

Board of Fire Commissioners
Regular Meeting
Wednesday, December 13, 2023
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

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Meeting ID: 884 1769 3055

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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, Chairman; Austin Tanner, First Selectman; Leo Berube; R. David Lee, Board of Finance Liaison; James Soler; Matthew Alexander, East Brooklyn F.D. Representative; Aimee Genna, Citizen Representative (all present in person).

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

Present via Zoom – John; Carrie Juhasz; Jenn Nemeth; Carrie Barna; Kathy, Matt Noren.

3. **Approve Minutes**
 - a. **Regular Meeting of November 8, 2023**

Motion was made by L. Berube to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of November 8, 2023, as presented.

Second by A. Genna.

Discussion:

R. D. Lee noted the following correction: Item 6.b Grant Requests, first sentence, to read as follows – “Mr. Lee stated that the Assistance Fire Fighters grant is coming up in January of 2024 and he asked if there were any plans to submit a grant request.”

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

4. **Public Comment** – Comments may be heard in their entirety, as well as the entire meeting, by calling the First Selectman’s Office and requesting the Zoom link:
 - **Jenn Nemeth** explained about a lengthy pdf document (with various attachments) that she had submitted in an email which, she explained, contains eight action items:
 - Flashing lights and sirens
 - Department Financials

- Certifications/Equipment when responding to a call
- FOIA
- Background Checks
- Social Media Policy
- Brooklyn Fire District Meeting Dates and Times
- Stipulated Court Order from September 12th, which was acted upon this week.

Ms. Nemeth read aloud from a written statement which she also submitted, in which the BoFC is asked to take a more active role in the cross/counter claim.

Mr. Podzaline stated that he had received Ms. Nemeth’s email and that it would be entered into the public record.

5. Equipment Discussion

a. Inventory – No discussion.

b. Apparatus

- Chief Breen explained that the annual DOT inspection will take place tomorrow. Pump service tests and ladder inspection have been done.

There was discussion regarding lost revenue due to the ambulance having been out of service. Chief Breen explained that he had reached out to the insurance agent, but has not been able to speak with them yet. He has taken steps forward, but does not have a conclusion yet.

- Chief Skene explained that East Brooklyn has also finish testing and everything is going well.

There was discussion regarding guidelines for use of Department trucks for non-Department business (such as attending training with a for-profit company). Chief Breen explained that there is no written policy about that, but it is a benefit and it is a Department function. There was discussion regarding expenses incurred. It is a training exercise of the Fire Company.

There was discussion regarding blocking a State highway. Chief Breen explained that they work with the Resident Trooper.

6. Department Discussion

a. Recruitment, Retention, Training

Two (one from each Department) have completed the EMT training and are in the process of testing.

Mr. Podzaline stated that he will be attending a workshop on Saturday.

b. Grant Requests

Chief Skene explained that he is in the process of working with a company to fill out paperwork. He hopes to have something in place with them for next month.

Mr. Lee asked if anyone from either Department had attended any of the FEMA regional courses. Nobody had.

Mr. Lee asked if the Departments would be applying for grants individually or combined.

Chief Skene explained that the grant for a poly vent system that he is applying for is specific to the EBFD.

Mr. Lee explained that, in the past, volunteer fire departments that do not have sleeping quarters were not eligible for those systems (per FEMA grant writing workshop that he attended in 2019). He said that the emphasis going forward would be on PPE.

There was discussion regarding gear expiration dates and how gear is handled for dual rostering. It was explained that Members are given gear from their primary Department and it has not been a cause of confusion. Responding to a mutual aid call, out of Town, could cause some confusion, but the hope is that, at some point, there would be grant money to provide two sets of gear for dual responders.

There was discussion regarding the Tax Abatement and it was explained that 95 percent of calls are within Brooklyn (automatic aid calls), but the Chiefs need to further discuss the details for documenting the mutual aid calls out of Town.

There was discussion regarding one of Mortlake's apparatus which is due to be replaced next (ladder).

c. Organizational Vision – No discussion.

d. Standard Operating Guidelines – Progress

Mr. Podzalne explained that the Chiefs are going to address the concerns expressed regarding the use of red and white lights. He asked if there is an SOG relating to this concern.

There was discussion. Chief Breen stated that there may one, but it would need to be updated. Chief Breen explained that they follow the State laws and guidelines.

- Chief Officers – Red and white flashing lights and sirens - citizen vehicles are obligated to pull over to allow them to pass.
- Other Volunteers (Junior Officers, General Membership) – Flashing blue lights which is a curtesy light – citizen vehicles may yield the way if they choose to. It does not allow you to run through a red light, speed, pass vehicles. Everything must be done with regard to public safety.

Chief Breen also explained about the different levels of calls.

Mr. Lee asked about the permitting process. Mr. Soler referred to CGS 14-96.q for the guidelines regarding the permitting process. A permit is required from the State for red and white lights and a permit from the Departmental Chief is required for blue lights. Mr. Lee asked if the Chiefs have documentation providing the permitting for blue lights and if they have the permits for each individual Chief Officer for the lights that they are using. Chief Breen stated that the Department would have that, they are carried in the vehicles.

e. Fire Department Self-Assessments – Progress

No discussion.

7. Financials

a. Accounts

i. Chart of Accounts

Mr. Lee asked if progress was being made regarding consolidating the Chart of Accounts as requested by the Board of Finance.

Mr. Lee reminded the Chiefs that it was voted on back in October that quarterly reports are due at the January 2024 meeting: Through the first two quarters of fiscal year 2023-2024 and then, quarterly reports thereafter, to be based on the consolidated Chart of Accounts.

The Chiefs stated agreement.

b. Budgets

There was discussion regarding the July-September budget that had been provided after the last meeting (money granted from the Town vs. money from fundraisers). Ms. Genna spoke about how it doesn't reflect actual expenses and revenues. Discussion continued. Mr. Lee stated both Departments have recognized that they use other funding to help their organization function and that it is up to the BoFC as to whether they want to ask for a further detailing of the entire cost of operations. Right now we are asking for a report that tells us how they are spending the Town's money. Mr. Lee said that this discussion could be tabled. Mr. Podzaline agreed.

There was discussion regarding EBFD building expenses. Mr. Alexander explained that the Department rents the building. The District is the Landlord and the Department is the Tenant, so maintenance cost of the building is the responsibility of the District. Chief Skene stated that it will be a much clearer budget this year.

8. Old Business

a. Volunteer Tax Abatement

Mr. Lee commented that we are waiting on information from both Departments - a sample on who would qualify for a given month, using the format.

b. Fire Lane Ordinance

There was discussion regarding correspondence from the Board of Selectmen. Areas of concern:

- Installation of signage - Mr. Lee explained that the Ordinance states that it is the responsibility of the property owner and, if not done properly, we have the ability to impose a fine. There was discussion. Mr. Podzaline and Ms. Genna expressed agreement with Mr. Lee.
- Penalty – There was discussion. Mr. Soler referred to the State Guidelines of 5-10 business days. Agreement was expressed among the Board.
- Should P&Z be involved and would it need to be announced in a public newspaper? – Mr. Lee suggested that the P&Z should be asked if they need to be involved and he explained that the draft language for the Ordinance clearly states, “The Fire Marshal shall cause a public announcement of the establishment of such fire lane to be printed in a newspaper having substantial circulation in the community.”
- Should municipal-owned fire lanes be maintained by the Town? - Mr. Lee stated that they should be because the Town maintains the property that the fire lane is on, so the Town should maintain the fire lane. Mr. Podzaline read aloud from the maintenance section of the draft Ordinance language.

Mr. Podzaline will forward an updated version of the draft language including the new language regarding penalty. The draft has not yet been sent to the Town Attorney for review.

There was discussion regarding who would be in charge of enforcement. The Resident State Trooper would be the most probable. Mr. Lee asked if we are sure that they have the authority to enforce municipal ordinances. Mr. Soler explained that CGS does allow local and State Police to enforce ordinances and law that have been passed – it is all answerable through the State. Discussion continued.

9. New Business

- Chief Skene explained that, during the last month, both Departments went through their five-year ISO inspection review and both passed. There are some areas that were brought to their attention which they are going to try to work on (training, documentation).
- Chief Breen commented about changes for the better regarding automatic aid (tanker and manpower).

Motion was made by M. Podzaline that the BoFC be provided with copies of the ISO Inspection Review Reports from both Departments once received.

Second by R. D. Lee. There was discussion regarding what the ISO report is about and that it affects insurance rates.

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

- There was discussion regarding the 2024 Schedule of Regular Meetings. Mr. Tanner commented that the January 10th date may have already been scheduled for another group.
- There was discussion regarding background checks. Mr. Lee asked that each Department provide an overview of the current practice with respect to background checks and the extent to which it covers criminal and motor vehicle records within and outside the State of Connecticut.

Motion was made by R.D. Lee that the BoFC requests, to be provided at the next meeting, the current status of the background check practice, for each Department, to include to the extent that it covers criminal and motor vehicle records, both inside of Connecticut and outside of Connecticut.

Second by J. Soler. There was discussion and it was clarified that they are asking for current practice. Cost was also discussed.

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

- Mr. Tanner commented about trying to keep the Chiefs informed about the paramedic situation which will be increasing substantially. There was discussion regarding providing feedback and about how it is decided whether the paramedic is needed.

10. Public Comment - Comments may be heard in their entirety, as well as the entire meeting, by calling the First Selectman's Office and requesting the Zoom link:

- **Jenn Nemeth** commented regarding the Fire Lane Ordinance and whether language should be added regarding deeds being amended, if a fire lane is added.

- **Carrie Barna** commented on the issue with BCI's - 501c3, First Responder. She said that the cost (\$35) falls on the volunteer.
- **Carrie Juhasz** commented about background checks. She suggested that some of the parking fees from the Brooklyn Fair could be used to offset the cost.
Regarding IRS filings, Ms. Juhasz stated that the EBFD is severely out of compliance in their filing as a 501c3 and she feels that they will incur many fees. There won't be any plausible deniability.

11. Next Meeting – January 10, 2024

12. Adjournment

Motion was made by L. Berube to adjourn at 8:20 p.m.

Second by R. D. Lee. No discussion.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary

Attachment: Correspondence – Fire Lanes from Board of Selectmen
Jenn Nemeth email dated December 3, 2023 with Attachments