

**Board of Fire Commissioners**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**Wednesday, April 12, 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:

**Join Zoom Meeting**

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**MINUTES**

1. **Call to Order** – Michael Podzaline, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. (19:02 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 twenty additional people present in the audience including those who offered comments from the public: Joe Voccio, Selectman; Lou Brodeur, Selectman; Nicholas Provost, President Brooklyn Fire District; Gil Maiato; Lisa Herring.

**Present via Zoom** – There were nineteen additional people present via online including those who offered comments from the public: Kim Lombardi; Jenn Nemeth; Carrie Juhasz Horton; John; Matt Nemeth.

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

Motion was made by D. Costa to accept the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 8, 2023.

Second by L. Berube. No discussion.

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

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to restrict public comment to 2.5 minutes per person.

Second by L. Berube. No discussion.

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

#### 4. Public Comment

- **Joe Voccio** commented about concerns that had been previously expressed regarding staffing levels. He asked that it be confirmed whether that need still exists before the budget process is completed, so that they would know if they need to take additional steps.  
Mr. Podzaline stated that it would be addressed during the budget discussion.
- **Nicholas Provost**, President of the East Brooklyn Fire Department and President of the Brooklyn Fire District, read aloud a letter which he provided along with a document regarding the Brooklyn Fire District (both attached).
- **Gil Maiato**, 594 Hartford Road, commended both Chief Pepin and Chief Breen for the work they do. He expressed dissatisfaction with last month's BoFC meeting. Mr. Maiato spoke about how he feels the budget should cover cleaning of the Fire Houses and how he feels that Mr. Lee is too abrasive and that he questions and complains about everything that East Brooklyn does. He said that East Brooklyn has a really good Fire Department.
- **R. Dave Lee** apologized to anyone who may have been offended at the March meeting of the BoFC and acknowledged that his tone may have been inappropriate. He explained that the questions that he raised during this budget cycle, he has also raised in the past. His goal is transparency and accountability of public funds.
- **Kim Lombardi** (via Zoom) spoke of how she is concerned about safety, background checks and the integrity of the East Brooklyn Fire Department. She feels information should be known.

#### 5. Equipment Discussion

##### a. Grant requests

###### Chief Breen:

- Mortlake's Grant Request to Connecticut Water was denied because they had received a grant within the last two years.

###### Chief Pepin:

- Received a \$1,500 check from Eversource from a grant request. He explained that they applied it toward Seek Thermal Imaging Cameras (each firefighter has their own).

##### b. Department Inventories – No discussion.

##### c. Apparatus

###### Chief Breen reported:

- The new ET is doing very well.
- On Monday, they had a drill with East Brooklyn on the ladder truck and it went well.
- All of their air packs were flow tested and all passed. New air packs purchased last year went into the new ET.

## 6. Department Discussion

**Chief Breen** explained that March was a very busy month for EMS. Chief Pepin stated agreement and explained that there are a lot of EMS calls in the middle of the night and he is grateful for the Members from both Departments who respond to the calls.

### a. Recruitment, Retention, Training

**Chief Breen** reported:

- Mortlake has a couple of applications pending: one from EBFD for the ambulance; and another that has a great deal of experience as a firefighter.
- Five members are taking the Firefighter 1 Class.

**Mr. Tanner** did not have information regarding the Highway Department employee.

### b. Self-Assessment Study (Town of Brooklyn Firefighting Standards & Professional Guidelines Evaluation attached)

**Mr. Podzaline** explained that it would be good for the Board to know what areas each Department excel in and what areas the Board could assist with.

**Chief Breen** stated that Mortlake would start making assessments after getting through budget season. He commented about the effort to standardize/unify SOG's and SOP's. The first draft of the radio procedures will be the first of truly combined SOG for both Departments.

**Mr. Podzaline** commended the Chiefs for working well together.

**Mr. Lee** suggested keeping this item on the agenda to stay focused on it. Mr. Podzaline confirmed that it will stay on the agenda under "Old Business."

**Chief Pepin** stated that he plans to review it over the next few days.

## 7. Financial Reports Discussion

### a. FY 23/24 Budget

**Mr. Podzaline** explained that East Brooklyn's Budget had been tabled from last month.

**Mr. Lee** asked what support the East Brooklyn Fire Department gets from the Tax District relating to building maintenance line items.

**D. Costa** referred to the letter and the documentation provided by Nicholas Provost. Mr. Costa read aloud the "Financial Responsibilities" page and the "Building Maintenance Agreement" page from the documentation provided.

**Mr. Podzaline** stated, for the Record, standard operating guidelines for the Brooklyn Fire District.

**Chief Pepin** explained that it is pretty much on the same basis as a landlord/tenant situation.

**Mr. Lee** commented that reference had been made to By-Laws which may have been different.

**Mr. Podzaline** explained that the answer to the question is irrelevant to the BoFC. The Selectmen and the Board of Finance have their opportunity to do with it what they may, but as far as the BoFC is concerned, it has been satisfactorily answered. He asked if there had been any changes to the budget proposal since last month.

**Mr. Costa** stated \$90,466 and \$21,270 Capital, for a grand total of \$111,736.

Motion was made by M. Podzaline to approve the East Brooklyn Fire Department's Budget Request for FY 2023/2024 – \$111,736 (Budget - \$90,466 and Capital - \$21,270).

Second by L. Berube.

Discussion: Mr. Lee asked what the percentage increase is.

Mr. Costa stated that it is 15.91 and that there are some things that they don't know about (like electrical).

Mr. Lee stated, from the Board of Finance perspective, it's going to be tough because the rate increase is pretty high.

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

**Chief Breen** explained that Mortlake's Budget Request of \$119,750 was approved last month, but there was a question regarding the \$5,700 line item for cleaning. He met with Mr. Tanner last week and discussed the use of the Town Custodian to clean the facilities and they believe that this will work out. Therefore, there may be a reduction in their Budget, bringing it to \$114,050 which will also reduce the percentage a little. He noted that this has not been discussed at the Board of Directors level or with the Membership yet. There was discussion. Mr. Lee stated that the budgets need to be presented to the Board of Finance next Wednesday. Chief Breen stated that Mortlake's request should be presented as the \$119,750 until they can get through their processes.

**b. Capital Requests**

**Chief Breen:**

- Mortlake's Capital Request is for a septic system upgrade for the office building (which has its own septic system) to tie-into the city sewer at a cost of approximately \$36,000.

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to open discussion regarding septic system upgrade at Mortlake at a cost of approximately \$36,000.

Second by M. Podzalne. No discussion.

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

Chief Breen explained that the building was built in in the 1960's or 1970's and the septic system is not to today's standards. They are constantly having to have it pumped out and the lines cleaned. It is down to a matter of months between frequencies. The system is not working the way it is supposed to. He explained that a pump needs to be installed due to the difference in elevation where the sewer line is at the street and where the building is.

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to approve the request for septic system upgrade at Mortlake at a cost of approximately \$36,000, as proposed.

Second by L. Berube. No discussion.

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

**Lou Brodeur** asked, as Capital Committee, if it includes the blacktop.

**Chief Breen** stated that it does, as far as he knows.

Motion was made by M. Podzalne to open discussion regarding East Brooklyn's Capital Request for a gear washer for PPE in the amount of \$12,000 (which includes plumbing).

Second by A. Tanner. No discussion.

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

**Chief Pepin:**

- East Brooklyn's Capital Request is for a gear washer in the amount of \$12,000 (minimum NFPA requirement and also includes plumbing). They have no way of keeping their gear clean other than by hosing it off, which they are not supposed to do. It destroys the gear. He explained that, without the waterline, they would only be able to clean one set of gear every five days. There was discussion regarding sharing Mortlake's small gear washer which, both Chief Breen and L. Berube were in agreement, is not practical.

Motion was made by M. Podzaline to approve East Brooklyn’s Capital Request for a gear washer for PPE in the amount of \$12,000.

Second by A. Tanner. No discussion.

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

At this time, as a point of clarification regarding the Fire District supporting the East Brooklyn Fire Department, Mr. Lee made reference to the Standard Operating Guidelines (revised June 1, 2019) and read aloud from the By-Laws (revised in 2021), Article 3 - Operation of the East Brooklyn Fire Station, Section 1, “The East Brooklyn Fire Station is owned by the taxpayers, the Fire District, and all matters pertaining to its use, maintenance and operation are under the control and supervision of the District Board.” Mr. Lee, for clarification, asked Mr. Costa if the District Board has severed maintenance from the lease.

Mr. Costa stated that they only maintain what was provided in the documentation.

Mr. Lee noted that the 2021 By-Laws are different than the 2019 Standard Operating Guidelines.

## **8. Old Business**

### **a. Volunteer Tax Abatement**

Mr. Podzaline stated that the Volunteer Tax Abatement has been sent back to the BoFC.

Mr. Lee explained that the Board of Finance discussed the how to manage the number of eligible people between the two Fire Departments and it was sent back to the BoFC to create a more definitive approach for accounting purposes. He suggested that it be tabled

Motion was made by R.D. Lee to table discussion regarding the Volunteer Tax Abatement to the April meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners.

Second by M. Podzaline.

Discussion:

Mr. Podzaline stated that he would send it back to the Chiefs as they have oversight.

Mr. Lee read from the Minutes of the Board of Finance meeting (when this had been discussed) regarding what they want for budget and auditing purposes.

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

## **9. New Business**

Mr. Lee asked about Mortlake’s old ET.

Chief Breen explained that it has been sold to a fire district in Dover County, Tennessee. The proceeds from the sale remain with Mortlake as it was registered to and owned by the Mortlake Fire Company. The Rescue truck and the new ET were purchased through Capital requests with a caveat that they be registered to the Town. So, technically, the Town of Brooklyn owns those apparatus and when they are sold, the proceeds would go to the Town.

Mr. Brodeur stated that when the old ET was purchased, they received a grant in the amount of \$160,000 and the Mortlake Fire Department put in the remainder.

Chief Pepin stated that there is an office that is opening behind CVS where they will be doing fire department physicals. He will get pricing. He is currently continuing to use the Plainfield Walk-In.

Chief Breen stated that he has been coordinating with Dayville, but it has not been finalized.

## 10. Public Comment

Mr. Tanner asked that comments be kept to issues at hand and not personal.

- Jenn Nemeth (via Zoom) asked that the Board enquire regarding the status of the lawsuit and that it be kept on the agenda to give a regular update. She said that there have been major developments this past week and she want to be sure that the BoFC are aware of them, the specifics of filing deadlines and whether the responses have been received by the Court as legally required.
- Carrie Juhasz Horton (via Zoom) spoke about tax filings and referred to a letter she received from Lynda A. Morris (attached). She said that she will report to the State and the IRS.
- Lisa Herring, 33 Church Street, thanked the Board and volunteers for their work and she said that, for every negative comment, there are a lot of people who are grateful for what they do.
- Nicholas Provost spoke about background checks. He explained that they are going through the SOP's and SOG's to clarify everything better, but what they do right now is CT court case look-up, sex offender registry and driving record as well as call references. He explained that there is a timeline with CT court case look-up. They are looking into an outside agency.  
Mr. Provost asked Mr. Lee to review the H&R Block information and give his opinion. He said that everything is well documented by Patrick Gauthier.
- John, 24 Day Street, spoke about consolidating the Fire Departments and he feels that this Town cannot afford to consolidate them. He feels this would cause a huge tax increase. He said that the \$250,000 from the Town is very short of what the Fire Departments should be getting.  
Mr. Podzaline clarified that there is no formal request from either Fire Department for paid staffing.
- Matt Nemeth, Day Street, responded to rhetoric that the scrutinizing of financials and budgets is a direct insult on the capability of the first responders. He said that none of this has anything to do with anybody's capabilities or the fact that anybody is volunteering anymore. He explained that what is being asked for is transparent government, where money is coming from and going to. He feels that a big portion of Town is being double taxed. He asked that the BoFC needs to pursue further the question of, "What is the Brooklyn Fire District doing to support fire suppression in the Town, other than owning a building?" He feels the BoFC should figure out a way to consolidate those funds or let the taxpayers of the larger Town of Brooklyn pay less because of the District's costs.

## 11. Next Meeting – May 10, 2023

## 12. Adjournment

Motion was made by D. Costa to adjourn at 8:11 p.m. (20:11 hours).

Second by L. Berube. No discussion.

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

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault  
Recording Secretary

Attachments: Nicholas Provost, President of Brooklyn Fire District - Letter and 41-page Document  
Town of Brooklyn Firefighting Standards & Professional Guidelines Evaluation  
March 2023 Call Volumes - Mortlake  
March 2023 Call Volumes - East Brooklyn  
Carrie Juhasz Horton - Letter from Lynda A. Morris dated April 10, 2023