

FD Paid Staff Sub-Committee

Special Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 1, 2022

7:00 pm via Zoom & In Person

Clifford B. Green Meeting Center

Join Zoom Meeting

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1. **Call to Order** – Austin Tanner called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. (19:02 hours).

Attendance: Austin Tanner, First Selectman; Lou Brodeur, Selectman; Felix Ramos, 16 Juniper Way; Steve Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief; Brian Pepin, in-coming East Brooklyn Fire Chief (all present in person).

Michael Podzalne was present via Zoom.

Jim Warren, current East Brooklyn Fire Chief was absent.

Also Present – Joe Voccio, Selectman (via Zoom); J.S. Perreault, Recording Secretary (in person).

Audience (in person) – Sandra Brodeur, Treasurer Mortlake; John Livernoche, Captain East Brooklyn.

2. **Public Comment** – None.
3. **Introduction of Members** – Everyone introduced themselves.
4. **Discussion on Charge of Meeting**

S. Breen explained that the Fire Commissioners had put together the Subcommittee to discuss the potential need for paid firefighters in the Town of Brooklyn. There has been a dwindling number of volunteers over the years, but the need to provide the service to the Town still continues. There has been a lot of off-the-record discussion regarding how to go about implementing this and what it is really intended to do:

- Is it to supplement the fire response?
- Is it to supplement the ambulance response?

Mr. Breen said that these discussions need to be had in a controlled form to come up with a plan to move forward so that the pieces are in place when ready to move in that direction.

Brian Pepin stated agreement with Mr. Breen.

5. Elect Chairman

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to nominate M. Podzalne for the position of Chair for the FD Paid Staff Subcommittee.

Second by F. Ramos. No discussion.

See Motion #2 for vote results.

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to close nominations.

There was no second to the motion. No discussion.

There were no other nominations.

#2 - Motion to close nominations carried unanimously (6-0-0).

#1 - Motion to elect M. Podzalne for the position of Chair for the FD Paid Staff Subcommittee #1 carried unanimously by voice vote. (6-0-0).

Mr. Podzalne took over the meeting.

6. Discussion on Meeting Schedule

There was discussion regarding budget and needing to have basic rough figures by March or April for supplemental funds.

There was discussion regarding possible dates for the next meeting of the Subcommittee.

Motion was made by F. Ramos to schedule the second meeting of the FD Paid Staff Sub-Committee for Thursday, February 24, 2022, at 7:00 p.m., at the Clifford B. Green Meeting Center.

Second by L. Brodeur. No discussion.

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

7. Report from Fire Chiefs

B. Pepin stated that he did not have anything to report at this time. Mr. Podzalne thanked Mr. Pepin for stepping up to the position of Chief (effective 2-7-2022).

S. Breen stated that there are two things that need to be considered:

- He believes that Ambulance and Fire Service need to be treated separately. The number of fire calls in a year does not even closely compare to the number of ambulance calls (approximately 1100 calls per year). He explained that he would not want to see paid fireman being using to staff the ambulance.
- He feels very strongly that, although paid staff discussion is important, we can't just look at just putting paid staff in to solve manpower issues that we have in Town. The Fire Commissioners

have been asked to explore tax-abatement incentive for the volunteers. He said that information has been presented numerous times to the Board of Fire Commissioners, but the Town currently does nothing for the volunteers. He said that there is a defunct retirement program that means nothing to the young people coming in and that is who you need to have come in. He feels that very strong consideration needs to be given as to what to do for our volunteers as well as considering paid staff.

Mr. Tanner stated agreement with Mr. Breen. Mr. Podzalne also agreed and stated that he was surprised when he found out that there wasn't anything in place. He said that incentive for volunteers is a high priority. Mr. Tanner spoke about needing to get some kind of a commitment. There was discussion regarding a reward system used by other towns:

- Percentages (monthly vs. yearly) for attendance at meetings, trainings, calls.
- Years of qualifying service. Good for incentive for new members and also for retention.

There was discussion regarding this item being kept on the agenda regarding paid staff: Stipend/Tax Abatement/Ambulance.

There was discussion regarding ambulance and Mr. Breen referred to a history entitled, *Mortlake Fire Company Manpower Needs*, dated January 2022 (included in packets to Sub-Committee Members, also included in packets was another document – Subject: Mortlake Ambulance Response, dated September 14, 2021). Mr. Breen explained that, due to the shortage of volunteers, they have had to ask the Town to supplement what it would take to staff the ambulance with paid staff and then, would return some of the revenue back to the Town. He explained that they have not had to come to the Town for money for several years, but will need to if they need to add additional paid staff. Mr. Breen explained that he feels that the way it was done before (with Vintech), is a good way to do it. Mr. Breen explained about their contract with Vintech (based on hours). Mr. Breen commented that the EMS staff in the area that work for the Town of Brooklyn, is all the same group of people that work for KB Ambulance, Putnam Ambulance, Woodstock Ambulance and, until there are more people in that pool, there is no guarantee that, if we provide the funding to staff 24/7, that we are going to have that staff.

Mr. Tanner stated that he had spoken with Chris Littke from Canterbury who had informed him that three towns in Massachusetts had formed a consortium for paid staff. They will be doing a presentation and he suggested attending to get ideas. Mr. Breen commented that regionalization is something that has to be considered and he feels that it would be interesting to hear what they have to say. He said that you have to think about what is best for the region, not just the Town, when it comes to taking care of the people.

8. Discussion on Present State of Missed Calls

There were three reports (included in packets) regarding missed calls (January 2021 thru December 2021):

- *Missed Ambulance Calls Sorted by Reason and Date*
- *Missed Ambulance Calls 2021 Sorted by Date and Time*
- *Missed Ambulance Calls Sorted by Shift and Date*

The Members reviewed the above and there was discussion. Mr. Breen stated that he does not think that you would find a fire call or an auto accident that wasn't answered by one of the two Departments in Town. Mr. Brodeur and Mr. Breen explained about ambulance missed calls and how mutual aid works.

Most missed calls are during the overnight hours. Discussion continued regarding the reports. Mr. Brodeur stated that he will forward the packet information to Mr. Podzalne.

9. Discussion on Present Staffing

Mr. Podzalne commented that some important things to know on this subject would be: turnout time vs, time-of-day; and the number of members who are getting out. He said that, without those numbers, we can't really judge how big of a need there is going forward. He asked that the following numbers for the last year be available for the next meeting:

- Monday thru Friday during the day;
- Monday thru Friday evening time;
- Monday thru Friday at night;
- vs.
- Weekends.
- When are the calls taking longer to get out for?
- What calls are we getting less people to come out for?

Mr. Brodeur suggested also having the following information available:

- What would be the difference going for 18 hours vs. what we are doing now or for a full 24/7. Mr. Breen stated that, basic numbers, it would cost \$235,000 to staff 12 hours a day, 7 days per week, so it would be double for 24/7, plus a percentage. So, Mr. Breen stated that, to go from 18 hours to 24 hours, the Town would need to supplement approximately \$235,000. Currently, the Town does not contribute any funding to the ambulance operations.

There was discussion regarding how the lower number of overnight calls doesn't offset the expenses of staffing the ambulance. Daytime is a bigger problem with fire response.

10. Discussion on Next Steps to Proceed

Mr. Podzalne asked if there is anything else that would be needed for the next meeting (February 24th). Mr. Tanner commented that, regarding firefighters, if we have to go with paid staff, we need to look at the two Departments combining at some level. Mr. Breen stated that with any kind of paid fire staff, however it works out, it has to be resourced for both parties – it can't be one without the other. He said it can be made to work. Mr. Tanner agreed and he said that, while we have the Sub-Committee, we should try to look into everything longer term.

Mr. Voccio commented that a third task could be looking at the possibility of merging the Departments and how that might work mechanically. Mr. Tanner stated that there are a lot of possibilities. Mr. Ramos explained that he'd rather see shared resources than a merge. Mr. Brodeur stated that you can't put one paid person in each Department and function as a team. Mr. Pepin explained about the situation between Ledyard and Gales Ferry where the five paid staff are town employees. Discussion continued.

11. Public Comment

Sandy Brodeur asked Mr. Pepin if the Town of Ledyard had to do something to incentivize the volunteers when the five paid staff were implemented. Mr. Pepin explained that during the day the volunteers know that a call will be handled, but if there are multiple calls at one time, there are a few people that will

respond because they know that the paid staff are busy with the first call. Those people who respond get a stipend from the Town. The Town gives the Department a stipend and then the Department manages the money and gives out the stipend to the volunteers. He explained that the relationship between the paid staff and the volunteers is excellent. Mr. Breen spoke about how Mortlake saw a drop in volunteers when they first implemented paid staff and that it took three or four years to repair, during which time they implemented an incentive program.

Mr. Voccio stated what he thinks, from the Chiefs' perspective, to be the order of priorities discussed:

- #1 – Developing a tax abatement or stipend program for all fire volunteers.
- #2 – Addressing the ambulance service.
- #3 – If there is need to consolidate the units.

Mr. Podzalne explained that he thinks that we are on the same page. There was discussion regarding an incentive program to recruit more volunteers which would be separate from retirement. Mr. Pepin will get incentive information from Ledyard.

Sandy Brodeur voiced concern that a tax abatement would not be an incentive for younger people. Mr. Ramos suggested offering them a choice, tax abatement or stipend. Discussion continued regarding how to get younger people into the Departments.

Mr. Pepin commented that we actually are combining resources because for the majority of EMS calls, Mortlake and East Brooklyn are working together (dual response calls).

12. Adjourn

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to adjourn at 7:59 p.m.

Second by A. Tanner. No discussion.

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

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary