

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

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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 Soler was present via Zoom.

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 – Lou Brodeur, Selectman; John DonFransisco; Nemeth; Dave Kowlenko.

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

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to accept the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of February 8, 2023.

Second by A. Tanner.

Discussion:

- Mr. Lee noted a correction to Item #6.a., first sentence, to read as follows: “Mr. Podzaline asked about the employee at the Town Garage.”

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

4. **Public Comment** – None.

5. Equipment Discussion

a. Grant requests

Mr. Podzaline asked about the status of grants. No AFG grant requests. Mr. Tanner was working with a potential vendor for a SAFER Grant; however, he stated that the SAFER Grant is out.

Chief Pepin explained that he got a grant from Eversource.

Chief Breen stated that the request for ten sets of gear for Mortlake did not go through.

b. Department Inventories

Mr. Podzaline asked about the status regarding updates on Department inventories.

- Chief Pepin stated that it will take a little time to get it done.
He explained that the FIT tester here in northeastern CT does not do N-95's, but once the machine is available, they will update everybody, including himself, for SCBA testing. They will be discussing how to accomplish this at the next Chiefs' meeting. Chief Breen stated that they have the equipment and that he knows someone who can do it. Mr. Podzaline offered his services as well.

Mr. Podzaline asked Chief Pepin about a post on FaceBook, that had been brought-up to him earlier in the day, regarding Back-To-Basics Training. He noticed that an East Brooklyn fire truck was present.

- Chief Pepin explained that they were able to make a little bit of money because Back-To-Basics will pay East Brooklyn for the use of the apparatus. A Driver/Pump Operator was also there. The money goes to the membership.
Chief Breen explained that area Departments, including Mortlake, have supported Back-To-Basics trainings with apparatus.
There was discussion. Mr. Lee questioned whether resources were out of service. Chief Pepin explained that no resources were out of service and that they would've responded. It is not a primary piece of apparatus (either for medicals or for fires).
- Chief Pepin explained that East Brooklyn also had a repeater issue that had to get taken out of the Engine, which has been an ongoing issue.
- Chief Breen explained that, apparatus-wise, Mortlake is in decent shape, but Ambulance 590 is a problem. It is too old. They hope to move forward with ARPA money, eventually.

Mr. Podzaline asked about radios which had been discussed months ago.

- Chief Pepin stated that he is not sure about how it is going to work.
Bill Skene (in the audience) explained that they are getting radios for apparatus and Officers. It will be for Town Fire Departments, Ambulance, Town Highway Crews.

6. Department Discussion

a. Recruitment, Retention, Training

Mr. Podzaline stated that Chief Breen was on the radio.

Chief Breen explained that he had an opportunity to speak with the Brooklyn Business Association regarding possibly allowing employees to volunteer during daytime hours. He feels that it is something that the Region should consider. He asked if there is something that the Town can do for the businesses who participate. He said it is only a concept, but he feels that it was a very worthwhile venture.

Chief Pepin stated that they had an opportunity to discuss a lot of different types of things. He felt it went very well.

There was discussion. Mr. Podzaline asked if there is a State Statute that requires employers to let people go. Mr. Lee read aloud from a State Statute that was passed in 2003 which states that they can't discriminate against it. Mr. Lee asked if it had been discussed with the employers. Mr. Lee said that it should be discussed with the Members as well. He said that it would require the Fire Chief to provide a letter to the individual so they can provide it to their employer.

Chief Breen stated that we don't want to threaten the business, we want to work with them. He suggested visiting business that weren't present at the meeting. He said there were far more positives than negatives. Chief Pepin agreed.

Mr. Podzaline asked about the Town Highway employees. Mr. Tanner stated that he has not spoken with the Union yet.

b. Paid Staff

Mr. Podzaline explained that he, personally, does not feel that the Town is ready, at this point, to get paid staffing. He does not feel that the Departments are ready to handle paid staffing at this time. He explained that, moving forward, the best route for the BoFC is to evaluate over the next six-to-twelve months (combine SOG's) and build a case to present it properly to the townspeople. We need to have answers to the questions that will be asked.

Mr. Tanner, Chief Pepin and Chief Breen all stated agreement.

Chief Breen stated that they have a good foundation for the direction we want to go and they will continue to work on management responsibilities and duties and on compiling statistical data to present. He feels that the operational changes made during the past year between the two Departments closed the gap a bit.

Mr. Lee stated agreement and suggested looking at other alternatives such as paid call process/stipend for fire fighters to encourage volunteerism. Chief Breen agreed and said that nothing off the table.

Mr. Podzaline commented that while streamlining, the Departments have been working together fantastically. He said that combining the really important SOG's would really help.

Chief Pepin said that they have already had discussions about trying to combine them.

Mr. Podzaline said that we know the general direction that these two Departments are going to have in the next 5-10 years, so anything done now will make it more seamless for all parties involved.

Mr. Tanner commented that some people think a study would be useful. Mr. Podzaline said that other Towns have done studies and he doesn't feel that a lot of money needs to be spent on a study. The last study in Brooklyn was in 1989. Mr. Lee said that there are two advantages to having a study: it gives us an independent resource to look back to; and it would take into consideration facility needs. Mr. Skene will provide a copy of the 1989 Study to Mr. Podzaline.

7. Financial Reports Discussion

a. FY 23/24 Budget

Chief Pepin presented the proposed FY 23/24 Budget for East Brooklyn (attached):

- From the discussion at the last meeting, he explained about physicals which are approximately \$250 per firefighter, done annually (total cost \$5,000).
- He explained the line items that showed increases: Membership/Retention; Education & Training; Sewer; Waste Disposal & Removal; Equipment & Hand Tools; Telephone; Equipment Maintenance & Supply; Equipment Repair & Parts; Electricity; Diesel.
- No increase to Capital.

Motion was made by L. Berube Berube to accept the East Brooklyn’s proposed FY 23/24 Budget, as presented.

Second by R.D. Lee.

Discussion:

Chief Pepin will look into Energize CT regarding changing delivery service for electricity.

There was discussion about physicals. The two Departments are in discussions regarding getting reduced rates for combining with other volunteer Fire Departments in the area.

Mr. Lee noted that the total net operating expenses went down \$100 since last month.

There was discussion regarding use of Tax District money. Mr. Costa suggested that the Tax District be asked about this. Chief Pepin explained that there is an Attorney who is taking care of everything (through the District and through the Fire Department) to get it all straightened out and make sure that everything is done perfectly. Chief Pepin said that he is not responsible for anything that has happened in the past.

Mr. Lee read from what was posted with the Town Clerk for the Tax District for FY 7/1/2022 – 6/0/2023.

Mr. Lee asked what the East Brooklyn Fire Department is getting from the Tax District; what is the Tax District paying for vs. what Town money is being used for; and he asked what the purpose of the Tax District is. Chief Pepin stated that they are responsible for paying for some repairs/things for the building. Chief Pepin stated that he understands and he said that if he had an answer, he would have no problem answering.

Mr. Lee referred to and read aloud from the Meeting Minutes of the annual Tax District Meeting of May 2, 2022, regarding account balances. Chief Pepin said that a lot of money was allocated for certain things (like a day room in the Fire House), but was never spent. It was voted on a long time ago.

There was discussion regarding Safety Capital. Chief Pepin explained that they will not have to buy bottles for the packs for fifteen years. He explained that next year FY 23/24, they want to get a gear washer (\$12,000) and he doesn’t know what the plumbing will cost. Discussion continued regarding \$7,000 that is going to pay for gear for new Members.

There was discussion regarding radios and large diameter hose which Chief Pepin explained that he was thinking of removing because it was done last year and it doesn’t make sense to him.

