

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

MINUTES

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

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

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

Via Zoom – None.

3. **Approve Minutes**
 - a. **Special Meeting of May 11, 2022**

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of May 11, 2022, as presented.

Second by J. Voccio. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously (6-0-0).

4. **Public Comment** – None.

5. **Report from Fire Chiefs**

Both Chief Pepin and Chief Breen expressed concern regarding daytime response during the week (Monday through Friday). There are not enough certified members during the day. Mr. Podzalne stated that, although this is not something new, it sounds like the situation is getting worse. Chief Pepin explained that it would be good if he had three certified firefighters every day. Chief Breen explained that

even our mutual aid partners can't be counted on to show up with enough manpower because this is a problem everywhere.

There was discussion about how the lack of manpower is a safety issue. Mr. Podzalne commented that, due to the severity of this issue, the Town should interpret this as, the East Brooklyn Fire Department does not exist during the day since they do not have anybody to go interior during the day.

There was discussion regarding that there is automatic aid between the two Brooklyn Fire Departments for every fire call. Cardiac and respiratory calls are also dual Company responses.

6. Discussion & possible action on volunteer tax abatement program

There was discussion as to whether the tax abatement will help with response during the day. Mr. Podzalne doesn't feel that it will be a solution to increase participation, but it will reward the dedicated Members. Mr. Brodeur and Chief Breen commented that they feel that it will help on nights and weekends.

Mr. Tanner commented, and there was discussion, about possibly training some of the Highway Crew to help out during the daytime hours.

There was discussion regarding making the required percentage of calls responded to, in order to qualify, fair between the two Departments. It is more difficult for Mortlake to make the twenty percent (as presented) due to having ambulance/R-1 calls also. Mr. Podzalne suggested looking at the abatement:

- Specifically for fire calls;
- Specifically 20 percent of either; or
- Keep it as presented.

Mr. Podzalne explained that, as currently presented, over the last six months not one person from Mortlake would qualify. Discussion continued and different scenarios were presented. It needs to be the same for both Departments.

Mr. Voccio commented that he would be in favor of looking at all of the options to make it fair for both Departments. He asked for a timeline for getting proposals for better protocol from both Departments and for implementing the abatement program. Mr. Brodeur suggested that the Departments notify their Members that they will begin tallying all of the calls responded to/training/meetings on August 1st for a couple of months to get a rough idea of how it will work out. Discussion continued.

Mr. Podzalne explained that every East Brooklyn call is a Mortlake call as well, but not every Mortlake call is an East Brooklyn call because the ambulance is either going separately on their own or they are going mutual aid. He suggested that eliminating the ambulance only responses, or the responses out-of-district where R-1 is not toned, is as fair as it could be. This would require that the membership of East Brooklyn respond to R-1 calls. Chief Breen explained how they could change their dispatch protocols to make certain calls ambulance-only calls. Discussion continued about Priority 2 calls. There was agreement that, if waiting for a mutual aid ambulance or if an ambulance is coming from the hospital, an R-1 should respond.

The Chiefs will notify the Members that they will begin tallying in August so that numbers will be available in October. Mr. Podzalne stated that he feels that, with the adjustment discussed to the formula, the tax

abatement program, as presented, would work fine. It is within the Board of Fire Commissioners' authority to recommend that the Fire Chiefs change their response criteria.

For October, the reports should show:

- Total number of calls vs. response by Members looking at when the R-1 was needed for delay of ambulance and fire calls.

7. Discussion & possible action on volunteer compensation program – Tabled until the Tax Abatement Program is settled.

8. Discussion on long term paid staffing strategies fire & ambulance

Mr. Podzalne stated that he would like to have something ready for the next budget cycle. The following were discussed:

- Put together something to be recommended to the Town;
- Commission a Fire Study.

Mr. Voccio explained that he disagrees with waiting to next budget cycle as there is an unprecedented level of funding available (ARPA) and this is a major issue that requires solving. He feels that some type of operating fund to pay staff and hire an ambulance has to be a high priority consideration. Chief Pepin expressed agreement. He asked that information be provided as to what is needed.

Mr. Podzalne commented that he feels that a rough-draft proposal of the needs that are best for the Town could be ready for September. The Chiefs agreed. Mr. Podzalne commented about the funding being available now, but the Town would need to be willing to accept the responsibility in the future. Mr. Voccio suggested that you could call it a pilot program that will run through the 2026 budget year and decide after that whether or not it is paying dividends. Mr. Tanner expressed agreement.

9. Discussion on Next Steps to Proceed – As discussed above.

10. Next meeting schedule.

Next meeting to be held September 14, 2022, 6:00 p.m.

11. Public Comment

David Lee commented regarding changing response protocol. He said that a licensed R-1 responder is mandated to respond to those calls. There could be issues with requirements of the State. Mr. Podzalne explained that this will be worked out by the Fire Chiefs.

12. Adjourn

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to adjourn at 6:59 p.m. (18:59 hours).

Second by B. Pepin. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously (6-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary