

FD Paid Staff Sub-Committee

Special Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 24, 2022

7:00 pm via Zoom & In Person

Clifford B. Green Meeting Center

Join Zoom Meeting

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1. **Call to Order** – Michael Podzalne, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. (19:02 hours).

Attendance: Michael Podzalne, Chairman; Austin Tanner, First Selectman; Lou Brodeur, Selectman; Joe Voccio, Selectman; Felix Ramos; Steve Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief; Brian Pepin, East Brooklyn Fire Chief; (all present in person).

Also Present – J.S. Perreault, Recording Secretary (in person).

Audience (in person) – David Lee, Board of Finance; John Livernoche, Captain East Brooklyn.

Via Zoom - Bill

2. **Approve Minutes**
 - a. **Special Meeting of February 1, 2022**

Motion was made by Joe Voccio to approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of February 1, 2022

Second by L. Brodeur. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously (7-0-0).

3. **Public Comment** – None.

4. Report from Fire Chiefs.

Chief Pepin reported:

- He had forwarded information about the incentive program from the Town of Ledyard to Mr. Podzaline and Chief Breen. Mr. Pepin explained that it is on a point system and it is fairly complicated.
Mr. Podzaline likes that the points are weighed differently and it is good from a budgetary standpoint.
- Mr. Pepin is still learning the emergency reporting system and, therefore, was not able to pull calls and data yet. He needs a couple more days.
- They have 22 members, 8 are active. The majority of EMS calls, during the day, are handled by Patrick Gauthier. Mr. Pepin stated that he is very grateful for Mr. Gauthier's service and all that he does.

Chief Breen reported:

- He has 77 people who are members of the Fire Department, of those 77 members, 38 are active and the others fall into the categories of veteran members and associate members.
Of the 38 active members, 20 are firefighters, 11 are EMT's, 4 are EMR's (some hold certifications and some do not), the remainder are not certified.
- For the month of January, they only dropped five of all of the ambulance calls. This is way down from earlier in the year. He explained that two were due to no first crew during the overnight hours and three were due to no second crew. He feels fortunate that over the last month-and-a-half, their second crew has been getting out on the road pretty regularly.
- In January, they were dispatched to a total of 97 incidents, 72 of which were EMS or auto accidents, 5 structure fires, 1 medical assist, 3 cancelled en-route, 5 false alarms under different categories.
- February, to date, they have been dispatched to 78 incidents, 63 of which were EMS incidents, 4 structures fires, the remainder were public service incidents or false alarms.
- It been pretty busy. Last year, they were dispatched to a total of 9 structure fires and they have already tied that.

There was discussion regarding why Mortlake's number of missed calls went down. Chief Breen credits adding staff to cover Friday and Saturday nights from 6 p.m. to midnight, having conversations about missed calls, and scheduling.

5. Discussion on present state of missed and delayed emergency responses.

There was discussion regarding how it depends on the time of day. There are more missed calls during day time.

There was discussion regarding missed second ambulance calls which are very dependent on time of day and on who is on the first crew during the overnight hours.

6. Discussion on developing a volunteer incentive program for all volunteers.

Mr. Podzaline explained that he had gathered information from other towns and they all do something different. He asked the Chiefs if they had a feel for what direction their people would like to go. Mr. Pepin stated that with the way times are today, they are looking at money. Mr. Breen said that he left it

ambiguous. Mr. Ramos prefers to offer a choice. Mr. Voccio compared simple administrative costs vs. tax abatements (which would involve the Assessor) or fees (which would require someone to keep track) and he stated that this should be kept in mind for consolidation discussion.

Mr. Breen explained the retirement program that they had done in the past. To qualify, you had to wait a year to be put into the program and over the course of the year, you had to:

- Make 15 percent of fire calls and 15 percent of the EMS calls per month, not per year;
- Be involved in at least one of the three major fundraisers; and
- Make a minimum of one training per month.