For the Record, Mr. Podzalne read aloud from the By-Laws of the Brooklyn Fire District, Mission Statement and from Article 3 – Operation of the East Brooklyn Fire Station. Mr. Podzalne said that if you apply that statement from this Budget request, you would eliminate \$38,720 (Building Maintenance, Alarm System, Property Upkeep, Water for the Building, Sewer, Waste Disposal, Natural Gas for the Building, and Electricity for the Building). He explained that the District Tax Payers are being double taxed.

Mr. Tanner explained that these questions will need to be answered when they are asked during the Budget process. Discussion continued.

Mr. Lee explained that if this item were table to the April 12th meeting of the BoFC, there would still time to present it to the Board of Finance at their meeting on April 19th.

There was no vote for this Motion.

Motion was made by A. Tanner to table approval of the FY 23/24 Budget Request for East Brooklyn Fire Department to next meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners to be held on April 12, 2023.

Second by R.D. Lee. No discussion.

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

Chief Breen presented the proposed FY 23/24 Budget for Mortlake (attached):

- They did not make any changes since the presentation last month. He brought it back to the Board of Directors and they are happy with items such as physicals, vaccinations and training. He explained that there are different levels of physicals and vaccinations and he said that they are comfortable with the proposed Operating Budget - \$119,750.
- Regarding their Safety Equipment Funding - \$30,775, he explained that the numbers are their best estimates for what it has trended in the past.

- Total Proposed Budget Request - \$150,525.

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to accept Mortlake's grant request as presented – Operating Budget - \$119,750 and Capital Funding Request - \$30,775.

Second by M. Podzaline.

Discussion:

The following items were discussed: physicals, training, building maintenance, alarm system, vehicle maintenance, cleaning, equipment repair, utilities, diesel fuel, radios, gear, internet service.

Regarding cleaning, East Brooklyn does not have a cleaning service. Mr. Tanner will look into incorporating the Town Janitor.

Mr. Tanner will find out if the Town negotiated with the fuel company yet.

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

8. Old Business

a. Volunteer Tax Abatement (attached)

Mr. Podzaline explained that the Town Attorney has reviewed it and it is in the Selectmen's hands at that point. He had requested that Mortlake provide twelve months of cost from the previous year for the Board of Selectmen. Chief Breen offered to resend it.

9. New Business

Mr. Podzaline spoke about combining SOG's and a grade scale for paid staffing. He hopes to have something for the next meeting.

Mr. Tanner mentioned about filling the vacancy for a Citizen Member.

Mr. Tanner spoke about an opioid settlement and asked if the Departments had a use for NARAN.

Chief Breen will check with the ambulance staff.

Mr. Lee asked where we stand on the Heart Safe Program.

Chief Breen explained that it is moving forward. They are working on getting the statistics on all of the DFIBS in Town.

10. Public Comment

Lieutenant, Nick Provost, President of the East Brooklyn Fire Department and Fire District requested an Executive Session so that he could answer questions for the Brooklyn Fire District.

Motion was made by D. Costa to enter into Executive Session at 8:46 p.m. with Lieutenant, Nick Provost, President of the East Brooklyn Fire Department and Fire District so he could answer questions about the Fire District.

Second by L. Berube.

Discussion: 2/3 vote required to pass.

Mr. Lee gave his opinion that if there is discussion about a public entity, it should be in a public forum.

Those In favor: D. Costa; J. Soler; L. Berube.

Those Opposed: R.D. Lee; A. Tanner; M. Podzaline.

Motion failed by hand vote (3-3-0).

11. Next Meeting – April 12, 2023

12. Adjournment

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to adjourn at 8:48 p.m. (20:48 hours).

Second by L. Berube. No discussion.

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

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault

Recording Secretary

Attachments: Proposed Budget for East Brooklyn F.D. for FY 23/24

Proposed Budget for Mortlake F.D. for FY 23/24

Proposed Ordinance Town of Brooklyn Tax Abatement Program for Certain Emergency Services Volunteers (clean version)

Proposed Ordinance Town of Brooklyn Tax Abatement Program for Certain Emergency Services Volunteers (red line version)