

Board of Fire Commissioners
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
May 2, 2024

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

Absent: None

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

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

Commissioner Longo welcomed Kevin Nursick to the board as a new fire commissioner. Commissioner Longo also publicly thanked the recent retirees, Commissioner Dutton and Commissioner Cafazzo from the Fire Commission. He wished them good health, best of luck in their future endeavors, and thanked them for their years of service.

Public Comment:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Commissioner Longo asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the April 4, 2024 meeting. Commissioner Cavanaugh made the motion to approve provided the time was edited from 5:30 PM to 5:00 PM. Commissioner Bemer had a question regarding the minutes. On Page 6 it stated "Commissioner Bemer replied he brought this up before every time bonding was discussed at the Council meeting with interest rate seems to be pre-World War I". He did not recall making this statement. Commissioner Cavanaugh stated he did. Commissioner Bemer thought he said something else. Commissioner Bemer seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion passed, with Commissioner Cofiell abstaining as he was not present at the last meeting.

Communications:

Commissioner Bemer informed the committee he received a letter from Jim Dutton which stated effective immediately he was resigning from the Town of Glastonbury Fire Commission and has notified the Republican Town Committee Chair and the Fire Chief.

Commissioner Bemer received a letter from John Cafazzo that stated he was writing a letter today to resign from his position on the Board of Fire Commission. Commissioner Cafazzo enjoyed being part of the Commission over the last number of years and just doesn't feel he could commit to the amount of time needed to continue. He felt that the commission has definitely come a long way in making positive changes within the fire department, and is confident that the current commissioners will continue to do the same. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve the Town of Glastonbury and was thankful for being allowed to play a role.

Chief's Report:

Chief Thurz reported the following:

- Building update:

- The contractor has corrected the drain problem at Station 3. There are some remaining punch list items that still need to be completed. The Town is holding back the contractor's retainage until the punch list is 100% completed. The Facilities supervisor is hoping the work will be completed within the next two weeks.
- New apparatus update:
 - Progress photos have been provided in a link, which was sent out to the members, and also posted on Facebook. The bodies are in the process of being framed up.
- On June 22nd and 23rd there will be another lifting and stabilization class. Department has been given four free seats for the class. The training will be held at the training facility and already have members signed up.
- The annual awards dinner was held on April 27th where members were recognized for their years of service and educational achievements. There was approximately 114 people in attendance.
- The Fire Department will be participating in the Memorial Day Parade.
- The Fire Department will be assisting the Police Department, Parks Department and Glastonbury EMS with National Night Out on Tuesday, August 6th. The event will be held at the Riverfront Community Center.
- A quarterly report has been requested by the Town Manager, and is due to him by May 9th. A copy of the report will be emailed to the Commissioners once completed.
- Review of operating expenses.
 - Commissioner Bemer asked what the budget was for the Villa Louisa (awards dinner)? Chief Thurz replied about \$6,500 between awards and dinner.
 - Commissioner Longo asked if the waterway on Ladder 31 was discussed at the last meeting? Chief Thurz replied that it may have been talked about, but not included in the expense report at that time. The vehicle maintenance expenses were for the last couple of months.
 - Commissioner Longo asked if the contractor previously mentioned was for the drain at Station 3? Chief Thurz responded it was, and the water fountain is actively working. The contractor just needs to finish the tile work.
- Chief Thurz provided an overview of the compensation plan for the department going forward. The intention is to present the plan to the membership within the next couple of weeks. This is the plan the Strategic Planning Committee has been working on, as well as part of the next year's operating budget. The intent is to implement the plan on July 1st.
- Commissioner Cavanaugh asked who will perform the jobs currently being done by the per diem personnel? Chief Thurz replied some would fall under his responsibility, or at his

discretion. At times it may be offered to members who would be compensated through the points system. There will no longer be an eight-hour day at an hourly rate. For example, task like putting the boat in the water, fire prevention or hose testing.

- Commissioner Cofiell asked if any other members would have discretion in assigning points, e.g. Assistant Chief, Deputy Chiefs, or Captains, or do they need to get prior permission? Chief Thurz replied some things being assigned needed to be evaluated, as those who receive a stipend were also putting in a sheet for work completed. For example, if you are an engineer or responsible for the self-contained breathing apparatus why would you be getting compensated to fill air bottles, that is why you receive a stipend. Chief Thurz is not saying he is the only one with the discretion, but there needs to be a better method of oversight at what is being entered into the system for compensation. Commissioner Cofiell commented there are some legitimate tasks that should be compensated, which Chief Thurz agreed. However, there are some items that should not be compensated because the individual is receiving a stipend.
- Commissioner Longo noted this has been a long work in progress and a lot of numbers have been run, but asked if anyone looked at a pension plan or did a cost comparison as opposed to the increase in training? Chief Thurz replied that it maybe something else we will have to look at in the future. However, as Chief Thurz mentioned before, the department has a lot of older members, and to invest in a pension now would not be beneficial, but is something to look at for the future. Rocky Hill Fire Department started their plan in the 1980s. Commissioner Cofiell mentioned we discussed it back then too, and it didn't happen. Chief Thurz noted back than members wanted to be compensated each year. Looking back now 40-years later it would have been nice, along with the tax abatement for life and to receive some income from the fire department after you retired.
- Commissioner Bemer had a question at the beginning of the presentation in which Chief Thurz referenced so many units per company and company drills, shouldn't it be not just company drills, but fire department drills? Chief Thurz responded department drills, a member will still get credit whether they go to their own company's drill or another company's drill.
- Commissioner Bemer also inquired if the budget still reflects the overnight crew, and if funds for the per diem were still in next year's budget? Chief Thurz replied there are funds in next year's budget to accommodate the overnight, but it is suspended right now because the numbers do not justify continuing the program. However, if the number of overnight incidents goes back up and there is a problem with members responding the funds are available. Commissioner Bemer asked if the funds were not used could they be transferred to the new program? Chief replied that the overnight program is in the same line item as the new program. Per diem is funded out of part-time wages, just like officer's stipends. There are four different line items: full-time wages, part-time/stipends, point system, and a small budget for the administrative assistant to attend commission meetings.

- Commissioner Bemer asked Deputy Chief Cody if the new system is easier now to post every month or three months instead of six or 12? Deputy Chief Cody responded it can be posted as soon as the data is available. There is a process to review, to make sure it is accurate and that there are no mistakes before posting. Commissioner Bemer agreed, it has been a long process, a lot of people in the mix, and glad everyone got together and on the same page. Between the Board of Finance, Human Resources and the Town Council it can make one's head spin. Chief Thurz replied the most important thing to look at within the presentation is that members will see a sizable increase in the funds they receive for responding to incidents. The example I used was a fairly active member which showed the difference in compensation. A member will receive a little over 100% increase, or double their money.
- Commissioner Cofield asked if the membership was asking for more money? Chief Thurz replied no, but he wanted to put something together that was fair and understandable. The current program has been in existence since 1987, almost 40 years old, so this new system will be easier to figure out. This was to make sure that when converting to the point system the membership was ahead of the game. There has been times when people wanted to be compensated more for overnight incidents based on the call volume. There was also a time when an officer wanted to be compensated more because their company responded to more calls than the officers at the other companies.
- Commissioner Longo noted that with the per diem being suspended was there much thought going forward as to what may take place if it was to be reinstated? Chief Thurz replied he would like to address that after the new program has been implemented. Commissioner Longo commented there were questions when the per diem started, and after it was tweaked and used for a long time felt it proved its medal. Chief Thurz replied no one is more upset about the program being suspended than himself. It was something that former Commissioner Richard French and himself spent years putting together, and while not favorable at first, it has been in existence for almost eight years with two members Monday through Friday that we knew were available.
- Chief Thurz noted his plan is to present the new compensation plan within the next two weeks by hosting a department meeting at the Riverfront Community Center. He invited the Commissioners to attend to show support of the new program.
- Commissioner Longo said it always intrigued him that this was brought up a long time ago, and that Chief Thurz stated he wanted to rectify some things, but I am guessing that there are some towns that may not be as well healed as Glastonbury? Chief Thurz asked what he meant by well healed? Commissioner Longo replied being able to fund something like the plan presented. Chief Thurz responded he looked at Berlin and Canton. Commissioner Longo replied they have money, but if the town didn't do this per say what are the ramifications? Is there a fine, we must comply within a certain amount of time and then there would be a penalty if we don't comply by then? Chief Thurz answered there would be a fine.

