

FD Paid Staff Sub-Committee
Special Meeting
Wednesday, October 12, 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:

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89641764304?](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89641764304?pwd=NE05NUtQU0pHYlkwQ2hKaVlmM0o0dz09)

[pwd=NE05NUtQU0pHYlkwQ2hKaVlmM0o0dz09](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89641764304?pwd=NE05NUtQU0pHYlkwQ2hKaVlmM0o0dz09)

Meeting ID: 896 4176 4304

Passcode: 111070

One tap mobile

+16465588656,,89641764304# US (New York)

+13017158592,,89641764304# US (Washington DC)

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: 896 4176 4304

Find your local number:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89641764304?pwd=NE05NUtQU0pHYlkwQ2hKaVlmM0o0dz09>

MINUTES

1. **Call to Order** – Michael Podzaline, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. (18:02 hours).
2. **Attendance:** Michael Podzaline, Chairman; Austin Tanner, First Selectman; Joe Voccio, Selectman; Steve Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief; Brian Pepin, East Brooklyn Fire Chief (all present in person).
Lou Brodeur, Selectman arrived, in person, at 6:34 p.m.
Felix Ramos was absent.

Also Present: J.S. Perreault, Recording Secretary (via Zoom).

Audience (in person) – Leo Berube; David Lee, Board of Finance. There were two additional people present in the audience.

Via Zoom – Jenn Nemeth; Sandy Brodeur; Spiro & Christa Haveles (approx. 6:45 p.m.).

3. **Approve Minutes**
 - a. **Special Meeting of July 13, 2022**

Motion was made by S. Breen to approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of July 13, 2022, as presented.

Second by J. Voccio. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (5-0-0). L. Brodeur was not present.

4. **Public Comment** – None.

5. **Discussion on volunteer tax abatement program**

There was discussion regarding the proposed draft language which had been attached to the agenda for this meeting to Sub-Committee Members, to the agenda for the Board of Fire Commissioners' meeting to

follow this meeting, and was also posted on the website. Mr. Podzalne had additional copies available for those who wanted them.

Mr. Podzalne stated that the draft language is as previously discussed.

The Chiefs had been tasked with implementing changes in their response procedures:

- Chief Breen:
 - He explained that he had breakdown numbers for the month of August: 1) He highlighted anything over 15 percent; 2) For total call volume (R1 and Fire together) there was only one member that would have been over the 15 percent; 3) If breaking it down for 15 percent of either R1 or Fire, there was a total of five that would qualify. He does not expect that it will change significantly for the month of September. He explained that he does not see that 20 percent (or even 15 percent) would really be effective for Mortlake.

There was discussion regarding the 20 percent. Mr. Podzalne stated that 20 percent was to be in-line with the volunteer pension. Chief Breen commented that when they did the volunteer pension program was at 15 percent, so that is why he used 15 percent for his breakdown. Mr. Podzalne commented that, hopefully, it would incentivize the ones that are close. Mr. Podzalne and Chief Breen were in agreement not to lower the criteria any lower than what is in the pension program.

- Chief Pepin:
 - Although he did not have a breakdown, when reviewing his printouts for the two months, he explained that out of East Brooklyn's Membership, at least five would have met 20 percent and seven would meet 15 percent. He will have a printout for the next meeting.

For the record, Mr. Podzalne explained that he feels that it is fair for the Town to ask for the 20 percent. Chief Pepin expressed agreement. There was discussion. Mr. Podzalne recommended that the proposal be moved forward to the Board of Selectmen to see what their recommendation would be.

Chief Pepin asked for clarification that it is to be just strictly calls and that meetings and training were not to be added in. Mr. Podzalne explained that is correct. Mr. Tanner suggested waiting to see Chief Pepin's breakdown before sending the proposal to the Board of Selectmen. Chief Pepin left the room as he offered to get his laptop to retrieve the information for the Sub-Committee.

Leo Berube, from the audience, commented that people may think that 20 percent of the call volume is too high, so they may just say forget it because they don't feel that they will be able to meet it. He feels that they may put in the extra effort to make the 15 percent. Discussion ensued.

A woman, seated in the audience, suggested that it be looked at it for the whole year vs. monthly.

A man, seated in the audience, commented regarding the difficulty in finding volunteers in Town for the fire departments, even if you were to offer them \$2,000 up front. He suggested reducing to 10 percent. Discussion continued.

This man, from the audience, also asked about the difference in the benefit for EMS vs. Interior as 90 percent of his calls are EMS/Medical and he explained that he feels that it

outweighs the risk. Mr. Podzalne explained that it is due to qualifications/training. Discussion continued. Chief Breen explained that he doesn't feel that it is fair to those that are strictly fire responders, so he suggested that the type of calls that an individual will respond to should be looked at. Discussion continued.

There was agreement for the following changes to the proposed language:

- Item (c) **BENEFIT** (1) to read as follows: "Each eligible resident who is providing a service to the town at the level of "interior firefighter or EMT" defined by their respective department's rules and regulations 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."
- Item (f) **ELIGIBILITY** (1) to read as follows: "To meet the eligibility qualifications, a member of the East Brooklyn Fire Department or Mortlake Fire Company, Inc. must maintain a minimum of twenty percent (20%) participation per month of either all EMS or all fire calls."

Discussion continued. Chief Pepin stated that he would provide the breakdown information. Chief Breen stated that he does not disagree with keeping with the 20 percent.

Motion was made by B. Pepin to move the **Proposed Ordinance Town of Brooklyn Tax Abatement Program for Certain Emergency Services Volunteers**, with the following amendments, as discussed, to the Board of Fire Commissioners:

- Item (c) **BENEFIT** (1) to read as follows: "Each eligible resident who is providing a service to the town at the level of "interior firefighter or EMT" defined by their respective department's rules and regulations 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."
- Item (f) **ELIGIBILITY** (1) to read as follows: "To meet the eligibility qualifications, a member of the East Brooklyn Fire Department or Mortlake Fire Company, Inc. must maintain a minimum of twenty percent (20%) participation per month of either all EMS or all fire calls."

Second by J. Voccio.

There was discussion and it was agreed upon to add EMR to Item (c) **BENEFIT** (2).

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (5-0-0). L. Brodeur was not present.

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

Mr. Podzalne explained that he and the Fire Chiefs had discussed what would be best for the Town and their recommendation is that the Town would benefit from three paid positions, Monday through Friday (similar to Salem's 50 hour work week). Salem's structure is similar to Brooklyn (two fire departments, one with ambulance).

L. Brodeur arrived at 6:34 p.m.

There was discussion regarding per diem vs. full-time Town employees. S. Breen explained that he had met with Vin-Tech on Monday regarding Mortlake's paid ambulance staff (contract) and he said that it would be a benefit for Mortlake to have staff with a combination of both fire and EMS qualifications. However, he explained that Mortlake's rate of \$19/hr. vs. Vin-Tech's rate of \$30/hr. He raised the question, "Is the overhead through the Town less than the overhead through the Staffing Agency?" He said that it is \$87,000 for the coverage that they presently have through Vin-Tech. Mr. Voccio explained that the idea was to use the ARPA funding to craft a program. This will not be a popular expense for

future Town budgets, but if there is some benefit to it, this would be a way to prove whether it would be a viable option. Discussion continued regarding the opportunity to possibility use the funding available for this proposal.

7. Discussion on Next Steps to Proceed – See Above.

8. Next meeting schedule.

November 9, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.

9. Public Comment

David Lee commented that there is a Certificate Federal Grant Program for the purpose of hiring fire fighters that would address this issue. He said that there are other options besides ARPA.

Mr. Voccio said that the Town could look into it.

10. Adjourn

Motion was made by J. Voccio to adjourn at 6:55 p.m. (18:55 hours).

Second by L. Brodeur. No discussion.

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

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary

Attachment: Proposed Ordinance Town of Brooklyn Tax Abatement Program for Certain Emergency Services Volunteers

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, 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 their 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.
- 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:** (1) Each eligible resident who is providing a service to the town at the level of "interior firefighter" defined by their respective department's rules and regulations 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.

(2) Each eligible resident who is providing a service to the town at any level other than "interior firefighter" defined by their respective department's rules and regulations shall be entitled to a \$1,000.00 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 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,
 - d. The Boards of Directors of the Mortlake Fire Company, Inc., the East Brooklyn Fire Department,
 - e. 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.

(1) To meet the eligibility qualifications, a member of the East Brooklyn Fire Department or Mortlake Fire Company, Inc. must maintain a minimum of twenty percent (20%) participation per month of all emergency calls.

(2) Any member of the East Brooklyn Fire Department or Mortlake Fire Company, Inc., who cannot perform their duties and fails to meet the eligibility criteria due to a department-related injury shall have their percentage of attendance adjusted for the time lost.

(3) The Board of Fire Commissioners can create more stringent qualifications for the abatement should they wish to do so in the future.

Commentary

(a) **PREAMBLE:** This subsection connects the ordinance to the enabling legislation, which aims to attract new volunteers and retain existing ones.

(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. Hence, 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 departments 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 more significant 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 they can promptly make the necessary adjustments to tax bills. It also provides a tool for giving 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 information provided by the respective Chiefs. Finally, it offers 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. It also sets forth language in which the Board of Fire Commissioners can amend eligibility criteria in the future.