

**Board of Fire Commissioners
Regular Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 9, 2019
7:30 pm Mortlake Fire Department**

1. Call to Order - Acting Chair, Jeff Otto called the meeting to order at 7:33p.m. (19:33 hours).

Attendance: Jeff Otto; Lou Brodeur; Patrick Gauthier; Felix Ramos; James Soler.
Rick Ives arrived at 7:45 p.m.

Others Present – Sandra Brodeur: Jim Warren, East Brooklyn Fire Chief; S. Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief.

**2. Approve Minutes of
a. Regular Meeting of December 12, 2018**

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to accept the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 12, 2018, as presented. Second by P. Gauthier. Motion carried unanimously (5-0-0).

3. Public Comment – None.

4. Equipment Discussion

P. Gauthier asked that MortLake let him know what the price was for updating the de-fib because he would like East Brooklyn to be included in the package deal. S. Breen stated that it would be in 2020 and they are approximately \$3,000 each.

**5. Department Discussion
a. Recruitment**

S. Breen reported that Mortlake has had a slow, steady stream of applicants (about one per month). Some stay and some don't. J. Warren reported that it is similar at East Brooklyn.

There was discussion regarding the average age of volunteers which varies.

Neither Department has any particular plans for recruitment at this time.

b. Retention

S. Breen reported that they are neither coming in nor leaving in droves. P. Gauthier spoke of how the rents are so much higher than on the other side of the River and he mentioned that it would help out if there were a rent assistance program. Tax abatement programs had been

discussed, but there has been no follow-up. There was discussion. J. Otto will ask R. Ives to investigate tax abatements as the cost would have to be covered by his budget.

c. Paid Staff – It was decided to skip this item and come back to it to when R. Ives arrives.

Mr. Ives arrived at 7:45 p.m.

Mr. Otto reported that the last time this subject was discussed, the question had been raised as to whether the Town could employ people to replace the labor contractor's employees (ambulance drivers) and save the mark-up that the labor contractor obtains on their wages. During that discussion, S. Breen had also asked if it would be possible to employ three people rather than two and have them be qualified to drive fire trucks so that they could get the trucks out to the scenes of incidents and to do Station maintenance and testing of equipment and other things that are chores for the existing volunteers. Everyone had been in agreement to look into this idea. Discussion ensued and there was agreement that there would not be time to do it in the coming budget. There are too many questions that need to be answered/researched.

Mr. Otto asked if we should be looking for the Town to employ ambulance attendants beginning July 1, 2019. S. Breen stated that he would like to work toward that, but he sees no need as the ambulance sustains itself in-house. Mr. Breen disagrees with the ambulance money (used for labor) being given to the Town and then the Town making up the difference for the third person. Discussion ensued. Mr. Otto pointed out that if the Departments hire the employees themselves, they cannot be a member of the Department in any capacity. Mr. Breen explained that it is his understanding, after speaking with the labor attorney, that, as long as the person is compensated for the time that he/she works as an employee and as a volunteer to meet the minimum wage standard, then there is not an issue with crossing that line. He said that if they exceed 40 hours per week, they have to be paid overtime rate. Mr. Otto does not agree with this interpretation and suggested getting a legal opinion (he referred to the information from the Town of Scotland that had been provided previously). Discussion continued. Mr. Otto, again, referred to the Scotland model which requires (to satisfy the federal part) that they be paid by a different party other than the employer which would be the reason for getting the Town involved. He stated that if Mortlake wants to employ their ambulance attendants directly, they may do so if those people are not members of the Mortlake Fire Department. He said that any different combinations may require closer scrutiny. Mr. Otto explained that, if Mortlake wants to save money by eliminating the labor contractor, there is nothing that prevents them from doing that, except that they cannot employ members of the Fire Department and there is no reason for the Town to be involved with that.

There was discussion regarding that Scotland is doing more mutual aid calls now.

There was discussion regarding raises/pension.

Mr. Ives explained that this discussion is due to not being able to handle all of the calls in an efficient way. He stressed the importance of having a system in place to be ready and he asked for a commitment to have it on the table for next July. Mr. Otto suggested that, since nobody is anxious to begin employing people by the Town, if the Departments are able to continue with

volunteers, then that's what they should do. Mr. Breen explained how they need people during the daytime hours and that mutual aid companies automatically come to any type of fire call (not because they need more trucks, but because they need more manpower). He guessed that this occurred (during the daytime) approximately 20 times in the last year. He said it seemed to work and that adjustments can continue to be made so that they can continue to work as volunteers as long as possible. He feels that putting paid staff in place will change the dynamic of the fire service in Town. There was discussion regarding supervision. Discussion continued.

Mr. Otto stated that he feels that everyone agrees that the longer we can make the 100 percent volunteer work, the better the Town will be. He explained that the law requires that the First Selectman to provide adequate public safety for the Town and he has to be sensitive to whether the independent volunteer fire departments are actually providing acceptable levels of public safety. He suggested that this be discussed further to see if there is agreement that the levels of public safety are adequate.

Mr. Ives mentioned that it is not 100 percent volunteer now because stipends are being paid.

Mr. Otto suggested that the Fire Chiefs report as to whether they are adequately staffed and whether there is a labor problem that needs to be acted on (which will take a significant amount of study and planning).

1. Time of day of calls. – See above under Paid Staff.

Mr. Otto provided copies of an analysis of Time of Day Response for 2018 for both Departments. There was discussion.

There was discussion regarding when Mortlake began responding to medical calls (1980's).

6. Financial Reports Discussion

J. Otto reported that no reports are due to be submitted this month and that no questions had been raised by the Board of Finance. P. Gauthier stated that he had e-mailed East Brooklyn's Report earlier in the day.

a. Budget Discussion

As discussed last month: Drafts due in February; Preliminaries due in March; Finals due in April.

7. Other Business

Rescue 192 is gone.

8. Public Comment

Sandra Brodeur feels that, when paid staff is added, the stipend program would need to be added to the fire departments, as it was with the ambulance, to get the volunteers to answer calls. She urged that it is important that the Departments work to get a program for paid staff in place before it is needed so they will be ready when the time comes. She said that since the stipend was implemented, there are people fighting for shifts (to be on-call overnight) for the first time ever.

F. Ramos suggested that someone from Scotland be asked to attend a meeting for a Q&A session. Danny Simos, First Selectman of Scotland, will be asked to attend a meeting.

9. Next Meeting – February 13, 2019, at East Brooklyn Fire Department.

10. Adjourn

Motion was made by L. Brodeur to adjourn at 8:26 p.m. Second by R. Ives. Motion carried unanimously (6-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary