

Board of Fire Commissioners
Special Meeting
Wednesday, December 14, 2022
7:00 pm via Zoom &
Mortlake Fire Company – NOTE CHANGE OF LOCATION
12 Canterbury Road, 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 7:00 p.m. (19:00 hours).
2. **Attendance:** Michael Podzaline; Austin Tanner, First Selectman, Leo Berube; David Costa; R. David Lee, Board of Finance Liaison; (all present in person). James Solar (via Zoom). Felix Ramos and Patrick Gauthier resigned.

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

Present via Zoom – Joe Voccio, Selectman.

3. **Approve Minutes**
 - a. **Regular Meeting of November 9, 2022**

Motion was made by D. Lee to accept the Minutes of the Special Meeting of November 9, 2022.
Second by L. Berube.

Discussion: D. Lee noted that the meeting was a special meeting, not a regular meeting.

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

4. **Public Comment**

M. Podzaline read aloud a letter submitted by Lou Brodeur, long-time Member of the Mortlake Fire Company. He acknowledges the diminishing number of volunteers over the years and he states that EMT's and Interior Firefighters are continuously mentioned during Tax Abatement Program discussions, but there is never any mention of the lack of drivers, in both Departments, especially during the day. Mr. Brodeur suggests the following:

- Consider adding Apparatus Drivers or Engineers onto the list of critical Members along with the Interior Firefighters and EMT's.
- Under Item F, Eligibility, Section 3 – The BoFC could create more stringent qualifications for the abatement should they wish to do so in the future.
- When and if it gets approved at a Town Meeting, the approved document becomes law and can only be changed by Town Meeting.
- Under Item F, Eligibility, last paragraph – Same as mentioned above, the BoFC cannot make changes to the approved program.

5. Equipment Discussion

Chief Pepin reported:

- New gear has been ordered (six sets). He said that he should be able to get the second set and put it on next year's budget, by the time he gets it. This is for current Members.
- They ordered a natural gas meter. It goes from PPM in percentages. Purchased locally.

Chief Breen reported:

- New truck is in service. Equipment and hose is being transferred. Hose is still on backorder. Lettering is getting finished and radios are installed. The old ET was out of service for about six days.
- They have qualified a small number of drivers on it, so they could get it going and will continue to get everyone trained.
- New hydraulic equipment has come in. They will focus on getting it in service and on heavy rescue.

6. Department Discussion

a. **Recruitment** – No discussion.

b. **Retention**

Chief Breen reported that comparing between last year and this year, Mortlake is doing much better.

Chief Pepin stated that East Brooklyn is doing well, except for daytime.

c. **Paid Staff**

M. Podzalne explained that the Board of Finance wanted a job description. Mr. Podzalne provided a draft job description for review by the Board Members over the next month or two. He acknowledged that the bar is set high, but it is open for discussion.

There was discussion. A. Tanner asked if it is planned to put it in the budget for this year. Mr. Podzalne stated that that is the plan and also to appeal to the ARPA Committee at the same time. D. Lee explained that the ARPA guidelines don't support funding of this nature, by creating a burden on the community for future funding. The thought is to use ARPA Funding to do a study so find what could be a potential solution for the Town of Brooklyn. Mr. Lee said that the original proposal was for paid staff for fire and the ambulance at the same time. He said that it is an addition as opposed to a one-for-one swap out. He said we can use ARPA money to help fund an evaluation. The ARPA Committee is currently researching this. Mr. Tanner stated that he has to get some clarification. Discussion continued. Mr. Lee explained that it would fall back to the BoFC to be responsible for managing the process.

7. Financial Reports Discussion

D. Lee explained that further discussion on reports will be postponed until January. He said that he will be making a proposal that this Board request closure statements from each Department at the end of the fiscal year.

8. Other Business

a. Volunteer Tax Abatement

M. Podzalne stated that the latest draft was attached to the Agenda and was posted online.

There was discussion regarding L. Brodeur's recommendations in his letter. Chief Pepin and Chief Breen both stated agreement with Mr. Brodeur. Chief Pepin explained that a driver is not just a driver. Both Chief's agree with making adjustments. M. Podzalne asked, "What is a qualified driver?" Certifications may also need to be added. Chief Pepin commented that some of the older/senior Members may not be certified. Mr. Lee suggested a grandfather clause.

Mr. Lee stated that after any changes are made, it would need to go to the Town Attorney for review. There was discussion about the Ordinance and it was stated that it should be written that this Board would have the authority to make changes. He suggested that, with respect to the eligibility, remove any specific reference there and just refer it to a policy/procedure of the BoFC. Then it could be modified. He said a qualified driver needs to be defined. He would like to see a two-part analysis: a census of how many people meet these definitions so that we can know the potential impact (reduced revenue to the Town); and the potential number of qualified Members based on call volume.

Mr. Lee asked if we are set on the ratio of percentage of claims being the same for both Departments. Mr. Podzalne explained that, with the adjustments made and the automatic aid responses to each other, it seems to be balancing out fairly closely, especially when you separate the EMS and Fire from each other.

There was discussion about whether to schedule a Subcommittee meeting. No meeting scheduled. There may be a Town Meeting before June.

M. Podzalne will work on the recommendations/impacts with the Chiefs.

9. Public Comment

Joe Voccio commented about the urgency of getting something done and he stated that he is in favor of the study to find out what the best approach is. He hopes that whatever is decided to do gets expedited. There was discussion.

Mr. Podzalne stated, for the record, that he appreciates the transparency from both Departments. Chief Pepin stated, for the record, "We are consolidating a lot of our calls and everything so we can provide a better service for our taxpayers."

At this time, new Member, David Costa was recognized.

10. Next Meeting – January 11, 2023

11. Executive Session

a. Discussion on Brooklyn Tax District/Brooklyn/Ice Box litigation

Motion was made by L. Berube to enter into Executive Session at 7:31 p.m., to discuss Brooklyn Tax District/Brooklyn/Ice Box litigation, with adjournment at the conclusion.

Second by A. Tanner. No discussion.

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

Included in Executive Session: Michael Podzaline; Austin Tanner; Leo Berube; David Costa; David Lee; and via Zoom James Soler and Joe Voccio.

12. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary

Attachments: Tax Abatement Draft – Version 4
Draft Job Description
November 2022 Calls – East Brooklyn