

Board of Fire Commissioners
Regular Meeting
Wednesday, February 8, 2023
7:00 pm via Zoom &
Clifford B. Green Meeting Center
Suite 24, 69 South Main Street, Brooklyn, CT

To join this meeting, follow the below instructions:

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MINUTES

1. **Call to Order** – Michael Podzaline, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m. (19:11 hours).

2. **Attendance:** Austin Tanner, First Selectman, Leo Berube; R. David Lee, Board of Finance Liaison; (all present in person).
Michael Podzaline and James Soler were present via Zoom.
David Costa was absent with notice.

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

Present via Zoom – Lou Brodeur, Selectman; Sandra Brodeur; Joe Voccio, Selectman; Jenn Nemeth;
Carrie Juhasz Horton.

3. **Approve Minutes**

a. **Regular Meeting of January 11, 2023**

Motion was made by L. Berube to accept the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 11, 2023.

Second by A. Tanner. No discussion.

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

4. **Public Comment** – None.

5. Equipment Discussion

Chief Pepin reported:

- East Brooklyn has a new combustible gas detector that they should be able to get into service this weekend. He acknowledged that a donation had been received from Kazantzis Real Estate which helped them to purchase this meter. He explained that it is simple to use regarding conversion of parts per million to percentages. He said that it will be helpful to both sides of Town.
- A pretty significant repair had to be made to the deck gun on the engine as one of the motors failed. The repair was done by Bulldog (Bozrah).
- There was also a heater, A/C module failure on the engine. This repair was also done by Bulldog.
- Chief Pepin stated that these repairs caused a significant hit to their budget.

Chief Breen reported:

- There was a minor problem with the Rescue in the last few days. The repair was done by Bulldog.
- No new equipment came in this month.

a. Grant requests

M. Podzaline asked if anyone had submitted an AFG request.

Chief Breen stated that, if he can gather his information together by the deadline (Friday), he would be making a request for ten sets of bunker gear for Mortlake.

b. Department Inventories – No discussion.

6. Department Discussion

a. Recruitment & Retention

Mr. Podzaline asked about the employee garage.

Chief Breen stated that he has not yet had an opportunity to meet with Mr. Tanner, Tommy and the Union to have a discussion.

b. Training

- Mr. Podzaline asked where each Department stands with training. He said that, in the near future, training would need to coordinate with the Tax Abatement. He asked if there is a vision regarding training and where the Members want to end up within one to five years.
- Mr. Lee commented that there needs to be an understanding for the people we have in the Departments and make sure we have funding available for the training that they are looking to get.
- Chief Breen stated that he has five Members that will be taking the Firefighter I class starting in March and one Member will be taking the EMR class in Moosup.

c. Paid Staff – EMS & Fire

Chief Breen explained that Mortlake's Board of Directors have had budget discussions regarding a significant hourly rate increase for Vintech paid staff to keep ahead of other agencies in the area to be able to maintain the staff that we have and not have issues trying to find paid staff to fill those slots for the ambulance. They will be paying them \$37/hour. He said that the Company is not going

to request funding from the Town for the ambulance itself, but they may find, at some point in the year, that they may need some extra funding. At this point, the Board of Directors feel that they will be okay.

Regarding the job description, Mr. Podzaline explained that he feels that there needs to be some language regarding potentially riding on the ambulance to cover all the bases. Chief Pepin explained that this is covered under Essential Functions and he said that the draft is almost ready to present for review by the Board (he read that section aloud). Mr. Podzaline stated that the Board will review it next month.

Mr. Podzaline stated that he needs to meet with Mr. Tanner regarding cost of personnel besides the hourly rate. Mr. Tanner sent it to the Town Attorney for review, but has not heard back yet.

Mr. Lee commented that the Safer Grant 30-day window opens up next month. He read aloud an e-mail that he had received pertaining to the Safer Grant. Volunteer Fire Departments can request money to fund paying full-time people. He explained that this would be the easiest way to get paid staff in-house and he suggested that this be pursued, rather than 100 percent Town funding. Mr. Podzaline explained that both the Safer Grant and ARPA become a burden for the Town. Mr. Lee explained that the guidelines are different.

There was discussion regarding hiring a grant writer. Mr. Tanner stated that the Town would probably not be opposed. Chief Pepin will look into this tomorrow. Mr. Podzaline noted that there would not be enough time for the BoFC to act on it (deadline to apply 3/17/2023). Mr. Tanner asked the Chiefs if there was any money that they could put toward this.

7. Financial Reports Discussion

a. FY 23/24 Budget

Mr. Lee explained that each of the Chiefs would present their Draft Budget Proposals, comments/questions would be reviewed and approved at the next meeting, and the proposals would then be presented to the Board of Finance for review.

Chief Pepin reviewed the Draft for East Brooklyn (he had provided copies to Board Members):

- There was an increase of six active Members which he explained are the reason for some of the increases.
- Other increases are due to increases in pricing.

There was discussion with Mr. Lee regarding line items and what comes out of them. Chief Pepin explained that he takes from one to cover costs in another. Chief Pepin explained that he was unaware that Capital money was being used for the last payment of the SCBA's which wiped-out $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Capital.

There was discussion regarding physicals. Mr. Podzaline and Mr. Lee were in agreement that physicals are a justifiable line-item increase. Chief Pepin will adjust.

Chief Breen reviewed the Draft for Mortlake (he had provided copies to Board Members):

- He read aloud from his letter (dated February 8, 2023), reviewed the sheet entitled, *2022 Call Totals*, and explained the List of Members, all of which were included as part of the Draft packet.

- They are looking at nearly a 15-percent increase. He explained that many of the increases are due to increases in pricing, building maintenance, alarm system (one-time increase for installation), vehicle maintenance (including repairs to the ladder truck), cleaning service, Eversource Loan (has been paid off), utilities and fuel.

Mr. Lee noted that no column for prior year actuals for 2020/2021 and no column for year-to-date for 2022/2023. Mr. Breen will correct.

There was discussion. Mr. Lee suggested that a five-year span should be included:

2020/2021 Actual, 2021/2022 Actual, 2022/2023 Actual, 2022/2023 Budget, 2022/2023 Year-to-Date, 2023/2024 Proposal.

There was discussion regarding physicals, building maintenance, benefit from solar panels, facilities (structures are good for the next ten years).

Chief Breen explained that he also takes from one line item to cover costs in another.

There was discussion regarding the line item for Audit/Accounting Services. Mr. Lee asked if an audit was included last year. Chief Breen explained that, to the best of his knowledge, it did not. He thinks that the increase was due to added fees/financial review/change in status.

Chief Breen continued reviewing the Mortlake Draft Proposal:

- No change to request for Safety Equipment Expenses.
- He does not anticipate any large purchase of large diameter hose due to the new truck.
- There is an ARPA request to enhance the radio abilities throughout the Town.

There was discussion.

Chief Breen continued reviewing the Mortlake Draft Proposal:

- Capital Funding – What Mortlake may be looking for over the next five years: Sewer (tie into the City sewer); replace air compressor; replace Ladder 190; and replace Tanker 190.
- Air Packs Model Numbers.
- Air Bottles for the Air Packs (indicating the last tested date). This inventory does not include twelve new bottles for the last six packs.
- They will need to replace five SCBA after this year. Mr. Lee noted that it doesn't add up and he said that this would be something to look at from a grant perspective.

Chief Pepin stated that East Brooklyn has 18 packs and roughly 40 bottles.

Mr. Lee explained that the Board of Finance would like the BoFC to request more detailed reports from the Fire Departments. The following items should be included:

- Identify when packs will be due.
- Last test date for bottles.
- Longer range plan for Capital: apparatus; facility upgrades.
- Membership Roster.
- Tracking Information: length of service; age; documented trainings; what they respond to (fire only, medical only, or both).

Mr. Lee will send information to Members.

8. Other Business

a. Volunteer Tax Abatement

Mr. Podzalne explained that the BoFC had forwarded it to the Selectmen who discussed it and it has been sent to the Town Attorney for review. The Selectmen requested that the Board of Finance review it as well. There was discussion. Information on those who qualify needs to be submitted to the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Lee stated that the Town has not filed an update to the local EMS plan. The most current version was 2015 and was due in 2020. He suggested that it be reviewed and he read aloud an e-mail from Steve Hotchkis from the Connecticut Department of Health.

9. Public Comment

Mr. Tanner explained that Carrie Juhasz Horton had sent him a letter to read, but there are discrepancies between the Department and the District that he would like clarified.

Carrie Juhasz Horton was present via Zoom and read her letter aloud. She said that she has supporting documents.

Ms. Horton has concerns regarding transparency/oversight.

Gil Maiato, seated in the audience, asked about 990n.

Ms. Horton explained that it is a form for non-profit entities that collect under \$50,000.

10. Next Meeting – March 8, 2023

11. Adjournment

Motion was made by L. Berube to adjourn at 8:37 p.m. (20:37 hours).

Second by R. David Lee. No discussion.

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

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary

Attachments: 23-24 Mortlake Budget Proposal
Draft Firefighter Job Description
Draft Worksheets provided by R. David Lee
East Brooklyn January 2023 Calls
Carrie Juhasz Horton letter, e-mails and supporting docs
Carrie Juhasz Horton additional information