

Board of Fire Commissioners
Special Meeting
Wednesday, November 9, 2022
7:00 pm via Zoom &
Mortlake Fire Company – NOTE CHANGE OF LOCATION
12 Canterbury Rd, 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 7:02 p.m. (19:02 hours).

2. **Attendance:** Michael Podzaline; Leo Berube; Patrick Gauthier; R. David Lee, Board of Finance Liaison; (all present in person). James Solar (arrived via Zoom at approximately 7:42 p.m.). Austin Tanner, First Selectman, was absent with notice. Felix Ramos was absent.

Others Present (in person) – S. Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief; B. Pepin, East Brooklyn Fire Chief; L. Brodeur, Selectman; L. Brodeur; J.S. Perreault, Recording Secretary
There were three additional people present in the audience.

Present via Zoom – Jenn Nemeth; Kayla Burgess; John DonFrancisco; Ann-Marie.

3. **Approve Minutes**

a. **Regular Meeting of October 12, 2022**

Motion was made by D.Lee to accept the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of October 12, 2022.

Second by L. Berube. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (4-0-0).

4. **Public Comment**

M. Podzaline commented that both Departments had done great job on a recent mutual aid job.

Kayla Burgess made the following comments about the law suit that the East Brooklyn Fire Tax District has made toward the Town, the Board of Fire Commissioners, multiple local small businesses in Town and a private homeowner:

- She asked how one of the people spearheading the law suit, as Treasurer of the East Brooklyn Fire Tax District, who is Plaintiff in this case, is present tonight and has been recently re-appointed as a Member of the BoFC (Defendant in the law suit).
- She said that it is unethical that he be allowed to be part of the decision making body on both sides of the law suit. It is her opinion that this is a clear example of the corruption in small town leadership.
- It is her hope that no single individual would have the power or influence to force something of this magnitude to go as far as it has. So, she asked how it has gotten this far.
- It is illegal for the Fire Department to be housed outside of its District. She said that the businesses and private residence were there long before the Fire Department illegally moved in.
- The road is not for the sole use of the Fire Department, never has, nor will it ever be.
- She is attending as a taxpayer to voice her disgust regarding the entire situation.
- She said that the East Brooklyn Fire Tax District, as a whole, has been allowed to be a government-funded bully hiding behind the good name of being a tax district that is supporting first-responder organizations. She supports the Fire Department.
- As a taxpayer of this Town, she strongly recommends that the Fire District funding be reduced in the coming budget cycle for the Town Block Grant. She feels that it is a fair assumption that the only way they would have the expendable cash to carry on this frivolous law suit is because they also receive funds from the Town, which helps with their other operating expenses. She explained that she feels that the BoFC has the power to reduce that expendable cash. She feels that the Fire District has made it clear that they are not good stewards of public funding where they should be using every penny toward operations and the safety equipment for their membership.
- She asked that the BoFC take the most active role possible to ensure that this law suit be resolved quickly, not only for the good of the parties directly involved, but for the good of the citizens of the entire Town.

Jenn Nemeth read from a prepared statement regarding the law suit (copy attached).

5. Equipment Discussion

Chief Pepin explained that East Brooklyn will be purchasing more PPE due to an influx of Members/Interior Certified Members. He had to dispose of a lot of the spare PPE that they had due to it being over ten years old and in rough condition.

D. Lee asked if there is enough money in the current budget to cover this expense or if the Department will be asking for addition funds. Chief Pepin stated that they will not need additional money.

Chief Breen stated that ET-190 arrived earlier today. It is scheduled to get lettering on Monday. Radios to be installed on Friday, November 18th. There will be training for operators on Monday, November 21st and the truck should be in service the following week. He invited interested parties to go over to see the truck after the meeting. Chief Breen explained that they had made a Capital request for extrication equipment which was supposed to have been shipped to the Dealer on

November 4th. He is expecting the shipment at any time. He explained that this equipment will also require training.

D. Lee asked about the Capital request regarding the overhead doors. Chief Breen explained that everything is set and in place and it is being scheduled.

6. Department Discussion

a. Recruitment

Chief Pepin stated that East Brooklyn got a new Firefighter II Certified Member on Monday night. The new Member's wife will be joining also (medical).

b. Retention – No discussion.

c. Paid Staff – Subcommittee Update

M. Podzaline reported that there was discussion regarding the ARPA Request for paid staffing (copies were attached to the Agendas for both, the Sub-Committee and the Board of Fire Commissioners). Details and concerns were discussed such as numbers and fringe benefits. He said that they are looking for a favorable recommendation to forward to the ARPA Committee. As stated in prior meetings, it is a dire situation.

D. Lee explained that any ARPA Request would be based on what is presented to the ARPA Committee in the grant request. It needs to stand on its own. He asked for clarification regarding whether this would be in addition to the existing ambulance crew or replacing it. Chief Breen explained that it would be somewhat in addition to the existing crew. Mr. Lee stated that this would need to be clarified before submitting to the ARPA Committee.

Mr. Lee asked about job description, reporting structure and if they would rotate between Departments. He said that these would also need to be clarified with more detail before submitting to the ARPA Committee.

Mr. Lee asked about hours and covering morning and evening commute windows. He asked what data analysis supports this. Chief Pepin explained that they were looking at statistics and there were a large amount of calls in that timeframe. Mr. Lee stated that this should be included to justify the validity of the timeframe.

Mr. Lee explained that, as part of the grant review process, all are asked the question of whether there are other funding sources. Mr. Podzaline explained that he had researched with a valid grant writer source and found that there is not for a volunteer organization. Mr. Lee suggested that it should be stated in the ARPA Request that it had been researched and there are no other sources, although, he stated that he could debate that point. Mr. Podzaline stated that will be an ARPA Request and it may also be a budgetary request. Mr. Lee explained that, part of the ARPA process clearly states, in the requirements, that we should not be funding things that would create a burden on the Town in the future and, he said, that this would create a burden on the Town in the future.

Mr. Podzaline stated that he has put on the record as the Chair for both, the BoFC and the Sub-Committee, that he is not a fan of funding positions through ARPA money because it becomes a burden on the taxpayers.

There was discussion regarding the deadline to submit requests and Mr. Lee explained that the ARPA Committee kept its window open for certain types of requests. Mr. Podzaline stated that they can work on answering the questions over the next month or two.

L. Brodeur commented that there will be a Town forum presentation on November 28th to get input from residents as to whether anyone had a problem with the way things were funded or not funded.

Mr. Podzaline stated that they will also look into fringe benefits over the next month or two.

7. Financial Reports Discussion

D. Lee mentioned that he had asked that each Department submit a report of how they spent fiscal year 2021/2022 by this meeting.

East Brooklyn provided their report entitled, "East Brooklyn Fire Department Town Funds As of June 30, 2022, Budget for July 2021 – June 2022."

Mortlake will submit their report next month.

8. Other Business

a. Volunteer Tax Abatement

Mr. Podzaline explained that this was discussed at the Sub-Committee meeting earlier this evening. It had already been forwarded to the BoFC and the intent is for the BoFC to forward it to the Board of Selectmen. For the record, he stated that if any amendments are needed in the future, we will take care of it. Mr. Podzaline explained that both Departments aligned very similar reporting, definitions to get this program to work.

Mr. Podzaline opened the floor for discussion/questions.

D. Lee suggested the following changes:

- Page 2, Item (e).1.d, make two separate items, to read as follows: d. "The Board of Directors of the Mortlake Fire Company, Inc."
- Page 2, Item (e).1.e, to read as follows: "East Brooklyn Fire Department."
- Existing "e" would then become Item "(e).1.f."
There was discussion regarding the Boards of Directors.
- Page 2, Item (f) ELIGIBILITY (1) & (2) – Mr. Lee suggested that wherever either of the Fire Departments are mentioned, it be followed by, "or their successors, individually or collectively."
- Page 2, Item (f) ELIGIBILITY (3) – Change "can create" to "may create."
- Page 2, Item (f) ELIGIBILITY (1) – He suggests to either say emergency medical calls or define what R1 means.

There was discussion and Mr. Podzaline suggested defining both, fire call and R1 call, on Page 1, under Item (b) Definitions.

- Page 1, Item (b) Definitions (2) – The following was suggested, change “October 1, 2022” to “commencing the fiscal year following the effective date.”
- Mr. Lee suggested the following, Page 1, Item (b) Definitions (3) “Eligible Resident,” add, d) “A member of the organization with a collective 25 years of accrued service, or more, and otherwise not eligible or receiving any other service award program, would be eligible to receive the tax abatement.”

Discussion ensued and Mr. Podzaline stated that the intent of the Program was for the now. We need the responders now and this was to help incentivize people to either begin to be active or to become more active.

L. Berube commented that we need to keep the people that we have and to get more people involved. He feels we need to move it along and get it going.

P. Gauthier commented that this is the type of thing we need and our #1 goal is to get as many people as possible to come in the door. He feels that looking back 25 years would be a lot of trouble with paperwork because record keeping wasn't like it is now.

D. Lee commented that there is a gap in membership for different service lengths and he feels that, at some point, there should be something recognized for these individuals.

Mr. Podzaline will make the changes to be ready for the next meeting.

J. Soler arrived via Zoom at approximately 7:42 p.m.

b. Approve 2023 Regular Meeting Schedule

Motion was made by D. Lee to adopt the 2023 Regular Meeting Schedule for the Board of Fire Commissioners, as presented.

Second by L. Berube.

Discussion: M. Podzaline stated that although the Schedule states that meetings are to be held at the Clifford B. Green Meeting Center, they may begin to be held at the Fire Houses again at some point.

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

At this time, Chief Breen announced that Mortlake's Annual Banquet was held last Saturday, which David Lee was unable to attend. Chief Breen presented Mr. Lee with an award recognizing his 40 years of service not only as a Member, but also as an Officer and Director of the Mortlake Fire Company.

9. Public Comment – None.

10. Next Meeting – December 14, 2022.

11. Executive Session

a. Personnel matters

Motion was made by L. Berube to enter into Executive Session at 7:57 p.m., to discuss Personnel matters.

Second by P. Gauthier. No discussion.

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

Included in Executive Session: Michael Podzaline; Leo Berube; Patrick Gauthier; David Lee; and James Soler.

Motion was made by L. Berube to come out of Executive Session at 8:05 p.m.

Second by D. Lee. No discussion.

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

12. Adjournment

Motion was made by D. Lee to adjourn at 8:06 p.m.

Second by M. Podzaline. No discussion.

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

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault

Recording Secretary

6 Attachments: Public Statement by Jenn Nemeth dated November 9, 2022; BoFC ARPA Request; Proposed Ordinance Town of Brooklyn Tax Abatement Program for Certain Emergency Services Volunteers; Report – East Brooklyn Fire Department Town Funds As of June 30, 2022, Budget for July 2021 – June 2022; 2023 BoFC Schedule of Regular Meeting Dates; East Brooklyn Oct. Call Volume (there was no discussion regarding this document, but it was provided before the meeting).