Mr. Breen suggested that something similar for qualifying for an incentive program would be appropriate. Discussion continued and Mr. Breen commented that it does help with response and it can be used as a tool for recruiting.

There was discussion regarding keeping track. When responding to a call, each member would be responsible to see the Officer in charge to get credit. There was discussion about how the "I am responding" computer program/app works.

Mr. Ramos clarified that, whichever program(s) are decided upon, both Departments would have those same program(s).

Mr. Podzalne stated that he will propose something to the Chiefs to talk about with their memberships. He said that it would be great if we can go with the multiple option. Chief Pepin stated that he and Chief Breen could also meet to discuss what would be a good option.

Mr. Podzalne explained a pay-per-call option that had been used when he was a volunteer. It was a point system that he said is the simplest form and the easiest for the Town to budget. Mr. Voccio stated that a meaningful amount for the average stipend would need to be determined. Discussion continued. Mr. Breen suggested taking six months of historical data to get an idea (and add 10 or 15 percent) for the amount to budget. Mr. Voccio stated that if it's meaningful, easy to administrate and predictable, those are all pluses, and even if the Town spends \$75,000 to \$100,000 a year, it's still the biggest bargain in Town because those folks are doing a job that no one else wants to do. He doesn't feel that there would be much pushback. He feels that if submitted soon, it could make it into the 2022/2023 budget.

7. Discussion on ambulance service.

See Chief Breen's report above.

8. Discussion on needs of paid staffing ambulance and fire.

Mr. Voccio explained that he has a different view on this because you would have through the whole exercise of cost benefit comparison if we outsource the whole thing vs. internally. It becomes a more difficult discussion. The incentive is a different ballgame. Mr. Podzalne agreed.

Chief Pepin stated that he and Chief Breen are going to work really hard on recruitment this summer. He also stated that members don't always live in Brooklyn these days. Chief Breen spoke about incentive for members to come and "hang out" at the firehouse and do more. Chief Pepin commented, "To be there because they want to be there, not because they feel that they have to be there." Discussion continued regarding the commitment involved and time away from families.

Chief Pepin spoke about how it is not safe to have only one firefighter in the firehouse. Discussion continued.

9. Discussion on department consolidation.

Chief Breen commented that there is going to be a lot of transition in the Departments and the Town and how we work together. He doesn't want to take consolidation off the table, but he feels that it would be fair to give it some time to see how it all works out. The plan is to work cohesively as separate entities, but working as one in a lot of ways. Discussion continued and there was agreement expressed among the Sub-Committee Members.

10. Discussion on meeting schedule.

Mr. Podzalne suggested that the Sub-Committee continue to meet regularly right before the Board of Fire Commissioners' meetings at 6:00 p.m. Everyone was agreeable to this. Mr. Voccio gave a reminder that the budget needs to be presented to the Board of Finance in April. It was decided to meet on March 9th at 6:00 p.m. Mr. Podzalne will provide the plan from Stonington.

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to set the next Special Meeting of the FD Paid Staff Sub-Committee for Wednesday, March 9, 2022, at 6:00 p.m. at the Clifford B. Green Meeting Center.

Second by J. Voccio. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously (7-0-0).

11. Discussion on next steps to proceed – No discussion.

12. Public Comment

David Lee, Board of Finance, stated that he concurs with Mr. Ramos regarding options. He feels that a tax abatement would be good to pursue. He asked that a sample program that he had provided get reviewed. He suggested ESL software for keeping track of any service of work program because record keeping is a challenge. He personally feels that, at some point, there needs to be consolidation to ensure no duplication of overhead. He feels that one entity is best for the Town. He suggested getting information on how Mortlake's current stipend program works.

Mr. Breen will provide the information on Mortlake's stipend program which is strictly ambulance.

13. Adjourn

Motion was made by F. Ramos to adjourn at 7:55 p.m.

Second by J. Voccio. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously (7-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary