

Board of Fire Commissioners
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

April 4, 2024

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

Absent: Commissioner Cofiell and Commissioner Cafazzo

Others: Chief Michael Thurz, Assistant Chief David Thurz and Deputy Chief Bruce Motowidlak

Commissioner Longo called the Special meeting to order at 5:30 PM

Public Comment:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Commissioner Longo asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the March 7, 2024 meeting. Commissioner Dutton made the motion to approve, which was seconded by Commissioner Bemer. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chief's Report:

Chief Thurz reported the following:

- The contractor will be returning to Station 3 next week to correct the drain issue with the water fountain. They will take up the floor in the ladies' room where the pipe is blocked so it can be repaired, and then reinstall the tile floor.
- The training facilities upgrades:
 - Working with Facilities to have the exterior stairwell and roof decking painted on all four levels.
 - Met with Charles Little with the Highway Department to discuss additional paving around the training facility up to the pavilion.
 - Will add new interior lights inside the tower's stairwell portion of the building. The lighting will need to be more resistant to the high heat temperatures.
 - Assistant Chief Thurz is working with an Eagle Scout to build a confidence maze on the third floor, in the peak roof section, so members can be taught safety and survival techniques while using a self-contained breathing apparatus. Assistant Chief Thurz commented the Eagle Scout is still in the planning stage of the project.
- New apparatus update:
 - The bodies for the new apparatus are now in production. Jonathan Schrumm advised that a link to Marion Body Work's website will be available soon. Members will be able to watch the progress of the trucks being built, with additional pictures being posted every two weeks. Plan is to schedule two inspection trips in June and August. In June the trucks are expected to be approximately 65% complete, with the August trip to be for final inspection. The hope is the new trucks will be delivered before Labor Day.

- In regards to the apparatus, there was discussion at the previous month's Commission meeting pertaining to the retirement of certain apparatus with the arrival of the rescue-pumpers. Initially, the plan was to purchase two new apparatus to replace three vehicles; Rescue 14, Rescue 33 and Engine 61. This plan would result in the fleet being downsized by one vehicle. However, since the initial plan was formalized, members have come up with an alternative use for Rescue 33, which would improve overall operations. The concept would be to turn the vehicle into an all-purpose or "special hazards", which would allow for the elimination of another asset from the fleet. The thought process when approached by some of the officers included:
 - Relocating all the HazMat equipment from the trailer into this vehicle. Then the HazMat trailer would be eliminated from the fleet. With Rescue 33 being kept inside this would also prevent the foam from gelling up, as it would be in a warm temperature, as opposed to be stored outside in a trailer.
 - Add additional ice rescue equipment, as well as shoring and cribbing to the vehicle.
 - All of the traffic control equipment stored on Service 65 would be relocated to this vehicle. This would also allow for the elimination of Service 65 from the fleet. Rescue 33, which is a larger vehicle would be used as a blocking vehicle on the limited access highway.
 - Rescue 33 could also be used as a warming shelter/mobile command post during inclement weather. The Department previously maintained a former Dial-A-Ride bus that was converted from a former Police vehicle.
 - The Fire Marshal's Office could also utilize the vehicle for any of their fire investigation work. The vehicle is equipped with an on-board generator for lighting, so a service truck would no longer be needed. The vehicle also provides an area to interview witnesses instead of their pickup trucks. It can also be used as an area to meet with members of the Police Department and State Fire Marshal during a fire investigation.
 - The plan now would be to retire Rescue 14, Engine 61, Service 65 and the HazMat trailer from the department's fleet.
 - This would be an operational change, which was suggested by the members that made sense. The department is still reducing fleet by another assets, and provides some more versatility in what we can do with this vehicle.
- Commissioner Bemer inquired if the truck would require any renovations? Chief Thurz replied there would be no renovations required. It would no longer be responding as a rescue truck; it would remain at Company 3 because of the overhead exhaust system which is already in place.
- Commissioner Dutton said it made sense to him.
- Commissioner Cavanaugh replied he supports the concept.

- Commissioner Longo replied he can understand the logic behind the plan, and credited those who stepped forward to come up with other ideas to utilize the vehicle. However, he had a couple of little problems with the idea. Commissioner Longo stated it was explained to the Commission when the concept of the rescue pumpers was being discussed that Rescues 14 and 33 would be eliminated from the fleet. The reason for their elimination is the department was not in the heavy rescue business anymore, we didn't need a big tool box on wheels, and it was time for them to go. I think we all agreed on that philosophy some of us less than others, but it was a unanimous decision as he recalls. It was also brought to the Strategic Planning Committee with some reservations, some questions and then they eventually endorsed that plan too. I could be wrong, but believe that is how it was sold to the powers to be at the town hall in regards to getting money for the new vehicles. We were going to lose these two trucks for the same reason. Then it was brought back to the Commission, and we endorsed the plan. So, I think, while this idea has merit, we all have notice that the Town Council is paying attention to vehicles a little bit more. I don't want anyone to lose credibility by saying we are going to get rid of it, this is why we need to get rid of it, we are going to reduce the fleet, and now we are not. I don't know where that leaves anybody's credibility, or how that looks by changing our minds midstream when talking about an expensive piece. I can support a lot of the ideas, I just wonder what everyone else thinks of that? While the Fire Marshal use is a very valid point, I think that maybe if they need a vehicle, as much as we like to be good neighbors, let there be an internal transfer and give them the vehicle. Let their budget be responsible for the maintenance, fuel, tires, etc. This way we kept our word, and did what we said we would do, and the Fire Marshal gets a new vehicle. The vehicle's expenses comes out of Community Development and it's off our asset list. This is just an opinion, and wanted to see what everybody thought?
- Chief Thurz replied the fleet is still being reduced, which Commissioner Longo acknowledged, that we are staying to our word, and adding another vehicle to reduce the fleet. This is an operational decision. I was the one that mentioned this is not becoming a rescue truck, it would become an all-purpose truck that will allow us to eliminate a service vehicle currently in use, which really isn't safe for the highway. I'm looking at this vehicle as a safety feature since it's a larger vehicle. The Fire Marshal's use of the vehicle is just one component of many features that the vehicle can still provide. For the Fire Department we would no longer have to provide a service truck at a fire scene to provide lighting. Operational costs will go down because it would only respond to motor vehicle accidents on a limited access highway. It will not continue to respond to calls like it does today, and only respond to special types of incidents. It gives the Fire Department the ability to eliminate another trailer from the fleet, and we will have everything on one vehicle. We are still living up to our commitment in eliminating three assets. Initially, it was me that said these vehicles no longer serve a purpose. However, we also need to think about the membership that were creative and came up with this other idea in how to utilize the vehicle. I don't see any loss in creditability. Its more of an operational decision.
- Commissioner Bemer replied he supports it, it is an operational decision, and he has spoken with other people about the idea and no one has a problem with it.

- Commissioner Cavanaugh agreed that it was a great decision to move forward with it, instead of it sitting at the Highway Garage until sold. If we could get another 10, 15, even 20 years out of it as a blocker on the highway its perfect.
- Commissioner Dutton agreed as far as a blocker it would be much safer than the current vehicle, Service 65.
- Deputy Chief Cody has been asked to head a committee to replace all of the department's portable, and whatever mobile radios possible based on a \$650K appropriation. The committee will also reach out to the Police Department to see if they are planning to replace any radios, as this may provide for better buying power. The committee will review the different providers of radios, which include Motorola, Harris, and Kenwood in order to come up with a recommendation.
- Commissioner Bemer inquired what Goosetown Communication recently dropped off? Chief Thurz replied they were pagers purchased this year with funds from Capital Outlay. Deputy Chief Cody has distributed the pagers to the Captains. Each company received eight new pagers.
- OSHA has extended its comment period from May 6th to June 21st based on the numerous comments received to date on the proposed changes forthcoming.
- Chief Thurz provided the Commission with the revised duties of the Chief officers.
- Review of operating expenses.
 - Commissioner Cavanaugh inquired where the UTV (Utility Terrain Vehicle) was purchased from? Chief Thurz replied through Polaris Government and Defense. The order was placed through Sourcewell, and the unit is built through their website. The estimated delivery date is 120 days from the date the order is placed.

Old Business:

Approval of Proposed FY'2024-25 Budget

- Chief Thurz reported the budget for FY'2024-25 was approved. Excluded from the budget was funding to replace Engine Tank 42, \$30K for 25 additional self-contained breathing apparatus cylinders and \$1.3K for a television monitor, which was an Information Technology recommendation. The Town Council did approve the additional funding to compensate the membership. Chief Thurz still needs to work with Human Resources in finalizing the proposed restructure of the compensation plan. Chief Thurz is scheduled to meet with the Human Resource Director on April 11th. Once everything is finalized the plan is to provide an overview to the Fire Commission at its May 2nd meeting, followed by a presentation to the membership at a department meeting, which would be held at the Riverfront Community Center. The last component, which still needs to be addressed, is how to appropriate funding for the various classes held by either the Connecticut Fire Academy or regional fire schools.

- Commissioner Bemer asked what changed the councils mind regarding the compensation plan? Chief Thurz replied he needed to provide some additional analysis that the Finance Director and he put together.
- Commissioner Longo informed the other Commission members that Chief Thurz and himself met for two and a half hours with two council members to review the apparatus. Commissioner Longo noted they were the two councilors that had concerns about the apparatus, apparatus mileage, hours, and purchasing going forward. At Station 4, Councilors Cavanna and Cavanaugh were given an orientation on what the department was looking to do. Commissioner Longo felt the meeting was productive. Commissioner Longo noted that Councilor Cavanna got underneath Engine Tank 42 and looked at it, had a few comments but nothing negative. Commissioner Longo noted he tried to reinforce the idea of how difficult it was to base fire apparatus solely on mileage as they just don't go very far, and that it has a different type of use and purpose.

Commissioner Longo mentioned Chief Thurz had pictures of the frame rails on Engine Tank 42 which is just showing some surface rust, which was not a big deal, but will continue to expand and separate the frame rails. At Station 3, there was an inspection of Tanker 34, which was the next vehicle in question. They looked at it but did not ask as many questions. We explain what the purpose was for not buying another specialty vehicle like a tanker, but replacing it with a vehicle that could carry a fair amount of water and still have the dual purpose of being a Class A pumper. It appeared they understood our position. It was good to show we are working together for the betterment of the department, and explained to them about the parts issue with Tanker 34.

- Chief Thurz replied the pictures were taken by MES Shipman on March 19th when the truck was having its annual inspection. Chief Thurz also noted he reached out to Jerry Ciccaglione and Deputy Chief Motowidlak by email to look at the rust on Engine Tank 42 and to come up with a plan as to what could be done between the scaling of the rust and putting a clear film on it. He also asked Mr. Ciccaglione to look at Ladders 15 and 31, Rescue 33 and Tanker 34 to make sure there is no issues developing on those vehicles. Engines 11, 21, 22, 32 and 41 all have the hot dip galvanized frame rails, as will the two new trucks, and did not envision any problem with them. Chief Thurz also mentioned to Councilors Cavanna and Cavanaugh that the department was looking to get rid of Service 65 and keeping Rescue 33 as a vehicle to serve as an all-purpose type support vehicle. The initial thought as to which trucks to remove from service was the Chief's decision. However, when the membership comes to him with their ideas he felt it was important to include them, to have their input as part of the overall organizational structure in making us better.
- Commissioner Bemer inquired if the new vehicles coming in were to be bonded, and does that have to come before the Fire Commission first before anywhere else? Chief Thurz replied good question, because the department has never bonded before. Commissioner Cavanaugh asked if the town has ever bonding anything? Chief Thurz replied the Police Department's radio system was bonded. This upcoming November, when the department's

budget is put together, Chief Thurz felt the Fire Commission should vote on the budget ahead of time with the understanding that its fluid and could be completely different by March.

- Regarding bonding, what the Town Council is looking to bond are big ticket items, Board of Education as well as fire apparatus. Chief Thurz put together an apparatus replacement schedule, which was provided to Councilors Cavanna and Cavanaugh at their meeting, illustrating the need that by July 1, 2026 a truck had to be ordered, knowing it would take three years to get delivered. The same goes for Ladder 15, that by July 1, 2027 we needed to order a ladder truck knowing that it would arrive in 2031. Commissioner Longo replied that we need to get this process started in some sort of order because we are approaching a point where we are going to need to purchase three or four trucks very shortly because of their age.
- Commissioner Bemer replied he brought this up because every time bonding is discussed at a Town Council meeting the interest rate seems to be pre-World War 1. Commissioner Longo responded that he feels they have a better shot at bonding then previously. Commissioner Dutton responded that he did not feel it would be the Fire Commissions decision, it would be the Board of Finance.
- Chief Thurz replied to Commissioner Bemer that every year the Department put together its Capital Improvement Program, which the Commission votes on, and we need to document that a formal vote was taken as opposed to just a discussion.

New Business:

Discussion on revision to lifetime tax abatement

- During a recent Strategic Planning Committee meeting it was discussed to look at revising the age requirement for the life time tax abatement. Commissioner Bemer had asked this be added to the agenda. Commissioner Bemer noted the discussion centered around changing the years of service, and discussing about renters and those that lived out of town. The committee suggested that a group of people get together and look into the matter further.
- Chief Thurz replied the issue has to deal with the town ordinance and the lifetime abatement, which requires a member to achieve 25 years of service and reached age 55. The question is can we get rid of the age component? You would still have to do the required years of service. For some to get the lifetime abatement, they achieve their 25 years of service in their early 40s, but need to stay on an additional 13 years to get the lifetime abatement. A concern or comment could be, would there be a mass exodus? Chief Thurz noted he would need to look into how many people it would affect. This is a town ordinance and something the Commission would have to look into. Commissioner Dutton stated he would be less concerned about someone who has put 25 years in leaving the department. Commissioner Cavanaugh mentioned that having it at 25 years may encourage people to stay on. Commissioner Longo felt it could go either way. Commissioner Dutton felt it depended upon the individual. Commissioner Longo believed it was a great concept. Commissioner Longo asked what was needed to expedite this? Chief Thurz replied its not

about expediting it, it's about doing the analysis, what's the drawback, but it's something he can't bring forward, that it needs to come from the Commission. Commissioner Bemer stated if the Chief could provide the documentation the Commission would need to move it forward. Commissioner Dutton agreed to provide something to the commission.

Committee Reports:

- Strategic Planning Committee:
 - Chief Thurz noted the meeting focused on changes to the compensation structure. It also included discussing the tax abatement, and a roundtable conversation regarding what has been going on within the department. The next meeting will be on April 15th at Company 1.

Commissioner Bemer asked Chief Thurz if he participate in the Job Fair at the high school? Chief Thurz replied he did along with Lieutenant Piacentini, and Firefighters Gosselin and Hart. They had some students express an interest in the fire cadet program. Members handed out pamphlets, used the fire extinguisher prop attract the students to the booth, as well as stress balls with the department's logo. The event went from 10:00 AM to 12:30 PM.

Commissioner Longo noted there was no additional information to report from the budget committee. Commissioner Longo stated hopefully at the next meeting the compensation package will be completely discussed so everyone has a better understanding and move forward. It has come along way, and there are just a few tweaks to work out.

Commissioner Bemer made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Dutton. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned: The meeting adjourned at 5:39 PM.

Next Meeting: The next regular meeting will be held on May 2, 2024, at Company 1, 2825 Main Street, at 6:30 PM.



Deborah M. Heald
Recording Secretary

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