting. Commissioner Cavanaugh made the motion to approve, which was seconded by Commissioner Bemer. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Chief's Report:**

Chief Thurz asked for a moment of silence in remembrance of former member Jason Kowalsky who recently passed away in a fire.

Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal Makuch commented on the fatal fire, which had an impact on both the community and the department. Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal Makuch noted the State Fire Marshal's office provided five members of its team to assist with the investigation.

As for an update from the Fire Marshal's office, Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal Makuch reported that inspections are now being done electronically with the software pretty well tuned. Inspections are more efficient, as well as the record keeping. Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal Makuch is continuing to have budget discussions with the Town Manager and his direct supervisor Shelly Caltagirone, which includes capital and staffing needs.

Commissioner Bemer inquired when the State Fire Marshal is called in to assist is the local Fire Marshal still in charge? Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal Makuch replied the State Fire Marshal takes the lead and coordinates with the local Fire Marshal office, which is common in a fatal fire situation, as well as with the local police department.

Chief Thurz reported the following:

- Contractor has completed the work at Stations 3 and 4. Will meet with the interim Facilities Director and architect to discuss any outstanding issues. The contractor has come back and made corrections to the items identified. Facilities also have some outstanding items to complete as well.

- The contractor has begun work at the training facility, and is moving right along. The burn rooms have been disassembled. Assistant Chief Thurz commented that the two burn rooms were demo in two days and construction has started on the third burn room. Initially this was projected to be a six to eight-week process, but they are moving expeditiously. Structurally the interior components for a 19-year old building were in very good shape. Contractor is in the reassembly phase and making good progress.
- The Town Manager requested a fourth quarter report for the next Town Council meeting. Chief Thurz is finishing that report and will email a copy to the Commission members once completed.
- The Capital Improvement Program presentation has taken place. The Town Manager has requested a memo for the Town Council as it relates to the replacement of Engine Tank 42. The department is requesting funding for new radios and to replace Engine Tank 42. The Town Council has questions regarding the mileage and repair history for Engine Tank 42. Commission members were provided with a copy of the memorandum, which outlined the mileage for the last three years, repairs, cost of repairs, and the number of responses. Included in the memorandum was the total number of days the apparatus was out of service. Chief Thurz noted that data integrity is the most important thing. This information was obtained through a combination of Vehicle Maintenance and the department's records management systems. In addition, the memorandum included a section of the National Fire Protection Association standard (NFPA 1911), which addresses inspection maintenance, testing and retirement of in-service emergency vehicles that are older than 25 years. The memorandum touched upon the long lead times for delivery of a new apparatus (3 to 5 years) and the cost increases of 1% every 30 days, or 12% annually. The memorandum also referenced that in 2023 there was an engine oil leak, which cost \$10.2K to repair, as well as an \$8.5K oil leak in March 2015. The Chief noted the budget process still remains active, with the operating budget presentation taking place at the end of February.
- Review of operating expenses.

**Old Business:**

**Update on New Physician:**

- Commissioner Longo stated he has heard nothing but good reports about the new physical process. He noted that it was a great piece of work by the Strategic Planning Committee, Chief Thurz, and everyone involved in moving it to Station 2. He feels it will work out, and that it's convenient for everybody. Commissioner Longo talked to a couple of people who have been through it and everybody seems to like it. He asked if any of the other commissioners heard any negativity about the process? Commissioner Bemer stated he heard nothing but positive comments. Commissioner Longo said he thinks it will be for the best, easier and there should not be any excuses for not getting a physical done.

**Renovation work - Station 3 and 4:**

- Commissioner Longo noted the Chief Thurz already discussed the renovation work at Stations 3 and 4, but doesn't think anybody was happy with the ultimate finished product.

The work left a little bit to be desired. The contractor was not as efficient as the contractor who renovated Stations 1 and 2. Commissioner Longo noted the Commission has gone over this every month, and that the Chief had a number of meetings with the contractors and Facilities staff. Commissioner Longo stated going forward, should there be more renovation work or firehouse projects, whether it be Facilities maintenance, a building inspector, or whomever, he thinks more of an effort needs to be made in correcting things as they go. Commissioner Longo stated he was not trying to be critical, and understand there was a transition within the Facilities department with the retirements of their supervisor and director. Perhaps that is the reason why. He noted his appreciation for the work that was done, but no one was happy with the finished project. He wondered if some of the social clubs at the different houses, who take a lot of pride in the appearance of their buildings and have done their own landscape if the work had some direct effect on their morale. Commissioner Longo concluded that he wanted to get everyone's ideas on what should be done going forward to make sure it does not happen again, and that is the only point he was trying to convey. Commissioner Longo asked for comments.

Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal Makuch commented that he works closely with Lincoln White, the Building official and they had a conversation with the interim Facilities Director. The Facilities staff does a lot of things well, but project management was not a strong part. The interim Director is aware that more focus needs to go into project management and believes that when a new permanent director is hired that is one of the skill sets required for the position.

#### **New Business:**

#### **Purchase of ATV:**

- Commissioner Longo inquired on the status of purchasing a new UTV given that funding was appropriated in this year's budget? Chief Thurz replied the committee has submitted their recommendation and that he is going through it right now, which will then be formalized in a memorandum. The plan is to see if a unit can be purchased through a cooperative agreement, such as Sourcewell. Captain Ruggiero established a committee who researched a variety of manufacturers and put together their recommendation.

