

**Board of Fire Commissioners**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**Wednesday, January 31, 2024**  
**7:30 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 7:31 p.m. (19:01 hours).
2. **Attendance:** Michael Podzaline, Chairman (Citizen Representative); Aimee Genna, Vice Chair (Citizen Representative); R. David Lee, Board of Finance Liaison; Matthew Alexander, East Brooklyn F.D. Representative; James Soler, Citizen Representative; Austin Tanner, First Selectman (all present in person).  
Leo Berube, Mortlake F.D. Representative, was absent.  
  
**Others Present (in person)** – Steve Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief; William Skene, East Brooklyn Fire Chief; J.S. Perreault, Recording Secretary.  
Sandy Brodeur was present in the audience.  
  
**Present via Zoom** – Carrie Barna; L. Trahan; Lou Brodeur; Ann Marie; Chris; John’s iPad; iPad; iPhone(65) Carrie Juhasz; J; C: Jenn Nemeth.
3. **Approve Minutes**
  - a. **Regular Meeting of January 10, 2024**

Motion was made by A. Genna to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 10, 2024.

Second by M. Alexander.

Discussion:

Chief Skene noted a correction: M. Alexander was listed as included in the Executive Session, but Mr. Alexander was not included. Mr. Podzaline expressed agreement with the correction.

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

4. **Public Comment** – None.

5. **Equipment Discussion**

- a. **Inventory**

- M. Alexander explained that they are working on a spreadsheet with the Members, Apparatus, SCBA’s.

- Chief Breen explained about the spreadsheet that they are working on. The hope is that it will be ready next month. He provided copies of various documents regarding inventory and explained about them (attached).

Chief Breen stated that he also has physical status, but wasn't sure if it was wanted to be included as part of inventory. Mr. Podzaline commented that it wouldn't hurt.

Mr. Lee asked about what NFPA cycle the 2003 SCBA's are on and if they are still compliant. Chief Breen explained that they have another year with compliance. They continue to pass their flow tests and other qualifications. He said that there will be a plan for replacements. There was discussion.

- Chief Skene explained that EBFD just bought ten new packs with ARPA money and they are all in service. He will have information for the next meeting.

There was discussion. Mr. Lee suggested that an "as of date" be added to the documents. There was discussion regarding expiration dates. A. Genna suggested including more dates for clarification and sorting purposes. Chief Breen explained about how they are using the Globe Gear Tracker Software. Mr. Podzaline asked if there is anyone expected to be an interior firefighter who would need gear. Chief Breen stated that there is not.

**b. Apparatus – Status quo.** No accidents, nothing major.

- A. Genna asked if there had been any feedback from the insurance company about the lost income (ambulance).

Chief Breen explained that he did find out that they do have coverage for lost revenue. He has provided projected numbers for the lost revenue, but has not heard back.

**6. Department Discussion**

**a. Recruitment, Retention, Training**

- Chief Skene explained that they had discussed doing some additional recruitment in the coming months, starting with FaceBook and at some events in the spring and fall.

**b. Grants**

- Chief Skene explained that everything was submitted, but he has not heard whether our paperwork has officially been submitted yet.
- Chief Skene spoke about reinstating the program for paid staff that Chief Breen and former EBFD Chief, Brian Pepin had worked on. Additional staffing: Three Firefighter/EMT's (per diem Town Employees – no benefits) – 5 days per week, twelve hours per day (proposed budget for these three positions approximately \$210,000). These would not be in place of the ambulance crew. He explained about Scotland's job description (same as what had been presented to the BoFC a year or two ago). Chief Skene explained about how Scotland has a stipend program for the evening with three members, for which, they applied for a SAFER Grant and it was awarded (\$360,000). He explained about the two versions of the SAFER Grants: one for paid staffing; and one for recruitment and retention.

Chief Skene spoke about how Mr. Tanner had discussed this with the Board of Finance a year ago. Chief Skene suggests that we apply for a SAFER Grant also. He explained about getting the documentation submitted to start the process. It is unknown, at this point, when the Grant opens.

There was discussion. Mr. Podzalne stated that with the per diem approach, unless you are competitively above similar towns, they are going to work in those towns. Mr. Podzalne feels that a true, dedicated Town employee is more beneficial than money spent relying on per diem. Reliance on per diem, regarding ambulance service, is okay, at best. Discussion continued.

Mr. Lee commented that the bigger issue of organizational structure, leadership and accountability need to be discussed before talking about SAFER Grants. He explained about how SAFER Grants are good for three years for funding, then eventually the community has to pick up that expense. Discussion continued.

Chief Skene explained that they would like to hire a Fire Administrator/EMD over both Departments (part-time position). He provided copies of a Job Description from the Town of Coventry, CT (attached). Part if the salary would be reimbursable by the State. There was discussion about accountability. Administratively, members would answer to the Fire Administrator on scene (they would respond to the ranking Officer). This person would be the ultimate authority of the Departments. Mr. Podzalne commented that it is a difficult task to bequeath responsibilities without the power. There was discussion regarding hours and benefits.

Mr. Podzalne suggested taking on and dealing with all of the issues and then presenting the whole argument to the taxpayers.

Chief Breen asked the Board what they consider to be the highest priority item to continue this discussion, a starting point. There was discussion and the following suggestions were made:

- R.D. Lee – An analysis of the call volume and types of calls and the manpower you presently have including their training/gear. Look at the data.
- M. Podzalne – Agrees with Mr. Lee, but is concerned about overlap.
- A. Tanner asked if it would be needed to hire a consultant.

Chief Breen explained that they have the data in a database which can be filtered and sorted and provided (ESO software can generate reports).

Mr. Podzalne explained that he does not feel that a consultant is needed. He commented that the majority of reports throughout the State say, collectively, the same thing: One person in charge, one organization. He said that, until that happens, there are so many hurdles to overcome. Mr. Lee commented that having a consultant provides a third-party person and removes the personalities involved and it provides some level of distance and authority.

Mr. Tanner commented that, at some point, there would need to be some type of merger for this operation to work.

Mr. Lee suggested tabling this discussion to the next meeting, while moving forward with the analytics.

**c. Organizational Changes** – No discussion.

**d. Standard Operating Guidelines** – No discussion.

**e. Fire Department Self-Assessments** – No discussion.

## 7. Financials

### a. Accounts

#### i. Chart of Accounts

Mr. Lee asked if the Charts have been reviewed. For the Record, this was a request from the Board of Finance. Mr. Lee stated that this information will be provided to the BoFC to advise them that it has been completed to the best of our knowledge. He said that, based on what he has seen, they are in alignment.

- EBFD had provided theirs at a previous meeting. Chief Skene explained that EBFD's basic Chart of Accounts is the same as Mortlake's. He explained about the three grey lines: Property Upkeep (to be moved to Building Maintenance); Radio and Safety Account Expenses (to be moved to Town Safety). Safety Account Expenses: Hazmat Equipment will be consolidated into another account as well.
- Chief Breen provided copies for Mortlake: July – December 2023 Town Operating; and July – December 2023 AMB Fund.

### b. Budgets

- Chief Skene provided copies of the EBFD DRAFT Proposed Budget for FY 2024/2025.
- Chief Breen provided copies of the Mortlake DRAFT Proposed Budget for FY 2024/2025. He explained about how it is separated into sections: Fire Department; Ambulance (they need to ask the Town for funding to supplement the ambulance moving forward) includes analysis on paid staff, tech staff and volunteer stipend program; Software Licenses; Professional Fees; and Utilities.

There was discussion regarding the loss in Ambulance revenue. Mr. Breen explained about: 1) aging population (Medicare/Medicaid reimbursements); 2) cost of doing business. He referred to the Financial that were provided for the Ambulance Report which shows a month-to-month analysis of where we are. He explained that collections are getting better due to changes that have been made. Chief Breen explained about rate increases received through the State. Chief Breen gave an explanation of the history of paid staff (goes back about 20 years).

There was discussion regarding Ambulance Pay Per Call: call volume; overnight shifts (volunteer staff that staffs the ambulance overnight).

Mr. Lee asked for a breakdown of Ambulance Income Receipts (type of call or how it gets billed) to understand what the revenue stream consists of.

Sandra Brodeur explained that the ambulance has been asked to do a report for July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, to include the mixture of revenues. She is working with the ambulance billing company to see what they can provide.

A.Genna asked about vehicle maintenance (on the Financial Statement). Chief Breen explained about Ambulance 590, an older ambulance in the fleet which has been a maintenance nightmare. A. Genna offered a suggestion for a way to highlight so that it can be more adequately compared from month to month.

There was discussion about billing.

There was discussion regarding Professional Auditing. Chief Breen explained that a forensic audit had been requested for both, Fire and Ambulance.

Sandra Brodeur explained that now that the revenue (not the income) for the Fire Department and the Ambulance Service is at or above \$500,000, that audit will be required every year. She explained that it will be a regular audit, but the cost would be \$10,000 to \$14,000. She said that it is a draft and will change.

