

**Board of Fire Commissioners**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**Wednesday, January 11, 2023**  
**7:00 pm via Zoom &**  
**Clifford B. Green Meeting Center**  
**Suite 24, 69 South Main Street, Brooklyn, CT**

To join this meeting, follow the below instructions:

**Join Zoom Meeting**

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**MINUTES**

1. **Call to Order** – Michael Podzaline, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. (19:00 hours).
2. **Attendance:** Michael Podzaline; Austin Tanner, First Selectman, Leo Berube; David Costa; R. David Lee, Board of Finance Liaison; (all present in person).  
James Solar was absent with notice.

**Others Present (in person)** – S. Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief; B. Pepin, East Brooklyn Fire Chief; J.S. Perreault, Recording Secretary.

There were seven additional people present in the audience.

**Present via Zoom** – Lou Brodeur, Selectman; Jenn Nemeth; Nemeth; Carrie Juhasz Horton.

**3. Approve Minutes**

**a. Special Meeting of December 14th, 2022**

Motion was made by D. Lee to accept the Minutes of the Special Meeting of December 7, 2022, as posted.

Second by L. Berube. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (5-0-0).

**4. Public Comment**

Motion was made by D. Lee to limit public comment to two minutes per person.

Second by L. Berube. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (5-0-0).

There were no comments from the public either in person or via Zoom.

## 5. Equipment Discussion

### Chief Breen:

- New ET-190 is in service. There are still discussions among Members as to whether they are satisfied with it. There are still a few punch-list items. Overall, they are really happy with it. L. Berube stated that it doesn't meet specifications.

Chief Berube explained that there are 104 pages of various specifications and there are some superficial things, like chrome vs black, nothing to do with the function of the truck. He said that some people may have misunderstood what the spec reads specifically and some decisions were made along the way having to do with supply availability.

The truck went on its first official structure fire in December and everything went well.

For the Record, Mr. Podzaline asked about inter-department driver qualifications.

Chief Breen explained that there were about six that were initially trained and that they will get everyone else caught up.

### Chief Pepin:

- East Brooklyn is still waiting on their natural gas meter to be delivered.
- Last week he filled out a grant application through Eversource for Seek Personal Thermal Imagers.

Mr. Lee asked if this is an attachment for the SCBA's for which there is an ARPA request.

Chief Pepin stated that it is not.

#### a. Grant requests (AFG enrollment period)

Mr. Podzaline spoke of an e-mail that Mr. Tanner had received from NECCOG which included information for a grant (AFG grant information attached). The grant period closes in February 10<sup>th</sup>. He asked about Department needs.

Chief Breen stated that they will be having their first Officers meeting (of the year) next week and he will discuss this with the Officers to get a consensus.

Mr. Lee explained that a lot of documentation is required for those programs. He feels it would be good to take advantage of this.

Mr. Lee asked if the Chiefs were applying for any other grants other than the Eversource one mentioned by Chief Pepin earlier. He asked Chief Breen about Safe Heart.

Chief Breen explained that a couple of Members have volunteered to keep that program moving forward. He plans to meet with them to create a punch-list. He expects to be where they need to be with the program within two or three months.

Chief Breen stated that they received a grant for two new iPads from F.M. Global. They won't be eligible again for two years.

Chief Breen explained that CT Water and Walmart have grants available as well as private organizations that will be opening in February/March. He does not know what they would be applying for because he does not know what they would specifically be funding.

Chief Pepin stated that the Walmart grant would go toward PPE/medical. He said that he hasn't had an opportunity to look on the Fire Prevention Commission Control website to see what's out there. He will report anything worthwhile at the next meeting of the BoFC.

For the Record, Mr. Podzaline and Mr. Lee offered to help with grants, if needed.

## 6. Department Discussion

### Chief Pepin:

- Chief Pepin explained changes in Officers at East Brooklyn: The former Deputy Chief stepped down and is now the Safety Officer; David Costa has been promoted to Deputy Chief (as requested by the former Deputy Chief). He is excited that they have a few new Members as they topped out at 630 calls in 2022 (which they have never done before). He submitted his Call Reports - one Emergency and one ESO (attached).

The Safety Officer is a resource that both Departments will be utilizing. There was discussion regarding the qualifications/training of the Safety Officer: Firefighter II with 40+ years of experience going up through the ranks (Chief, Deputy Chief, Captain, Lieutenant). Mr. Lee asked if there is a plan to get that level of certification for Fire Safety Officer. Chief Pepin stated that it is a possibility.

