

**Board of Fire Commissioners**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**Wednesday, October 11, 2023**  
**7:00 pm via Zoom &**  
**Clifford B. Green Memorial 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/88417693055?  
pwd=alh6K1NkellZL1lLcHJCnkqV3pWQT09](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88417693055?pwd=alh6K1NkellZL1lLcHJCnkqV3pWQT09)

**Meeting ID: 884 1769 3055**

**Passcode: 438618**

**One tap mobile**

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**MINUTES**

1. **Call to Order** – Michael Podzaline, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. (19:02 hours).
2. **Attendance:** Michael Podzaline, Chairman; Austin Tanner, First Selectman; R. David Lee, Board of Finance Liaison; Matthew Alexander, East Brooklyn F.D. Representative; Aimee Genna, Citizen Representative (all present in person).  
James Soler arrived via Zoom at approximately 7:56 p.m.  
Leo Berube was absent with notice.

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

**Present via Zoom** – Joe Voccio, Selectman; Jenn Nemeth; Nick Provost; Ann Marie; Matt; Carrie Juhasz-Horton; WINY Radio; there were two additional people via Zoom not named.

3. **Approve Minutes**
  - a. **Regular Meeting of August 9, 2023**

Motion was made by R. D. Lee to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of August 9, 2023, as presented.

Second by A. Tanner.

Discussion:

A.Genna noted a correction to a misspelled name – Should be “DonFrancisco.”

R. D. Lee amended his motion to include the correction.

Second by M. Alexander.

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

4. **Public Comment** – None.

5. **Equipment Discussion**

- a. **Inventory**

Mr. Podzaline asked about the status on foam. Is it still on the rigs? There have been some issues with other towns.

Chief Breen explained that they have Class A foam on ET-190 (new).

**b. Apparatus**

**Chief Breen:**

- The ambulance that was in an accident returned on Monday, but it needs to go through an inspection before it goes back into service. He hopes that it will be back in service within the next week or so.

**6. Department Discussion**

**a. Recruitment, Retention, Training**

Chief Breen gave an update on training: 3 out of the 5 members that took Firefighter 1 passed the test on the first round. The two that didn't pass have to retake some sections of the test.

Matt Alexander and David Costa are Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) certified.

**i. Grant Requests**

- R. D. Lee asked how we are doing on the Community Heart Safe Program. Chief Breen explained that we are making forward progress.
- Mr. Lee said that he got information from AFG. They are planning to open up in January 2024. He asked if there are any plans regarding the AFG request. The two Chiefs have not had a chance to look at it yet. Mr. Lee explained about the AFG.
- There was discussion regarding ARPA money. Chief Skene explained that the order went to Shelley Cates two weeks ago and she will be cutting a purchase order. He explained that he had to modify the order due to a price increase. He believes that they will receive the radios by summer.
- Mr. Lee asked about a document that had been provided by Chief Breen regarding training attendance (for informational purposes – it is not completely up-to-date). Chief Breen stated that it is difficult to get people to do training (especially during the summer months). There was discussion regarding enforcement. Letters go out to Members who are not in compliance.  
There was discussion regarding coordinating training.  
Chief Breen explained that his spreadsheet is an easier visual than the report from ESO.  
There was discussion regarding when a Member would become a liability (risk vs. benefit).

**b. Organizational Vision**

Mr. Podzaline noted that it is difficult to paint of picture of where you want to go without it being on paper.

Chief Breen explained that now that Chief Skene is in place, the Chiefs have started meeting on a regular basis and they are moving toward having combined meetings of all of the Officers from both Departments. He explained that he and Chief Skene have one discussion so far about where they see things going in two, five, ten years. They are continuing to align the SOG's. They need to define how the Officers interact Townwide vs. their District (command structure). Chief Breen explained that they are working on a draft focusing on three items for the next meeting: Apparatus Response Order; Define Primary/Secondary Department for Dual Membership Roles; Response Protocols.

There was discussion. Mr. Podzaline suggested that the Town Attorney be consulted regarding the command structure. Mr. Lee referred to the Mortlake By-Laws.

Mr. Lee asked if the goal for the RIT Team is to be compliant with the NFPA Standards.

Chief Breen stated “yes.”

Mr. Lee asked who would be in charge of RIT Team responsibilities and, he asked, if the person who is designated to be in charge, compliant with NFPA standards for being a RIT Team Leader. Chief Breen stated that he did not have a 100-percent answer at this time, but that David Costa is heading it up at this point. He stated that they will ensure that those that are leading are qualified to do so. Matt Alexander and David Costa are both RIT certified.

Mr. Lee asked if there had been any analysis (based on calls) done to see if there is a need for a RIT Team.

Chief Breen stated that there was no statistical analysis.

Mr. Podzaline explained that a year ago, the two Chiefs were speaking about how there was a response problem especially during the daytime. He said that he is a fan of a RIT Team but, he expressed concern that it may compound the problem if the team can’t be assembled. There was discussion. Chief Breen explained that, in his many years of experience, it is not a common occurrence to have to deal with two major incidents at the same time.

Mr. Lee explained about the purpose of RIT. There was discussion.

c. **Standard Operating Guidelines** – See discussion above Agenda Item 6.b.

d. **Fire Department Self-Assessments**

Mr. Podzaline explained that the self-assessments are needed from the Departments (it was requested last May). He referred to industry standards from Volunteer Fire Insurance Services (VFIS). He asked if the Departments are going to do them together or separately.

M. Alexander said that he had started going through it during the summer and he explained that some could be done individually and some together.

The Board reviewed the NFPA 1720 Self-Assessment Manual (pages 7-10):

- Page 7 – Question #1 – Yes
- Page 7 – Question #2

There was discussion regarding Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) and there was disagreement as Mr. Podzaline feels that the BoFC is the AHJ, but the Chiefs disagree. Mr. Lee referred to the Ordinance that established the BoFC and he agrees with Mr. Podzaline. Mr. Podzaline read aloud from Town Ordinance, Section 11-1.3. Mr. Tanner stated that the BoFC aren’t there from day to day, so we take what the Chiefs say and go from there. Mr. Lee commented that the NFPA tells you the standard that you need to apply, but doesn’t tell you how to accomplish that standard. Mr. Lee stated that he does not dispute the history of how things have been done, but he suggests reading the Ordinance as it is written which allows the Board to have that authority. Mr. Podzaline stated that, due to things that have happened in the past, it may be in the best interest of the Town that this Board be the ultimate authority having jurisdiction.

Mr. Podzaline tabled this item.

- Page 7 – Question #3 – Yes
- Page 8 – Question #1 – Yes.

There was discussion. Chief Breen explained that some SOG’s need to be reviewed and updated. This is part of the effort to align the SOG’s.

- Page 8 – Question #2 – No

There was discussion. Chief Skene explained that he would need to contact the Warden at the Jail to get the most up-to-date version. They used to have annual training with the

prison, but that stopped when COVID-19 happened. Chief Breen commented that just before COVID they had done a large-scale fire response drill at the jail involving both Departments. The Warden has reached out and is interested.

- Page 8 – Question #3 – Per prior, transparent discussions, probably No.  
There was discussion regarding review of the alarm card and the need to use of “I am responding.”
- Page 8 – Question #4 – Yes  
There was discussion. It is not SOG based. Mr. Lee stated that a big part of it is documenting pre-fire plans and he explained that they get updated when people go through Fire 2 as that is one of the skills for Fire 2. Mr. Lee said that there is a need for updated pre-plans at Mortlake. Mr. Alexander said that they are in the office. Chief Skene explained that they can be loaded into the system.
- Page 9 – Question #1 – Chief Breen stated that it is not how they are organized.
- Page 9 – Question #2 – Mr. Podzalne commented that between the two Departments, responses have been better than in past years.

There was more discussion regarding AHJ (Authority Having Jurisdiction). Mr. Podzalne stated that Question #1 (Page 7) is tabled and he will make a request of Mr. Tanner to have the Town Attorney review it.

## 7. Financials

Mr. Lee asked if progress has been made on the Chart of Accounts

Chief Skene explained that he did a comparison between East Brooklyn and Mortlake and there are some that are similar and some are different because the Departments are different. He will work on getting it more closely aligned with Mortlake for next budget season.

Mr. Lee stated that it was requested by the Board of Finance. He suggested that the Departments submit quarterly reports to the BoFC demonstrating how the grant requests from the Town are being spent. The first one being due in January for the close of the second quarter in December and quarterly thereafter.

Motion was made by R.D. Lee that the Board of Fire Commissioners request of the Fire Departments quarterly financial statements using the consolidated accounts starting with the close of the second quarter and quarterly thereafter.

Discussion:

Chief Skene explained that he had just figured out his budgetary accounts based upon the reduction (based upon the original request) that was authorized by the Board of Finance approximately two weeks ago. He is working on this with the Treasurer and they are also working on some financial controls.

Second by A. Genna. No further discussion.

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

There was discussion regarding standardizing the two Charts of Accounts.

## 8. Old Business

### a. Volunteer Tax Abatement – Participation Form

Mr. Podzalne reviewed the Tax Abatement Participation Verification Form which was attached to the Agenda. Mr. Lee explained that the Board of Finance wanted to put the responsibility with the BoFC to validate that the people presented as being eligible for the abatement actually qualified. The form would need to be notarized.

Mr. Podzaline stated that it needs to be presented to the Board of Selectmen.

There was discussion regarding whether corrections could be made after the form is submitted. Mr. Lee explained that an updated form could be submitted to the BoFC.

**b. Fire Lanes**

Mr. Podzaline explained that he had asked Mr. Tanner to request the Fire Marshal to come before the Board to get input as Mr. Podzaline feels this would benefit the Town.

Mr. Tanner explained that the Fire Marshal didn't see a problem and said that there should be an appeal process.

Motion was made by R. D. Lee to forward the draft document regarding Fire Lanes to the Board of Selectmen for further consideration as an Ordinance for the Fire Department.

Second by M. Podzaline. No discussion.

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

**9. New Business**

**a. Pat Boyd Correspondence**

Mr. Podzaline stated that the BoFC, First Selectman, and both Representatives from the East Brooklyn Fire Department and Fire District received the letter dated September 6, 2023, which addresses dissolution of the Fire District through legislative act. He asked for the opinion of the Board.

Mr. Tanner stated that Representative Boyd presented the facts, but he doesn't necessarily agree with it. He said that the BOS have only discussed the generalities, but have not discussed whether to move forward or not. It is a controversial issue. The actual function of the District has been debated, but he feels that it would be good to get more input from the District. He feels that it is something that we could move forward on, but as non-controversial as possible. He feels discouraged that the District isn't involved, no one seems to care or participate.

Mr. Podzaline stated that it can be tabled and discussion can be had at a later date in a formal setting with the District present to get their opinion.

Mr. Lee commented that the ultimate resolution involves the Brooklyn Fire District being dissolved or another option could be that it expands to the entire Town. He doesn't feel that it can be addressed under a cloud of litigation. The litigation should be resolved first. Agreement was expressed.

Mr. Tanner read aloud a letter that he had received earlier in the day from the Town Attorney (available on the Judicial website). The Fire District withdrew its lawsuit against JMN Properties. The counterclaim filed by JMN against the Town Fire District remains pending.

**10. Public Comment**

- **Carrie Juhasz** commented that there needs to be further steps such as Informational tax filings/501c3 by the IRS. She requests that the Board of Finance put language in the requirements of the financial transparency. She said that the East Brooklyn Fire Department has been filing improperly since, at least 2009 and beyond.  
Regarding Mr. Tanner's comment regarding that no one seems to care about dissolving the Fire District, Ms. Juhasz said that East Brooklyn has the highest volume of rental properties, so in many cases the residents are not paying the tax.  
She said that meetings are not happening where they should be which is within the District. She feels that there are a lot of people who are unaware that they are paying this additional tax.

She has major concerns about corruption and missing money due to such a lack of financial transparency.

She expressed disappointment that the Fire Marshal has been asked to attend a BoFC meeting multiple times, but has not. She feels there should be accountability.

- **Nick Provost** referred to a letter that had been sent to some people earlier in the day. He wanted to hear comments from the Board. The Board Members had not received the letter.

**11. Next Meeting – November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at 7 p.m.**

**12. Adjournment**

Motion was made by A. Genna to adjourn at 8:35 p.m. (20:35 hours).

Second by R.D. Lee. No discussion.

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

**Attachments:** Correspondence from Representative Patrick S. Boyd  
Tax Abatement Participation Verification Form  
Mortlake – ESO Report (4/14/23 – 10/10/23)  
Mortlake Call Response September 2023  
Mortlake Training Log 2023