

**Board of Fire Commissioners
Regular Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 13, 2021
7:00 pm via Cisco Webex &
Clifford B. Green Memorial Center**

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1. **Call to Order** - Rick Ives, Acting Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. (19:00 hours).

Attendance: Rick Ives; Lou Brodeur; Jeff Otto, Patrick Gauthier; Michael Podzalne (all present in person). James Solar (present via Webex)
Felix Ramos was absent with notice.

Others Present – S. Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief; Jim Warren, East Brooklyn Fire Chief (both present in person); J.S. Perreault, Recording Secretary (via Webex).
There were eleven people present in person in the audience.
Jon DonFrancisco and Nemeth (members of the public) were present via Webex.

2. **Approve Minutes**
 - a. **Regular Meeting of August 11, 2021**

Motion was made by J. Otto to accept the Minutes of the Meeting of August 11, 2021 as presented.
Second by L. Brodeur. No discussion.
Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (6-0-0).

3. **Public Comment** – None.

4. **Equipment Discussion**

S. Breen:

- They had a meeting today to be sure they are where they need to be and it went well. There have been between 35-40 changes. It will take a week or two to make the specifications changes.

J. Otto:

- At the last meeting, he had provided a list of OSHA equipment/activities requirements. He stated that, next month, he will request that each Department provide their program to the BoFC.

5. Department Discussion

a. Recruitment

b. Retention

c. Paid Staff – Discussion with Fire Departments concerning the use of paid EMS/Fire personnel to supplement volunteers.

Mr. Ives stated that this item is what he'd like to pay most attention to and that discussion regarding the above items (#'s 3, 4 and 5a&b) may take place under this item as well. He explained that the difficulty with handling emergency calls was discussed at the last Board of Selectmen's meeting and it was decided to get this discussion going again with the Fire Departments. He spoke of the difficulty with getting volunteers and that we are getting more medical calls than ever before and that it appears that we may be having a problem.

We need to find out:

- If there is agreement that there is a problem (leaving fire out of it for now).
- If there is an issue, figure out, together, how to solve it.

Mr. Ives said that the suggestion of paid staff is a viable suggestion, but he is sure there are others.

J. Otto summarized the missed calls from January through September and suggested watching for another month or two to see if the trend of increasing missed calls continues.

S. Breen agreed that there have been an increase in the number of missed calls in the last couple of months and spoke of how a partial explanation is that COVID went through the staff so they had fewer people to work with. He explained that the trend is getting greater and that they have the same six people who have been running the volunteer staff and it is getting tougher and tougher to continue that level of volunteers. He said that, starting this Friday and Saturday from 6 p.m. to midnight, they are adding paid staff to cover those shifts. Even though they had not budgeted for that staffing time, they feel that the cost will be offset and they will watch to see how it works over the next couple of months. There was discussion. There was a suggestion that the Town pay to have an EMR/EMT course, but the need is for people who would be focused here in Brooklyn. Discussion continued regarding East Brooklyn people possibly answering ambulance calls at Mortlake and Mr. Breen explained that their previous offer for that still stands. Mr. Brodeur spoke about how some people are afraid to go on calls that are COVID related. Discussion continued regarding incentives. Some things previously discussed were pay per service and tax abatements. Mr. Ives feels that tax abatements is a viable thing that the townspeople would take a hard look at.

Mr. Breen spoke about how, over the last few years, there is a large influx of people coming into Town from other areas where services are provided municipally and there is a misconception regarding how we function. He feels that the townspeople need an understanding of how we function through volunteers. Mr. Ives agreed that there needs to be some communication. Mr. Otto suggested that Mortlake put publicity ads in newspapers regarding how it is a voluntary organization and would like to get more people to participate. Discussion continued.

Mr. Ives explained that he feels that, at some point, we will need some form of paid staff, both EMT and Fire, so we need to come up with a plan. We have to do something a little bit different than what we have been doing. Discussion continued regarding a subcommittee that had been formed. Mr. Ives said that he would like to change the subcommittee because they should also discuss a tax abatement program and recruiting as well as paid people. He feels they should all be discussed together as opposed to individually. Mr. Ives suggested five person subcommittee: a representative from each Fire Department, Mr. Ives, someone from the public. Mr. Ives will speak with Felix Ramos and he will get it set up. He said it doesn't have to get done tomorrow and he suggested looking at the data for the rest of the calendar year. Discussion continued regarding putting something together by the end of the year so it can be figured into the next budget.

Discussion continued regarding covering the cost for Mortlake's paid staff on the weekends. Mr. Breen explained that, in the past, they had to supplement their budget for paid staff and they may need to do that again.

There was discussion regarding a question raised by P. Gauthier about an acceptable number of missed calls. A gentleman from the audience noted that Plainfield and other towns are also having to deal with missed calls.

Sandy Brodeur (seated in the audience) noted that the subcommittee that had been formed a while ago never had a meeting. Mr. Ives stated that he will be on this committee and will call a meeting.

Ms. Brodeur asked that when there is a missed call, that the time of day be noted. Mr. Otto explained that the time of day is noted.

Ms. Brodeur noted that another thing that would want to be known is, will the calls that we would have made give us enough money?

There was discussion about East Brooklyn/Mortlake ambulance driving and there was disagreement about a past experience. Mr. Ives stated that the service has to be provided for everyone.

Mr. Ives stated that, within the next ten days, he will contact the subcommittee members and a member of the public and will set a date for a meeting and will push it forward.

6. Financial Reports Discussion

Mr. Otto stated that they are waiting for Mortlake's quarterly report which is due next Wednesday.

a. Budget Discussion – None.

7. Other Business

a. Review/Approve 2022 Schedule of Regular Meetings

Mr. Ives suggested continuing to have the Hybrid meetings, in person (at the Clifford B. Green Memorial Center) and also giving people the ability to participate from home.

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to hold the 2022 Regular Meetings on the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at the Clifford B. Green Memorial Center.

Second by J. Otto. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (6-0-0).

b. Mr. Ives commented that he had received information regarding a lawsuit, however he was not prepared to discuss it because he has not yet met with the Attorney. There will be a special meeting to go into executive session to discuss this matter.

8. Public Comment – None.

9. Next Meeting – November 10, 2021.

10. Adjourn

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to adjourn at 7:54 p.m. (19:54 hours).

Second by P. Gauthier. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (6-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary

***PLEASE NOTE: Meetings to continue to be held via WebEx and in person at the Clifford B. Green Memorial Center.**