

**Board of Fire Commissioners**  
**Regular Meeting**  
Wednesday, March 13, 2024  
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**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84876425108?pwd=1bpoPBLMRzsrognlOet8zOT16CHxal.1>

**Meeting ID: 848 7642 5108**

**Passcode: 333212**

**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.
2. **Attendance:** Michael Podzaline, Chairman (Citizen Representative); Aimee Genna, Vice Chair (Citizen Representative); R. David Lee, Board of Finance Liaison; Matthew Alexander, East Brooklyn F.D. Representative; Austin Tanner, First Selectman (all present in person).  
James Soler, Citizen Representative (present via Zoom).  
Leo Berube is no longer a Member of the BoFC.

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

There were three people present in the audience: Sandra Brodeur; Lou Brodeur; John Livernoche.

**Present via Zoom** – Carrie Barna; Ciaran Wilcox; WINY Radio; Erin; Chris; Galaxy 521-5G; iPad; iPad. There was one call-in user.

3. **Approve Minutes**
  - a. **Regular Meeting of January 31, 2024**

Motion was made by M. Alexander to accept the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 31, 2024, as presented.

Second by R.D. Lee.

Discussion:

A. Genna noted the following corrections:

- Military time for start of meeting was incorrect, it should be 19:31.
- Item 6.b, second bullet item, third paragraph from the top of Page 3, third sentence to read as follows: "Part ff the salary would be reimbursable by the State."

R.D. Lee noted the following corrections:

- Item 6.b, second bullet item, third paragraph from the top of Page 3, fifth sentence to read as follows: "Administratively, members would not answer to the Fire Administrator on scene (they would respond to the ranking Officer).

- Page 4, Item 7.a.i, third sentence to read as follows: “Mr. Lee stated that this information will be provided to the Board of Finance to advise them that it has been completed to the best of our knowledge.
- Page 5, Item 8.a, last sentence to read as follows: Mr. Lee commented that this will, likely, not be in place until FY 2025/2026, based on the definitive statement.

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

**4. Public Comment – None.**

**5. Equipment Discussion**

**a. Inventory Spreadsheets**

**i. Personal Protective Equipment**

- Chief Skene stated that one is at the Board of Finance and the other is included as part of the Report (inventory).
- Chief Breen stated that air pack, air bottle and PPE inventories were included in the Budget presentation.

**b. Apparatus**

A.Genna asked about the insurance claims for the lost revenue.

Chief Breen explained that they may have missed the window of opportunity due to timing. He is still communicating with the insurance company, but they are not sure what they will be able to do about it. Chief Breen approximates the lost revenue to be between \$28,000 to \$30,000 (68 calls).

**6. Department Discussion**

**a. Recruitment, Retention, Training – No discussion.**

**b. Grants**

- Chief Breen explained that Mortlake had a lot of issues with trying to submit the grant (getting authorized users onto the system. He explained that, despite all of the effort that went into it, they were not able to submit for the grant.
- Chief Skene stated that EBFD’s grant, for the vehicle exhaust system for the Station, has been submitted.

Mr. Podzaline asked about the SAFER Grant.

- Chief Skene explained that they are in discussion, but he was hoping to do it jointly with Mortlake, but he does not think that Mortlake will be able to get involved.

A.Genna asked if Mortlake will be able to go through a grant process going forward.

Sandy Brodeur explained that they didn’t know about the issue with getting users (not recognized by AFG) on the system until it was too late, but it is fixed and Mortlake is now all set going forward. There was discussion. Ms. Brodeur explained that the Office Administrator has taken the grant training program and they will be able to prepare the paperwork for grants going forward.

**c. Organizational Changes**

**i. Standard Operating Guidelines**

**ii. Fire Department Self-Assessments**

Mr. Podzaline tabled these discussions.

## 7. Financials

### a. Complete Budget Requests

- Chief Skene provided copies of EBFD's 2024-2025 Budget Proposal and reviewed each page. General Operating Budget - \$94,500 and \$21,270 - Town Safety Budget for a total of \$115,770.

Chief Skene explained about the new Line Items: Legal Expenses - \$8,000; Alarms/Security Maint. - \$3,000; and Accounting Services \$5,000.

Mr. Podzalne reviewed with Chief Skene the qualifications of each Member (interior firefighter, exterior firefighter, fire police) and if their physicals were up-to-date. There was a correction noted to the Membership List: William Wheaton, Sr. is not the District President.

There was discussion and the Board reviewed each line item and compared to previous requests and Chief Skene answered their questions.

Regarding the Fire District, Chief Skene will provide information regarding what funds the Fire District provided to, or on behalf of, the Fire Department. Chief Skene explained about things that were paid for by the Fire District last year including safety equipment, EBFD's portion of the annual banquet, gear washer, and for the construction of the back lounge area at the Fire House.

Mr. Podzalne stated his opinion (based on the number of qualified Members) that it is a waste of taxpayers' money to not merge the two Departments. He is concerned about the return on investment of taxpayer dollars.

Chief Skene explained that some Members had moved over to Mortlake and he explained that it had been discussed at the recent annual meeting and the Department feels that we should stay as we are and put a lot of effort into recruiting. They feel that a merger at this time would not be beneficial to the people that live on this side of Town (the majority of Mortlake is on the other side of Route 169 which will delay responses out of the Station). Chief Breen acknowledged that there are some dueling expenses that, by merging the Departments there would be some less expense operationally, but his point of view is that when the Departments do merge, from a standpoint of response area, geography, and risk of structural development on this side of Town, he sees the continued need to operate two Stations for the next several years. He explained that the manpower pool has shifted, but from a Town-wide perspective, you have the same manpower pool.

Discussion continued. A. Genna stated that she would prefer to table EBFD until after discussion on Mortlake's Budget proposal.

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to table the East Brooklyn Fire Department Budget Request.

Second by A. Genna. No discussion.

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

J. Soler left the meeting at approximately 8:10 p.m. and returned at approximately 8:30 p.m.

- Chief Breen provided copies of Mortlake's 2024-2025 Budget Proposal. General Operating Budget - \$115,700, Safety Equipment - \$30,775, and Ambulance - \$135,800.

Some corrections were noted to the lists of Members: one Member was incorrectly listed as a Paramedic, it should be EMT; Cody Ogozalek should be listed as Firefighter 2; Matt

Alexander was incorrectly listed - he is EMR Ambulance Driver only; and Aaron Breen should be listed as Firefighter 1.

Chief Breen explained that the flow testing for their 21 packs was not included because he has not yet received the report for the testing that was done during February 2024.

Chief Breen explained about the increase in Vehicle Maintenance and about the new line items for Background Checks (estimated cost per person approximately \$30) and Forensic Audit. Mr. Lee suggested that the Forensic Audit be included under Audit/Accounting Services. Mr. Lee also feels that Alarm System is not clearly defined.

Chief Breen explained that there is no change to Safety Equipment, but their requirements will continue to change, so they will continue to monitor.

There was discussion and the Board reviewed each line item (comparing to previous years) with Chief Breen and he answered their questions.

There was discussion regarding carry-over on the Safety Budget. Chief Breen explained that it has been a flat amount for as long as he can remember and that expenses change from year to year and that they are not locked-in to those lines, they are there as placeholders. Mr. Lee explained that on the Town Budget, money gets turned back to the Town if it does not get spent in that fiscal year. Sandy Brodeur explained that Safety Equipment is, basically, handled like Capital with the Town. Ms. Brodeur stated that it is voted on separately and the Auditor understands and has no problem with it. Discussion continued. Mr. Tanner expressed concern about transparency. Ms. Brodeur explained that, on the monthly reports, there is transparency.

There was discussion regarding seven sets of gear that Mortlake needs to order at a cost of \$26,000.

Mr. Lee explained that his perspective on these Budgets, at this point, would be, generally, no increases at all over prior year. He feels that the Community has gone through two years of mill increases and we really need to be cognizant of that and understand that it's been difficult for everyone and for any organization to ask the Community to hand out even more, he feels, is tough.

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to support a flat Mortlake request to match last year's request - Operating Budget of \$114,500 and Safety Capital Budget of \$30,775.

Second by M. Alexander.

Discussion.

- A. Tanner expressed agreement with R.D. Lee regarding mill increases over the last two years. He said that it would be nice if we could hold the line.

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

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to support a Budget for East Brooklyn Fire Department of: Operating - \$80,000; and Safety Capital - \$21,270.

Second by M. Alexander.

Discussion:

- R.D. Lee explained that his comments made regarding mill rate and the need to be conscious of the impact apply, but the disparity here is that, based on his review, the ask this year is significant at almost 18 percent, which is a little much.

- A. Tanner expressed agreement, but he said that the \$80,000 is because we had a major reduction from what they asked for last year.
- Mr. Lee agreed, but stated, that if you annualize their expenses to date, based on what was provided, they are still well below the \$80,000 (based on the prior report).

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

Discussion regarding the Ambulance Budget:

R.D. Lee recused himself as he has received benefit from the Ambulance within the last year as he is a paid Staff person and he left the room (9:12 p.m.). M. Alexander also recused himself and left the room (9:12 p.m.).

J. Soler left the meeting at 9:12 p.m. At this time, there were three Members remaining.

Chief Breen explained the history of requesting supplemental funding from the Town for paid Staff on the Ambulance which started in approximately 2006 (approximately \$80,000) and went for about ten years. Then they were able to sustain the Ambulance with the Staffing by itself until COVID (2020/2021), then they received ARPA money to help fill the gap. He explained that there has been a shift and they are only receiving about 44 percent of what they can bill. He explained about contractual agreements and about increases to Vintech to stay competitive in the area. He explained about how the largest portion of the population that they serve is over age 65 and about how Medicare/Medicaid pay less (their two biggest payers). He referred to the bar charts provided. He explained about annual rate increases from the State which help, but don't close the gap. He explained that they are working with American Ambulance to begin billing for "no transport calls" (e.g. lift assist). They are also looking into an EFT system.

Mr. Podzaline suggested tabling this discussion to a special meeting when new Mortlake Representative Member, Dave Kowolenko will be able to be present. Chief Breen expressed agreement.

Motion was made by M. Podzaline to table discussion on the Ambulance Portion of the Mortlake Budget Proposal to a later date.

Second by A. Genna.

There was discussion regarding that there was not a quorum. R.D. Lee and M. Alexander had recused themselves, but were brought back to the table to have a quorum for this vote.

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

J. Solar had left the meeting at 9:12 p.m. and did not return.

There was discussion regarding the Capital Funding Program – Air Compressor \$89,000. Chief Breen explained that his understanding is that no other modifications to the facility would be needed to install the air compressor. Chief Breen answered questions.

## 8. Old Business

### a. Volunteer Tax Abatement

Mr. Podzaline explained about the amended Volunteer Tax Abatement Verification form. He will provide it electronically.

### b. Staffing – No discussion.

**c. EBFD Generator**

Chief Skene stated that the generator is fixed.

**9. New Business**

There was discussion regarding scheduling a special meeting to discuss the Ambulance financials. It was decided to wait to schedule until it is known whether there will be a quorum (four needed).

**10. Public Comment**

Carrie Barna asked about background checks and suggested that there be a six-month to a year minimum and the volunteers pay up-front and if they meet the minimum, they get their money back.

Carrie Barna asked if there is an ethics situation in either Fire Department, would it go before the BoFC or the Ethics Board.

Mr. Tanner stated that an ethics complaint would go to the Ethics Board.

**11. Next Meeting – Regular Meeting Scheduled for April 10, 2024.**

**12. Adjournment**

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to adjourn at 9:40 p.m.

Second by A. Tanner. No discussion.

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

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault

Recording Secretary