**c. Quarterly Report** – No discussion.

## **8. Old Business**

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

- Chief Skene explained and provided copies of a DRAFT form for review (attached). There was discussion. Mr. Lee commented that evidence is needed for when you get to the annual statement, you will have a paper trail leading to that number. When the certified form is given to the tax collector, evidence is also needed to show that the person is eligible for the tax abatement and at what rate. Chief Skene explained that he had made a spreadsheet containing that information. A.Genna will work on creating a fillable spreadsheet for the next meeting.
- Chief Breen explained and provided copies of a DRAFT of Mortlake’s version showing the data that they will use to come up with the numbers.

Mr. Lee commented that this will not be in place until FY 2025/2026.

### **b. Background Checks**

There was discussion. Mr. Podzaline stated that background checks are accounted for in both Departments’ proposed budgets.

- Chief Breen explained that, currently, they look at history (querying) on State of CT judicial websites based on date of birth. Gives public convictions in the State of CT. A.Genna asked about motor vehicle checks.

Chief Breen explained that they are not doing MV checks at this time. There is no formal plan in place.

Mr. Lee stated that the request was for policy and procedure on what the Departments are currently doing. He asked if it is a documented process.

Both Chiefs stated, “no.” Chief Breen explained that, if there are any convictions, they would look at it at the level of the Admissions Committee and then the level of the Board of Directors and a decision would be made based on type of conviction, if it is a felony. A subjective review.

Mr. Lee explained that, if you don’t have an objective criteria, you are, potentially, exposing your organization to risk, if you are not treating everybody the same, based on objective criteria.

Mr. Podzaline read aloud, “Judicial website, Mortlake, query in-State only, judgement based upon the actions of the Membership Committee.

Mr. Podzaline asked about EBFDF.

Chief Skene stated that he believes it is pretty much based on the same idea.

Mr. Podzaline asked what the \$30 per background check consists of.

Chief Breen explained that it would be consistent criminal background checks similar to what they are doing now. They are still exploring other companies.

A.Genna asked if any progress had been made with the billing or physicals.

Chief Skene has not seen any bills.

Sandra Brodeur explained that they don't get the physical results until there is a bill. She said that in January, she got a bill for a physical that took place in November. She said that the Doctor has had some health issues and she thinks that it is an organizational thing.

There was discussion regarding keeping track of when members are due for physicals so as not to go over budget.

## **9. New Business**

Chief Skene explained that during the checkup of the EFBD, the generator was found to not be working. It has not yet been determined what is wrong with it. So, at this time, they do not have an operating generator. He said that it is not the District's issue. There is no lease agreement.

## **10. Public Comment - Please note that public comments as well as the entire meeting can be heard by requesting the link to the meeting from the First Selectman's Office.**

- **Sandra Brodeur** commented that the Board of Finance is hoping that the Departments continue to refine their backup reports for inventories so that they are more easily understood and more useful.

**Sandra Brodeur** expressed concern regarding members who belong to both Departments and how the log for response to calls will keep from duplicating.

Chief Breen stated that it is a concern that is being brought to our attention that we should probably address it.

**Sandra Brodeur** asked if QV could do the call analysis.

The answer was, "no."

- **Carrie Barna** asked about maintenance reports.

M. Podzaline stated that it would be reflected in the minutes.

**Carrie Barna** commented about background checks. She explained that there may be multiple people with the same name. She said that they should do specific background checks.

- **Carrie Juhasz** read aloud a letter to Mr. Hartley Field, Chairman of the BoFC, dated February 5, 1982, which spoke to developing a long-range financial plan for the fire protection and emergency services needs of the Town.

**Carrie Juhasz** commented that the same questions are being asked now to have a 20-year plan. She is in support of what the letter says.

**Carrie Juhasz** also referred to pages 2 and 4 from a Brooklyn Fire Protection Long-Range Plan Interim Report, dated 1983.

## **11. Next Meeting – Please Note: The next meeting of the BoFC will be March 13, 2024, at 7 p.m.**

## **12. Adjournment**

Motion was made by A. Tanner to adjourn at 9:31 p.m.  
Second by R.D. Lee. No discussion.  
Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (6-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault  
Recording Secretary

Attachments: SCBA Inventory  
SCBA Bottle Chart  
Gear Inventory  
Town of Brooklyn Fire Fighter Description  
DRAFT Emergency Administrator Management Director  
Mortlake July-December 2023  
Mortlake July-December 2023 – Ambulance  
DRAFT EBFD Proposed Budget FY 2024/2025  
DRAFT Mortlake Proposed Budget FY 2024/2025  
EMT/Firefighter Responses Tax Abatement Form  
DRAFT Tax Abatement Info – Jan-Dec 2023