At this time, for the Record, Chief Pepin read aloud a statement that he had prepared and read before the East Brooklyn Fire Department Membership at their monthly meeting last Monday (attached).

### Chief Breen:

- Mortlake held their annual elections at their meeting last Monday. All Officers remained in the same positions, except for two Lieutenants who changed positions with each other. They also added a third Lieutenant as that position had been vacant throughout most of 2022.
- He provided a Reports of the Summary of Call Totals for 2022 (3 attachments) and he reviewed the total calls: 1,532 total service calls of which 1,234 were ambulance calls. He stated agreement with Chief Pepin's earlier statement and said that Mortlake, also, has never run that many calls before. He also stated agreement with Chief Pepin that the addition of having dual responses with East Brooklyn and being Townwide resources has made a phenomenal difference. He said that one way or another, they don't miss a call and that the Membership, as a whole, is making this happen. Chief Pepin agreed. Mr. Podzalne commended the Members for their efforts.

There was discussion. Chief Breen explained that there may be an increase seen again next year for dual response due to only being in effect for six months in 2022. They will be adding cardiac arrest to dual response.

Mr. Lee asked how many of the 784 medical calls had both an ambulance and an R1 response. Chief Breen guessed that 10-15 percent had some type of R1 response. He explained that later on in the year, they changed their R1 dispatch protocols so that their first responders were only responding to the priority one calls, which does not include priority one calls to Pierce Baptist/Creamery Brook. Mr. Podzalne noted that there was a modification to eliminate unnecessary dual responses. Chief Breen stated that, at some point, he will do a breakdown of responses to the Facilities which is a large volume of calls.

Chief Pepin noted a correction: The Safety Officer is certified.

**a. Recruitment** – No Discussion.

**b. Retention** – No Discussion.

### **c. Training**

Mr. Podzaline asked if the Departments have annual training schedules.

Chief Breen explained that they lay out a tentative schedule of training for the year and adjust it as things come up. Last year, they trained three Mondays per month: fire and medical training the first two Mondays individually; and on the last Monday of the month, the two Departments trained together (sometimes twice per month). He anticipates that the two groups of Officers will meet together soon and will come up with a training schedule.

There is a Firefighter I class coming up in South Killingly which two or more Members of Mortlake will be attending.

Mr. Lee asked if there is incentive to get people to the next level. There is a Firefighter II class starting this winter.

Chief Breen stated that there have been conversations with the four who have completed Firefighter I and they are interested. It is a matter of scheduling.

Mr. Lee asked, with the installation of the new apparatus, if there was any thought given to the two-day Pump Operator Awareness Class or the six-day Certified Pump Operator Class.

Chief Breen stated that he had not given any thought to that yet.

Chief Pepin stated that East Brooklyn has a partial training schedule prepared and that a lot will be filled in with Mortlake. They have discussed dual Company and EMS training. It has to be finalized.

### **d. Paid Staff**

Mr. Podzaline stated that there are a couple of Town employees that also volunteer for the Fire Departments and there are questions regarding their response capabilities during the day. He asked if it is allowable on the personnel side to respond during the day.

A. Tanner stated that it is a good logical idea and that he will look into it and he will need to check with the Union.

For the Record, Mr. Podzaline stated that this would not eliminate the need for paid staffing.

Chief Breen explained that it would not be in lieu of or take the place of paid staff, but supplement the volunteers that we have to provide a little extra manpower during the day when it is needed.

Mr. Podzaline stated that, between the last BoFC meeting and the Board of Selectmen's meeting, he had tasked the Chiefs with coming up with a plan of how they would utilize paid staffing day-to-day between the two Departments.

Chief Pepin stated that he and Chief Breen discuss it quite often and they have come up with a job description. They are still working on who will supervise them, what they will be doing and how they will be utilized. He doesn't think it will take them long to finalize.

Mr. Podzaline stated, for the Record, that if the Chiefs feel, between themselves and the Selectmen, they can handle it, he doesn't feel that the BoFC needs to be involved, unless the Chiefs feel differently and would like oversight by the BoFC. He said that it is an ARPA request, but if that fails, there will be a budget request of some degree.

## **7. Financial Reports Discussion**

### **a. FY 23/24 Budget discussion**

Mr. Lee explained that the plan is to, tentatively, have a budget earlier in the process. The Board of Finance is looking to have the annual meeting in late May or early June. He suggested that the BoFC start looking at it in February this year, rather than March as in the past. He said that it is a grant request.

Chief Breen stated that he may have something ready for February.

## **8. Other Business**

### **a. Volunteer Tax Abatement**

Mr. Podzalne explained that there were some good recommendations. Selectman Brodeur had submitted a request to discuss drivers. Mr. Podzalne explained that he had discussed, with the Chiefs, adding an Exterior Firefighter Driver Level in the Abatement and, unfortunately, numbers-wise, there wasn't much change. Therefore, there were no changes to language regarding adding certifications for Pump Operator, Aerial Operator, physical requirement (DOT or NFPA). No changes were made to the Abatement language (attached). He has a recommendation for a slight change.

Motion (#3) was made by D. Lee to move the adoption and recommendation of the Draft Proposal for the Volunteer Tax Abatement to the Board of Selectmen with the recommendation that it be forwarded to the Town Attorney for review.

Second by L. Berube.

Discussion:

D. Lee asked about NFPA 1001 Fire 1/Fire 2 and the standard for SCBA usage and compliance with the OSHA requirement for medical exams being documented by each Department appropriately.

Chief Pepin explained that it is (spyometry). There are three levels and the Chief certifies what level they want them to be tested to and the Chief signs the paperwork.

Chief Breen stated that, on Mortlake's medical form, there are also three levels of testing that can be done.

For the person to qualify, they would have had to had that level of exam.

Motion (#4) was made by D. Lee to modify his Main Motion (#3) to include modifying the wording of Draft Item (f) Eligibility, Item 3, from "The Board of Fire Commissioners may create more stringent qualifications for the abatement should they wish to do so in the future," to "The Board of Fire Commissioners reserves the right to modify the qualifications for abatement should they wish to do so in the future."

Second by M. Podzalne.

M. Podzalne stated agreement that it is not the intent of the BoFC to create more stringent qualifications.

Amendment (#4) to the Main Motion (#3) carried unanimously by voice vote (5-0-0).

Discussion:

L. Berube suggested that instead of classifications/categories, Member of the Mortlake or East Brooklyn Fire Department be used with the meetings and training to qualify (\$2,000 qualification vs. \$1,000 qualification). He has concern for the drivers as Mr. Brodeur had suggested.

Mr. Podzalne explained that if the apparatus operators meet the call volume qualification, they are entitled to the \$1,000. He explained that the entire point of this incentivizing program is to get those

qualified people to respond or to incentivize people to become more qualified. The intent is not to go backward and reward people for their service, it is to go forward.

Mr. Lee explained that the original draft proposal language did not define criteria, it just said active Member. The recommendation was to incentivize people to become certified so you could get a higher abatement if you have a higher level of training.

Mr. Podzalne explained that he had looked at State-wide abatements and the majority are \$1,000. He said that the State recently increased it to \$2,000 which gave us the ability to amend it.

Chief Breen explained that it is more of a recruitment tool than a retention tool and that we are trying to boost our numbers of qualified personnel, which is a benefit to the Town. We are not discounting the importance of those that don't have a particular certification because they are still getting a benefit which was the maximum benefit up until very recently. He stated in agreement with Mr. Podzalne that this is not a program that was designed to reward the Members of the past that have served for so long. It is not to discount the service that they have provided to the Town, but we need to look ahead to the future and to be as effective as we can to provide the fire service continually.

Chief Pepin agreed.

Main Motion (#3), as Amended, carried unanimously by voice vote (5-0-0).

Mr. Tanner mentioned that there has been talk that there may be a State income tax credit this year.

## 9. Public Comment

Motion was made by D. Lee to limit public comment to two minutes per person.

Second by D. Costa. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (5-0-0).

**Carrie Juhasz Horton**, via Zoom, spoke about an e-mail that she had sent Mr. Tanner which contains links regarding her concerns (attached). She voiced concern regarding that she feels there is an important need for background checks for the volunteers. She is in favor of having some paid staff. She asked for more transparency regarding financial disclosures.

## 10. Next Meeting – February 8th, 2023

## 11. Adjournment

Motion was made by D. Costa to adjourn at 8:00 p.m. (20:00 hours).

Second by L. Berube. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (5-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault  
Recording Secretary

Attachments: Firefighters Grant (AFG) Information; East Brooklyn Call Reports (2); Letter from Chief Pepin to EBFD; Mortlake Call Reports Information (3); Abatement Draft Version 5; Carrie Juhasz Horton.