

Board of Fire Commissioners
Regular Meeting
Wednesday, January 10, 2024
7:00 pm via Zoom &
Clifford B. Green Memorial Center
Conference Room
Suite 24, 69 South Main Street, Brooklyn, CT

To join this meeting, follow the below instructions:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84876425108?pwd=1bpoPBLMRzsrognlOet8zOT16CHxal.1>

Meeting ID: 848 7642 5108

Passcode: 333212

One tap mobile

+16465588656,,84876425108# US (New York)

+16469313860,,84876425108# US

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, Chairman; Leo Berube, Mortlake F.D. Representative; R. David Lee, Board of Finance Liaison; Matthew Alexander, East Brooklyn F.D. Representative; Aimee Genna, Citizen Representative; Austin Tanner, First Selectman, arrived at 7:34 p.m. (all present in person).
James Soler, Citizen Representative, joined the meeting, via Zoom, at approximately 7:37 p.m.

Others Present (in person) – Steve Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief; William Skene, East Brooklyn Fire Chief; J.S. Perreault, Recording Secretary.
Ray Preece, Selectman, and one additional person were present in the audience.

Present via Zoom – John DonFransico; Carrie Juhasz; Carrie Barna; Joe Voccio, Selectman; Nate Salter; L. Trahan; Lou Brodeur; Sandy Brodeur; Guest; Jenn Nemeth; Ann Marie; Attorney Eric Garande.

3. Approve Minutes

a. Regular Meeting of December 13, 2023

Motion was made by M. Alexander to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 13, 2023, as presented.

Second by A. Genna.

Discussion:

- Clarification, by R.D. Lee, to Item 5.b, first bullet point, first sentence – The annual DOT inspection will “start” taking place tomorrow.
- A. Genna requested that, going forward, the attendance state everyone’s affiliation as all were not currently being included: Leo Berube – Mortlake Representative; James Soler – Citizen Representative.
- A. Genna noted a correction to Item 5.b, second bullet point, to read as follows: “Chief Skene explained that East Brooklyn has also finished testing and everything is going well.”
- A. Genna noted a correction to Item 6.d, second bullet point – “courtesy” was misspelled.

Motion, with noted corrections, carried unanimously (5-0-0).

4. Public Comment

- M. Podzaline stated that he had received an email (255 pages), for public comment, from Jenn Nemeth to be added to the Record.
- Carrie Juharsz stated that she had emailed two documents to be included in the Record of this meeting: How to lose your 501c3 status from the IRS; and the Fire District standard operating guidelines.

Mr. Podzaline stated that they will also be added to the Record.

5. Equipment Discussion

a. Inventory

- **Chief Skene** stated that everything is working and doing well.
- **Chief Breen** stated that everything is functioning.

Mr. Podzaline asked if Chief Breen had heard from the insurance company.

Chief Breen explained that he had provided to them the number of missed calls (68) with a dollar amount, but he has not heard back from them yet. He said that there is a full inventory of gear.

Mr. Podzaline asked if Department inventories are being worked on.

Chief Breen explained that some had been done as part of the ISO report, but there are other things that he has to give attention to. He said that there is a full inventory of gear.

b. Apparatus – No discussion.

6. Department Discussion

a. Recruitment, Retention, Training

- Mr. Lee asked if either Department is doing anything to incentivize the current Members to encourage others to join.

Chief Breen stated that there is currently no program like that.

- Mr. Podzaline asked where the Chiefs are regarding background check policies.

Neither Chief had anything prepared this month.

b. Grant Requests

- Chief Skene explained that East Brooklyn is applying for the exhaust system and that he met with the company that is writing up the grant yesterday (Lexipol). It is moving forward. He said that there is another grant that both Chiefs may apply for at the same time.

- Chief Breen explained that they still intend to apply for a grant for gear. His Administrative Assistant attended the AFG workshop on Monday, but he has not had an opportunity to speak with her about it. It is moving forward.

Mr. Lee explained that the window for AFG's opens January 29th at 8 a.m. and closes on March 8th at 5 p.m. He commented that, if the Chiefs apply separately, they are competing against themselves.

Chief Skene explained that they are applying for different things.

Mr. Lee asked about the SAM.gov registration.

Chief Skene explained that it is by Department. It was needed for ARPA funds.

Mr. Lee commented that a risk assessment needs to be completed as part of the application process.

Mr. Lee commented that each grant request has a cost-share amount. He asked if the Chiefs know what that is and how it will be funded.

Chief Breen did not know. Chief Skene believes it is five percent. Regarding how it will be funded, the Chiefs stated that they haven't gotten that far yet.

- Mr. Lee asked about the status of the Heart Safe Program. Funds were distributed in December 2021.

Chief Breen explained that an inventory of defibs was completed several months ago. A few discrepancies were found and they were updated. They are now at the point where they need to plan training and document certifications for CPR. Once that is completed, they can close it out.

c. Organization Plans – No discussion.

d. Standard Operating Guidelines

Mr. Podzalne asked if the Chiefs would be willing to have the Board work with them to present a boilerplate SOG to work from as this may become an issue with dual responders. There was discussion. Mr. Podzalne explained that his thought is to present a combined SOG for review.

e. Fire Department Self-Assessments – No discussion.

7. Financials

a. Accounts

i. Chart of Accounts

Mr. Lee asked if they have a common Chart of Accounts.

- Chief Skene explained that they came up with a Chart of Accounts very similar to Mortlake's. He submitted the EBFD Financial Report for 7/1/2023 thru 12/31/2023. He explained that the next report will have more detail as it is a work in progress.
- Chief Breen explained that he did not prepare the report thru December 31st. He submitted for July 2023 thru September 2023. Mr. Breen will provide thru December 31st at the next meeting.

Mr. Lee reviewed EBFD's Report.

- There was discussion regarding physicals/vaccinations. Chief Skene explained that they have been working on getting physicals done, but the Doctor's office has not been sending bills.
- There was discussion regarding property upkeep. Chief Skene explained that some things are scheduled to get done.

Mr. Lee stated that the District is the property owner and the landlord, but they are not responsible for any maintenance. There is no formal lease that Chief Skene knows of and he said that he has had discussions with the District President regarding expenses.

Mr. Lee clarified that \$80,000 is the full annual budget. Chief Skene stated agreement.

b. Budgets

The Chiefs agreed that draft budget would be provided for review at the next meeting.

c. **Quarterly Report** – See discussion under Agenda Item 7.a.i above.

8. Old Business

a. Volunteer Tax Abatement

Mr. Podzalne explained that a draft form had been presented at a previous meeting and that the Chiefs will amend it to better suit their needs.

Mr. Lee explained that the request from the Board of Finance was to provide some documentation to support that it is an ongoing management process and that the final report (notarized by the Department Head) has quality information – monitor on a monthly basis. There was discussion.

- Chief Skene commented that, based on 2023, EBFD would have seven Member qualified for the abatement: six - \$2,000; and one - \$1,000 (total \$13,000 for the year). He said that it needs to be explained to the Members because he feels that some don't have a good understanding of it.
- Chief Breen commented that ballpark for Mortlake would be seven - \$2,000 and one - \$1,000 (\$15,000 total for the year).

There was discussion regarding how often this should be reported. It was decided it would be reported quarterly.

Mr. Lee explained about the steps that need to be gone through: Board of Finance; Board of Selectmen; Town Attorney; Town Hearing. It is questionable whether it will be done in time to be impactful for fiscal year 2024.

A. Tanner arrived at 7:34 p.m.

b. Fire Lane Ordinance

Mr. Tanner stated that he had looked it over, but questioned maintenance. There was agreement that if it is municipal property, the Town is responsible and if it is on private property, the property owner is responsible.

Mr. Lee asked if some on the Board of Selectmen still had reservations. Mr. Tanner thinks that this has been resolved, but he will double-check tomorrow night. If it is all set, he will send it to the Town Attorney for review.

J. Soler arrived, via Zoom, at approximately 7:37 p.m.

Mr. Lee asked about the criminal background issue.

Mr. Podzalne stated that it will next month.

9. New Business

a. Co-Chair

Mr. Podzalne explained the need for a Vice Chair as he anticipates conflicts with his schedule in the spring.

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to nominate Aimee Genna as Vice Chair of the Brooklyn Board of Fire Commissioners.

Second by M. Alexander.

Discussion: It was noted that the responsibility of the Vice Chair is to act as Chair when M. Podzalne is absent.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (7-0-0).

10. Public Comment – Public comments, as well as the entire meeting, can be heard by contacting the First Selectman's Office and requesting the Zoom link.

- **Carrie Juhasz** commented about the Fire Lane Ordinance, referring to point #3 of the stipulated Court Order.

Ms. Juhasz commented about Standard Operating Guidelines regarding the Fire District Treasurer being responsible for maintaining the financial records of: a) Brooklyn Fire District Checking Account; b) Brooklyn Fire District Savings Account; c) East Brooklyn Fire Department Checking Account; and d) East Brooklyn Fire Department Savings Account. She stated that she contests the District and the Department are not as separate as they might claim to be.

Ms. Juhasz also commented about the 501c3 tax-exempt status. She referred to, read aloud from, and commented on a document that she had provided.

Ms. Juhasz commented about fundraising accounts which, she said, are not being reported by either Department. She suggested continuing to ask for transparency.

Ms. Juhasz commented about the importance of background checks for all members.

Mr. Podzalne stated, for the Record, that Ms. Juhasz' comments were her own opinion.

- **Jenn Nemeth** commented about the documents that she had submitted, for the Record.
Ms. Nemeth stated that an extension had been filed for their counter-cross claim and the new date is the 15th. She stated that it is important that interviews be conducted in the most accurate manner possible.
- **Carrie Barna** asked if log books are used for fuel for vehicles.
- **Jenn Nemeth** clarified that it is an alleged fire lane.
- **Carrie Juhasz** commented that a fire truck had been used for a boot collection fundraiser in conjunction with Baker's Dozen. She also commented that fire trucks were also brought to a Town meeting.

11. Next Meeting – January 31, 2024, at 7:30 p.m. (Please Note - No meeting in February)

12. Executive Session – JMN Lawsuit

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to enter into Executive Session at 7:56 p.m. including the following:

Michael Podzalne; Leo Berube; R. David Lee; Matthew Alexander; Aimee Genna; Austin Tanner (all in person); James Soler, Joe Voccio and Attorney Gurarde (all three via Zoom).

Second by Aimee Genna.

Discussion: 1) Ray Preece, Selectman, was also included in Executive Session; and 2) It was stated, for the Record, that nothing will be voted on after coming out of Executive Session, only to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously (7-0-0).

Executive Session ended at 8:50 p.m.

13. Adjournment

Motion was made by L. Berube to adjourn at 8:50 p.m.

Second by R.D. Lee.

Motion carried unanimously (7-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault

Recording Secretary

Attachments: EBFD Financial Report – 7/1/2023 thru 12/31/2023

Mortlake Quarterly Report - July thru September 2023

Jenn Nemeth email to M. Podzalne (dated 1/10/2024 with 2 attachments)

Carrie Juhasz email to M. Podzalne (dated 1/9/2024 with 6 attachments)