#### **Proposed OSHA changes for the fire service:**

- The Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is proposing changes to the 1910.156 Fire Brigade standard. Chief Thurz provided Commission members with a slide deck of the proposed changes, which was previously presented in a Zoom presentation that Commissioners Bemer, Dutton and Longo attended. Commissioner Longo noted the proposed changes are not ironclad, as there is a 90-day window to question or appeal the changes. Chief Thurz acknowledged Commissioner Longo's statement, and noted that this is a Federal OSHA proposal that will impact the entire country, and something that has been in the works since 2007. Chief Thurz further commented the current 1910.156 Fire Brigade standard is only two pages and incorporates just one standard related to personal protective equipment. The new standard would incorporate, or adopt at least two dozen National Fire Protection Association standards, which would include officer qualifications, personal protective equipment and physicals. The document is 608 pages and is scheduled to be published on February 5<sup>th</sup> with a 90-day period to submit questions or comments to Federal OSHA for consideration. At the end of that

period the proposed standard would be implemented across the country. Chief Thurz noted that Connecticut is an OSHA state, along with six or seven other states, and that we will be experiencing more NFPA standards. Chief Thurz commented that he attended another Zoom presentation on the matter and that there were over 1,300 participants. Chief Thurz offered to send out the 90-minute recording of the presentation, prepared by Keene State, to any Commission members if they would like to view it.

Commissioner Longo mentioned some of the presentation's highlights would be an expense to the town. Secondly, it is nationwide and that it will involve more time and training for the members. Commissioner Longo felt it could translate into maybe a little bit of a morale problem. The department is already stressed to get people to join and asking them to give up more free time feels it could have a negative impact at some point. Items that were previously grandfathered will no longer be recognized.

Commissioner Longo asked Commissioner Bemer to provide his thoughts. Commissioner Bemer felt the whole presentation was overwhelming. Chief Thurz replied the 1910.156 standard was adopted in the 1980's and hasn't been changed since then. Forty years later OSHA is looking to bring things forward.

#### **Apparatus Replacement:**

- While not an agenda item, Commissioner Longo inquired if there has been any thoughts of purchasing a traded in vehicle, like Ladder 31 to replace Engine Tank 42? Chief Thurz replied he periodically receives trade magazines but hasn't seen any engine tankers for sale. If there was something available he would advise the Commission and Town Manager. Chief Thurz questioned if the department wants to get into buying used equipment? Commissioner Cofiell suggested looking into purchases that might have failed. Chief Thurz replied that the price would still be around \$1.2 million. Commissioner Cofiell responded that we would be purchasing at today's price with an earlier delivery. Chief Thurz replied that was not a decision he could make at it would need a higher approval. Commissioner Longo stated his idea wasn't to look towards purchasing a previously owned vehicle, but something where a transaction wasn't completed. Perhaps even look at a manufacturer that had a demo vehicle, or something with limited use, low mileage at a reduced price that could help instead of waiting three to four years for a replacement vehicle.

Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal Makuch responded he works as an Emergency One representative outside the area, and they saw a 4.5% price increase in one night with a one-day warning. Because of the delays from the time a contract is signed to receiving an apparatus, an aerial truck is now 48 months from Pierce and about 32 to 34 months from Emergency One. Engines are now anywhere from 32 to 38 months for delivery. While the bigger dealerships sell over a hundred trucks a year in New England, they have money to order trucks in advance and market them as a demonstrator. However, demonstrators are different today, as they are no longer equipped with special features and are driven longer distances with the perception they can be purchased at a lesser cost. Today's demonstrators have the smallest engines in them because the dealer have to pre-buy the vehicle. At the firm he represents, trucks are being ordered six months to a year in advance. There are not many engine tankers being built as a demonstrator. Manufacturers are building engines and aerials. Two-thirds of the water tanks on an engine is 750 gallons with a third at 1,000 gallons. Commissioner Longo replied that he is a little discouraged about the timeframe from inception, to funding being approved to finally being delivered three years later. His thought was if we were to consider looking at trade journals there

might be a great deal would we be interested in entertaining that? Chief Thurz replied the next two vehicles being proposed are engine tankers and there are not a lot of them being built. If the ladder truck was being replaced that might be an option.

### **Committee Report:**

#### **Strategic Planning Committee:**

- Commissioner Bemer reported at the January meeting the discussion focused on the new physical process, and what additional items the committee wanted to address in the upcoming year. Chief Thurz asked committee members to provide suggestions as to what they wanted to accomplish in 2024. Commissioner Bemer felt the meeting was run well. Chief Thurz mentioned that one item raised by the committee was to look at adjusting the lifetime tax abatement requirement. Chief Thurz had a preliminary discussion with the Town Manager and that this will be one of the items to work on in 2024. Chief Thurz also reviewed the proposed capital and operating budget for the upcoming year. The next meeting will be February 19<sup>th</sup> at Station 3.
- Budget Committee: Commissioner Longo noted that Commissioner Cavanaugh and himself have been discussing the budget with the Chief and that there is nothing new to report. He noted that as the Chief gets more information he will keep them informed. There is still two more months to go in the budget process.

Commissioner Longo requested that an updated list of phone numbers and emails be prepared for the Commissioners and Chief officers. Chief Thurz reminded Commissioner Longo that Commission members might want to consider establishing a separate email account for fire department business. Chief Thurz reiterated that fire department business sent to a personal email address subjects an individual to the Freedom of Information Act. If you utilize a personal email you subjecting yourself to personal items within that account being discoverable. Deputy Chief Cody noted that a fire department email account could be established for each commission member. Chief Thurz noted that agendas and minutes could also be sent by email going forward.

**Next Regular Meeting:** March 7, 2024 at Company 1, 2825 Main Street, 6:30 PM.

**Meeting Adjourned:** Commissioner Cofiell made the motion for adjournment, which was seconded by Commissioner Bemer, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:10 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