

FD Paid Staff Sub-Committee
Special Meeting
Wednesday, March 9, 2022
6:00 pm via Zoom & In Person
Clifford B. Green Meeting Center
Suite 24, 69 South Main Street, Brooklyn CT

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86183485428?pwd=TnNWMY9RdWIGZVFZZzJTGpwNUptQT09>

Meeting ID: 861 8348 5428

Passcode: 436917

One tap mobile

+13017158592,,86183485428# US (Washington DC)

+13126266799,,86183485428# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 720 707 2699 US (Denver)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

Meeting ID: 861 8348 5428

Find your local number: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86183485428>

MINUTES

1. **Call to Order** – Michael Podzaline, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. (18:03 hours).

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

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

Audience (in person) – David Lee, Board of Finance.

Via Zoom – None.

2. **Approve Minutes**
 - a. **Special Meeting of February 24, 2022**

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of February 24, 2022

Second by J. Voccio. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously (6-0-0).

3. **Public Comment** – None.

4. **Report from Fire Chiefs**

Chief Breen reported:

- He reviewed a 3-page report of the breakdown of calls and responses over the last 180 days to give an idea of how many responders they had (he distributed copies to Sub-Committee Members at this meeting).
 - They were paged to 694 incidents (including all ambulance responses): 13 percent fire; 87 percent EMS.
 - 12 Structure Fires; 1 Leak; 4 Chemical Release; 7 Trees & Wires Down; 1 Service Call; 15 Public Service Assistance; 16 Dispatched and Cancelled En-Route; 21 False-Alarm Calls.
- They average three trainings per month: 2 Fire; EMS. Typically, they also have one monthly meeting, one Officer's meeting and one Director's meeting.

Chief Pepin reported:

- He reviewed his 3-page report (dated March 8, 2022) which covered the period of 3/1/2021 through 3/1/2022 showing the breakdown of incident types and number of responders for certain types of incidents (he distributed copies to Sub-Committee Members at this meeting).
- Almost 70 percent of calls were EMS.
- He explained that he has found that they are short during the day and missed calls depend on who is off and who is at work. Some people are able to leave work if it is a fire or serious accident.

5. Discussion & possible action on development of a volunteer compensation program

Mr. Podzaline stated that he had forwarded his draft to everyone and asked if the Chiefs had an opportunity to discuss it with their Members.

- Chief Breen explained that he had spoken about it with the Officers and the Board of Directors and got nothing but positive feedback for trying to put a program together. He said that there are a lot of details to be worked out.

Mr. Podzaline stated that he feels that the biggest hurdle will be accountability (the same for both Departments). There was discussion about using "I Am Responding" as a portion of the accountability.

- Chief Pepin explained that he had spoken with the Board of Directors, the Officers and some of the Members and he also received positive feedback. He explained what East Brooklyn does for their roster (everyone has to go back to the Fire House).

Discussion continued regarding accountability. Mr. Podzaline suggested that the Chiefs work together to create a check-in system that works for both Departments that we'd be able to use as a Fire Commission. Chief Pepin explained that he and Chief Breen had spoken about accountability, to be on the same page. Chief Pepin had reached out to ESO, which is the software that Mortlake uses. He explained that right now, they have an update from Fire House to ESO, but they are working on the update from Emergency Reporting to ESO. The timeline may be a year. Chief Pepin is going to ask them if we can get the system in place and start from ground zero with it, and then when the update comes, if they can upload all of that information after the fact. Discussion continued.

Mr. Podzaline suggested, in the interest of time, a two-fold check system where each Department would have a roster and when they come back from a call, they sign their name that they were at that call. Then, the Chiefs would bring the printouts to the Fire Commissioners quarterly. There was no opposition expressed. There was discussion about signing off on training. Mr. Podzaline stated that this will be discussed at the Commissioners level.

Mr. Podzaline said that there is still talk about a tax abatement program, but his opinion is one or the other, you can't have both. Mr. Tanner agreed. There was discussion. They used 15 percent in the past and you can use the same checks and balances. Mr. Voccio explained that it may need to

be one or the other (not both) until it is figured out what the average payout is under the program. It needs to be given more thought. Mr. Voccio explained that accountability, simplicity and the amount are what is needed. A 1099 may be associated with the abatement.

Discussion continued. Mr. Voccio explained that for it to be implemented, they would need a proposal for a number and the framework of the system. Mr. Brodeur suggested doing it in increments over three years (depending on how much). Ms. Podzalne explained that North Stonington did \$1,000 per week. Mr. Voccio questioned whether funding for the program would be eligible through ARPA. Mr. Tanner thinks that it might, to get it started. Discussion continued regarding COVID mitigation funds.

6. Discussion on ambulance service.

Chief Breen explained that the ambulance is doing okay, number not available for February, but similar to where they were in January. Four or five missed calls, most of which were second crew calls. Two were missed first crew calls. Strides of improvement over last late summer/early fall. He has one new person taking EMT classes. He spoke of the serious shortage of EMT's.

7. Discussion on long-term paid staffing strategies fire & ambulance

Chief Breen explained that his Manager wants to hire three people to add to the staff to have coverage in case somebody calls out/takes vacation time. He hired one person, but applications aren't coming in. Chief Pepin commented that it is going to boil down to competitiveness. Chief Breen will be meeting on Monday with the Regional Manager for VinTech to discuss pay and how competitive we are in the area because he wants to have that tool to be able to attract people to come in. Right now, we are at the same pay level as KB. Discussion continued. Mr. Brodeur commented that some agencies are adding benefits (like insurance) to their hourly wage.

8. Discussion on next steps to proceed

To have more discussion and recommendation for the compensation program.

9. Next meeting April 13, 2022 (6:00 p.m.)

Mr. Podzalne suggested that the Sub-Committee may not need to meet every month, at least bi-monthly, starting in May. There was agreement expressed among the Members.

10. Public Comment

David Lee, Board of Finance, provided copies to Members of a sample draft ordinance, based on documents from the State of Connecticut, for a tax abatement program to be discussed at the Board of Fire Commissioners meeting. He explained that it is not a line item in the Budget. He does not feel that it is an either/or option. He feels that you need to have multiple things available to people because you will end up disenfranchising some people. Mr. Voccio agreed and feels that this may open up a larger discussion about abatements and exemptions. The State Statute allows up to a cap of \$2,000 for tax abatement for volunteer firefighters and volunteer first responders. It can be applied to property and vehicles. Mr. Podzalne commented that we are not under a time crunch budget-wise, just a recommendation of an ordinance to the Selectmen.

11. Adjourn

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to adjourn at 6:47 p.m.

Second by J. Voccio. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously (6-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary