

FD Paid Staff Sub-Committee
Special Meeting
Wednesday, April 13, 2022
6:00 pm via Zoom & In Person
Clifford B. Green Meeting Center
Suite 24, 69 South Main Street, Brooklyn CT

To join this meeting, follow the below instructions:

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MINUTES

1. **Call to Order** – Michael Podzalne, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m. (18:10 hours).

Attendance: Michael Podzalne, Chairman; Austin Tanner, First Selectman; Lou Brodeur, Selectman; Steve Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief; Brian Pepin, East Brooklyn Fire Chief (all present in person). Joe Voccio, Selectman (via Zoom and then arrived in person at 6:15 p.m.). Felix Ramos was absent with notice.

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

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

Via Zoom – John DonFrancis.

2. **Approve Minutes**
 - a. **Special Meeting of March 9, 2022**

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of March 9, 2022, as presented. Second by A. Tanner. No discussion.
Motion carried unanimously (6-0-0).

3. **Public Comment** – None.

4. **Report from Fire Chiefs**

Chief Breen reported:

- He has not concentrated on the tax abatement or compensation programs over the past month due to other priorities. He said that it has been discussed at the office level at a meeting and they were very receptive to the idea. He is looking forward to getting more information regarding membership.

Chief Pepin reported:

- They talk about the tax abatement and compensation programs often. There is concern regarding percentages. He explained that some people are not certified and that he is requiring that everyone has to get certified in at least one thing to have something to offer. He explained that they have three levels: Fire Police; Fire Support (uncertified outside support people); Interior Firefighters. Discussion ensued. Different levels of tax abatement was suggested. Chief Breen explained about Pomfret's program which also involves seniority. Chief Pepin stressed, and all agreed, that everyone is valuable.

5. Discussion & possible action on volunteer tax abatement program

Mr. Podzalne asked if Chief Pepin's requirement for certification in at least one area should be part of the criteria for eligibility for the tax abatement program. He read the following from page 1 of the draft document:

(f) **ELIGIBILITY:** The Board of Fire Commissioners shall determine the criteria for certification of eligibility for members of the Mortlake Fire Company, Inc. and East Brooklyn Fire Department, or their successors, individually or collectively, which criteria shall not be less stringent than the criteria for attendance at emergency responses, training and drills for yearly eligibility for the Tax Abatement program.

Chief Breen explained that Mortlake's membership qualification is strictly based on training attendance. He suggested doing it by percentage and increase the opportunity. He explained that qualification for the retirement program, from the past, was based on a combination of making 15 percent of the calls per month for nine months out of the year, one training per month, and a certain number of meetings throughout the year. He said that it would be easy to use that for qualifications for the tax abatement. Discussion ensued. Mr. Brodeur suggested giving the uncertified people more training (e.g. how to dress a hydrant, how to help with hose) because those people are beneficial on the fire ground. There was discussion regarding certified people vs. uncertified people and the amount of sweat work/training required of the certified people. There was agreement between the two Chiefs that you need to have something to drive people to get qualification and that there should be a value placed on non-certified support people.

Chief Breen suggested looking at the entire scope for Fire and EMS (i.e. R-1 calls) and have three different levels of award: Certified Firefighter EMT's; Firefighter only/EMT only; and Firefighter Support Staff. He feels this would drive people to push up furtherer into the award program. He feels that both Departments need to be on the same page as far as qualification criteria. Mr. Podzalne feels this is worth looking into and he asked Mr. Tanner what the Town would feel to be the next step. Mr. Tanner explained that an Ordinance would need to go to Town meeting and also, what the total impact would be.

There was discussion regarding that this would be a retention tool as well as a recruitment tool. Chief Breen and Mr. Brodeur commented that the retirement program had made a difference in responses and attendance at training.

Mr. Podzalne asked if something similar for the compensation program would be wanted and the two Fire Chiefs were in agreement for this. Mr. Podzalne suggested that, moving forward, look at it from the perspective of:

- 15 percent of calls per month
- Training (one per month)
- The number of people who would've qualified last year
- What would the cost have been to the Town

Mr. Podzalne also suggested breaking it down by qualification (e.g. \$1,000 – Support Staff; \$1,500 - Firefighter; Firefighter/EMT - \$2,000).

6. Discussion & possible action on volunteer compensation program

Mr. Podzalne stated that he had asked that the two Departments get on the same page regarding credit for calls, trainings, etc. The two Departments now have the same application form.

Chief Pepin stated that East Brooklyn's sign-in procedure is working out well. He has also spoken with the ESO Representative to get pricing. Their current subscription for emergency reporting expires in August.

Mr. Podzalne would like to get the tax abatement and compensation programs into action as soon as possible and stated that he will re-draft it for review next month.

There was discussion regarding cost for tax abatement (which would fluctuate year-to-year) and the compensation (which would be a set amount at \$52,000). Mr. Voccio suggested the possibility of the tax abatement being transferrable (which would add more complexity). Mr. Voccio stated that he would be in favor of making the two amounts as close as possible because he feels that is the only way it is going to be workable. Discussion continued. Mr. Voccio stated that if there is a lot of participation, he would not want the \$52,000 fund to get depleted and he would want to be prepared to put more money into the annual fund. Discussion continued. Mr. Voccio suggested being more transparent on the exemptions which will change the way the budget is presented.

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

Mr. Podzalne asked the Chiefs how the day time hours have been going.

Chief Pepin:

- His main responder was on vacation and there were six missed EMS calls (no response at all) in a week-and-a-half.

Chief Breen:

- Explained that there are approximately 400 EMS calls per year in Brooklyn (2/3 in Mortlake's district and 1/3 in East Brooklyn). He explained that Mortlake is in year two of a three-year contract with a staffing agency to provide 2 EMT's from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., but they are not providing at that staffing level. EMS is a major overall problem in the area and he is meeting with the staffing agency on Monday regarding this issue. There have not been any initial EMT classes over the last two years.

Mr. Podzalne asked if the Departments are automatically responding together more.

Chief Pepin explained that they recently made a change 24/7 where any type of cardiac or respiratory arrests or above, on the medical side, would be a dual company response.

Chief Breen stated that he still needs to work with his officers to be able to match up 24/7.

Mr. Podzalne stated that staffing during the daytime hours will be kept at high priority. There was discussion and the Chiefs expressed their frustration when they don't have people to respond.

8. Discussion on next steps to proceed

Mr. Podzalne suggested looking at what works for other area towns to figure out what would best fit Brooklyn (e.g. per diem staffing, full-time staffing, etc.).

9. Next meeting schedule – May 11, 2022 at 6 p.m.

10. Public Comment – None.

11. Adjourn

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to adjourn at 6:58 p.m.
Second by B.Pepin. No discussion.
Motion carried unanimously (6-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary

Proposed Ordinance Town of Brooklyn

Tax Abatement Program for Certain Emergency Services Volunteers

(a) **PREAMBLE:** The provisions of Public Act 99-272 Section 6, as amended by Public Act 19-36 are hereby adopted, and are set forth in subsections (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f).

(b) **DEFINITIONS:**

(1) "Active" shall mean certified by the Chief of the Mortlake Fire Company, Inc., the Chief of East Brooklyn Fire Department, or their successors, either individually or collectively, as to members of their respective organizations, or on or before the certification date, as eligible for tax abatement under this ordinance.

(2) "Certification Date" shall mean March 15 of the assessment year commencing October 1, 2022 and each assessment year thereafter.

(3) "Eligible Resident" shall mean each resident of the Town of Brooklyn who volunteers his or her services:

(A) as an active firefighter or emergency medical responder for the Mortlake Fire Company, Inc.,

(B) as an active firefighter or emergency medical responder for the East Brooklyn Fire Department, or

(C) as an active firefighter or emergency medical responder of their successors, individually or collectively.

(4) "Benefit" shall mean the reduction in property taxes described in subsection (c) below.

(c) **BENEFIT:** Each eligible resident shall be entitled to a \$2,000.00 reduction in property taxes otherwise due from that resident for the fiscal year next following the certification date.

(d) **LIMITATIONS:** The benefit shall be subject to the following limitations:

(1) Residents who are eligible residents under two or more among (b)(3)(A-C) shall be entitled to one benefit only.

(e) **MECHANISM:** The respective Chiefs of the Mortlake Fire Company, Inc., the East Brooklyn Fire Department, or their successors, individually or collectively, shall, on or before the certification date:

(1) submit their original notarized certifications to the Tax Collector for the Town of Brooklyn and

(2) forward a copy of their certifications to:

(a) the Board of Finance,

(b) the Office of the First Selectman

(c) the Office of the Tax Assessor,

(e) the Boards of Directors of the Mortlake Fire Company, Inc., and the East Brooklyn Fire Department, and

(f) the Board of Fire Commissioners.

(f) **ELIGIBILITY:** The Board of Fire Commissioners shall determine the criteria for certification of eligibility for members of the Mortlake Fire Company, Inc, and East Brooklyn Fire Department, or their successors, individually or collectively, which criteria shall not be less stringent than the criteria for

attendance at emergency responses, training and drills for yearly eligibility for the Tax Abatement program.

Commentary

(a) **PREAMBLE:** This subsection connects the ordinance to the enabling legislation, whose purpose is to attract new volunteers and retain existing volunteers.

(b) **DEFINITIONS:** This subsection defines terms in a way that tracks the enabling legislation.

(c) **BENEFIT:** This subsection defines the benefit in a way that tracks the enabling legislation. It limits the benefit to a reduction in property taxes, so volunteers who do not owe property taxes realize no benefit, and volunteers who owe less than \$2,000 in property taxes realize a smaller benefit.

(d) **LIMITATIONS:** This subsection prevents residents who belong to more than one of the volunteer fire department or who belong to both a volunteer fire department and volunteer ambulance from getting a double benefit. This limitation reflects the memberships' desire to avoid artificial cross-pollination for the mere purpose of obtaining a greater tax abatement rather than dual or triple membership based on genuine interest and the perception that the time volunteered by most individuals tends to be approximately the same regardless of whether the volunteers spend their time exclusively for one fire department or in combined participation in more than one organization.

An additional limitation restricting the benefit to one per married couple was considered and abandoned because of fairness concerns.

(e) **MECHANISM:** This subsection sets forth a mechanism for providing adequate notice to the Tax Collector so that he or she can make the necessary adjustments to tax bills in a timely way. It also provides a mechanism for providing similar notice to the entities like a Board of Finance, Office of the First Selectman and Office of the Tax Assessor so that these entities can adequately plan in anticipation of abatements. It ensures the validity of the notice by requiring a notarized certification of the notice provided by the respective Chiefs. Finally, it provides similar notice to entities like the Board of Fire Commissioners and the Board of Directors of the service organizations so that these entities can stay in the information loop.

(f) **ELIGIBILITY:** This subsection sets forth, as a minimum, compliance with the requirements already in place for pension plan credit, while allowing the Board of Fire Commissioners to create more stringent qualifications for the abatement should they wish to do so either now or in the future.