- Commissioner Bemer asked if the Commission should make a motion to approve, which Chief Thurz replied he would like them to. Commissioner Bemer made a motion to accept the new compensation plan as presented, which was seconded by Commissioner Cavanaugh. Commissioner Longo asked if there was any other discussion, which there was none. The motion passed with Commissioners Bemer, Cavanaugh and Nursick in favor, Commissioner Cofiell abstaining, and Commissioner Longo opposing the plan. Commissioner Longo went on to state he has been opposed of the idea since day one. He liked the fact that people would be making more money. However, he just thought we have ignored this for a long time and nothing came to the forefront, nobody brought it up, and there was no mention of fines. He would have preferred that other things were looked at, a pension, maybe increasing the tax abatement. Chief Thurz and Commissioner Cofiell replied the tax abatement could not be increased because it's a state statue. Commission Longo went on to state that he did recognize all of the work that was put into the plan and that it was well done. He is not a huge fan, but does appreciate the monetary gain, and that it was just his opinion.
- Commissioner Cofiell asked if the tax abatement would be going up to \$2,500 next year on the legislative side? Chief Thurz replied there is nothing being proposed legislatively regarding the tax abatement. Commissioner Nursick asked if it made it out of any committees? Chief Thurz replied unless it gets put in through an implementor bill. There is still another week to go within the legislative session.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

Vice Chairman position:

- Commissioner Longo noted with the resignation of Commissioner Dutton the Vice Chairman's position needs to be filled. Commissioner Longo had a conversation with Commissioner Cavanaugh during the brief transition of Commissioners Cafazzo and Dutton resigning, as he is the lone remaining Republican. Commissioner Cofiell made a motion to nominate Commissioner Cavanaugh as the board's Vice Chairman. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bemer. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ethics Commission Ruling:

- Commissioner Longo updated Commissioner Nursick that there were a couple of questions raised during the fall regarding an ethics situation that came to the forefront, and a possible conflict that needed to be rectified, which went through the Ethics Commission concerning Commissioner Cofiell and his business. Commissioner Cofiell spoke to the Ethics Commission and a decision was rendered. Because the topic was not an agenda item Chief Thurz advised Commissioner Longo that it needed to be added. Therefore, Commissioner Bemer made a motion to add under new business discussion on "Issued in response to Request for an Advisory Opinion dated March 3, 2024, submitted by John Cofiell, Jr. (#: 24-1). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Longo. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

- Commissioner Cofiehl noted in his ruling he needed to disclose who he is, and what his relationship is. He noted his family has been a member of the original Company 3 through today, between his grandfather, father, himself, brother and sons. He wasn't sure if some of the things done in the past were right or proper. A lot of the things their family have done, based on his father's belief of not having to charge to do some stuff, would save tax dollars or the budget, so there had been a lot of things that came out of Cofiehl's uncharged. When the company was in a financial position it would donated time and equipment over the years to do certain operations. He was not 100% certain where this came from. At one time there was a little advisory that he may want to step down because of other town interactions that the business does. He chose not to, and does know what else is going on, but other agencies seem to stopped doing business for whatever reason. When asked to fill out the paperwork, which he took to an attorney, his lawyer questioned if it was the appropriate paperwork. Commissioner Cofiehl began to receive letters from the town's attorney over the matter. This was not a simple process as he was told it would be. A little over a month ago a decision was rendered, and essentially Commissioner Cofiehl needs to tell everyone who he is, what his relationship is, and any transactions that might be voted on by the Commission that had something to do with his business, therefore he would need to abstain from any participation. So, based on the letter, and his attorney's opinion, it would seem everything is back to normal. However, it is still unclear if at every meeting, or when a new member comes in if he needs to explain who he is based on both he and his attorney interpretation of the letter.
- Commissioner Cavanaugh asked if at every meeting he has to state he owns Cofiehl Sports and Power? Commissioner Cofiehl said that is vague, but at least anytime a new member joins to comply with what is required.
- Commissioner Nursick asked if this was an advisory opinion from the Ethics Committee? Commissioner Cofiehl replied yes, through their lawyer. Everything was done through a lawyer. Chief Thurz noted the issue came up not because of when Commissioner Cofiehl was a firefighter, but because he now sits on the board, and his political affiliation. Commissioner Cofiehl responded it didn't come through politically because Chairman Longo was not first contacted. Chief Thurz replied it wouldn't have come through the chair. Commissioner Cofiehl felt it would have because that is who he reports to. Commissioner Longo stated that wasn't the fact, that all commissioners are equal. Chief Thurz noted it was because of his political affiliation and voting on things like the budget, so there were no improprieties. There are other things within the Ethics Commission policy regarding purchasing with someone who's on a board and does business with the town. Chief Thurz wasn't sure what some of the sections referenced in the letter meant. Commissioner Cofiehl wasn't either. Chief Thurz pointed out the letter stated for him to pay particular attention to those sections. The reason for the opinion was to make sure everything was in accordance to the policy.
- Commissioner Longo noted he and Chief Thurz discussed this when it first came to be. It is everything everyone is very obviously aware of these days. We just wanted to air on the side of caution so no one would be accused of this, that, or the other thing. It's a new world, everybody watches every single thing, some people may think there some improprieties. We have all known Jay for 40-50 years, the whole family. This was a new wrinkle that everyone goes through, but I think we did the right thing to correct it, or make it more transparent.

Committee Reports:

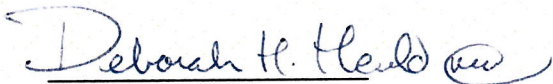
Strategic Planning Committee:

- Commissioner Bemer noted there was a meeting at Company 1 to discuss the lifetime tax abatement, based on years of service and age. There was also discussion on some type of stipend for renters or out of towners. Chief Thurz added that there was discussion on ways to recruit and retain members through other types of incentive programs.
- Commissioner Cavanaugh mentioned with the stepping down of Commissioner Dutton would the committee be looking for other members of the Strategic Planning Committee, and wasn't sure if Commissioner Nursick would be interested, later on, or in the future? Commissioner Nursick said he would help wherever its needed. Commissioner Cavanaugh thought maybe something he wants to discuss later, to think about, to commit to it. Commissioner Longo said he would be open to that. Historically there had always been one from both sides. Commissioner Longo said he didn't know going forward since they are still down one member how quickly it was going to be resolved. I have no issue if Commissioner Nursick would like to go to the committee meetings. It's a good way to meet people, and to begin understanding the interworking of the department. The consensus of the Commission was to have Commissioner Nursick participated in the committee. The commission could always change who participated in future meeting. Chief Thurz stated the next meeting will be May 20th at Company 2.

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

Meeting Adjourned: The meeting adjourned at 7:22 PM.

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



Deborah M. Heald
Recording Secretary

c: Fire Commission (5)
Fire Chiefs (4)
Fire Captains (4)
Jonathan Luiz, Town Manager
Michael Makuch, Fire Marshal
Gina Consiglio, Purchasing Agent

