

FD Paid Staff Sub-Committee
Special Meeting
Wednesday, November 9, 2022
6:00 pm via Zoom & In Person
Mortlake Fire Company - NOTE LOCATION CHANGE
12 Canterbury Road, 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 6:04 p.m. (18:04 hours).

Attendance: Michael Podzaline, Chairman; Lou Brodeur, Selectman; Steve Breen, Mortlake Fire Chief; Brian Pepin, East Brooklyn Fire Chief (all present in person).
Austin Tanner, First Selectman, and Joe Voccio, Selectman, were absent with notice.
Felix Ramos was absent.

Also Present: J.S. Perreault, Recording Secretary.

Audience (in person) –David Lee, Board of Finance; Leo Berube; Gill Maiato; William Skene.

Via Zoom – Jenn Nemeth; John DonFrancisco; Kayla Burgess; Ann Marie; Lori.

NOTE - Location was changed from the normal meeting location (Clifford B. Green Meeting Center) to the Mortlake Fire Company due to another event taking place at the same time at the Clifford B. Green Meeting Center.

2. **Approve Minutes**
 - a. **Special Meeting of October 12, 2022**

Motion was made by S. Breen to approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of October 12, 2022.

Second by B. Pepin. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (4-0-0).

3. **Public Comment** – None.

4. Discussion on volunteer tax abatement program

M. Podzaline stated that the amended version of the draft language had been provided to Committee Members and was also posted with the agenda for this meeting (see attachment). He said that there was some additional language and some clarification as discussed at the last meeting:

- Added Emergency Medical Technicians to the Benefits language;
- Inclusion of the 9 months of the 12 of the fiscal year for either all Emergency calls or Emergency R-1 calls.

Mr. Podzaline asked the Chiefs if it should be “and/or all Fire/Emergency Calls”.

Chief Breen explained that his belief is that it should not be “and/or” because you have people that are only firefighters and you have people that are only medical responders. He feels that “or” is sufficient in that language. If you hold both certifications, you should be responding to both types of calls.

Chief Pepin stated agreement with Chief Breen.

Mr. Podzaline asked if Interior Firefighter either has the same qualifications or the same standards across both Departments with fitness being a requirement for both Departments.

Both Chiefs stated “yes.”

Chief Breen stated that you get a physical upon entry into the Department and, then, as required. There was discussion regarding cost associated with yearly physicals.

Chief Pepin explained that East Brooklyn has started doing them annually. He does not know the cost because he does not see that information, but he will find out. He hopes to have them all done within the next couple of months.

Mr. Podzaline explained that they are trying to make the program not complex, yet maintain transparency at all levels: from the Fire Chiefs to the Commissioners; from the Commissioners to the Town Hall; and to the Assessor. Mr. Podzaline asked if here were any further recommendations for amendments and he opened the floor to public comment regarding this matter. There were no further recommendations.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:

L. Berube suggested that a motion be made to begin the process to get it going because it could take a while.

L. Brodeur stated agreement with forwarding it to the Commissioners. It is on the Agenda for the BoFC special meeting later this evening.

There were no further comments.

5. Discussion on long term paid staffing strategies fire & ambulance.

a. ARPA funding request

M. Podzaline and the two Fire Chiefs worked on the request at the request of the First Selectman, Austin Tanner and Selectman, Joe Voccio. Mr. Podzaline stated that the ARPA Request had been posted with the Agenda for this meeting (see attachment).

Chief Breen and Chief Pepin were in agreement that they reviewed it and there was nothing different than what had been discussed, other than that a dollar value had been included.

Chief Breen stated that we need to focus on the fire side and get things in place before we can take the next step. Mr. Podzalne explained that we tried to keep the request as simple as possible.

L. Brodeur stated that he feels that it is way under-budget: no provisions for vacations; sickness; paid medical leave. He feels that these need to be addressed before putting the plan into motion. There was discussion. Volunteers cannot replace those people during those times, you would have to use per diem people. Mr. Podzalne stated that costs associated with fringe benefits would be above this Board and that this is request is just to forward to the ARPA Committee. Mr. Brodeur stated that the ARPA Committee would come up with a lot of questions that need to be answered. Discussion continued. Mr. Brodeur commented that this would just be for a year and that it would be put into the budget when the ARPA money runs out. Mr. Podzalne explained that if the ARPA Committee has questions, this Board will answer what it can and that any other questions would need to be answered by the appropriate individuals. The two Chiefs were in agreement that they interpreted the request as a rough draft and that it would be added to in steps as it is forwarded.

Mr. Podzalne stated that the next step would be to forward it to the Board of Fire Commissioners and then, they would submit it to the ARPA Committee.

Chief Pepin explained that this would be like a pilot program and there will be a lot of adjustments. He said that, after a year or two, if it is felt that minimum staffing is needed, it could be discussed. He said that it is another layer of employees. He said that at least, if one person calls out sick, it is better than what we have now, in some cases.

Mr. Brodeur asked if it would be more cost effective to work forty hours (7 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and have four employees. One person that fills in when the others aren't working. There was discussion regarding three people @ 50 hours per week (150 hours) vs. four people @ 40 hours per week (160 hours) and losing the 10-hours of coverage. Mr. Podzalne explained that he had reached out to the Town of Salem which is a similar set-up to Brooklyn and they have had 50 hours of paid daytime staffing with the 10 hours going to their current employees, with the overtime to guarantee coverage during the primetime and early-time hours. It has been working in Salem for a number of years. He suggested that the Board of Selectmen reach out to Salem with questions.

Mr. Podzalne suggested that it be forwarded to the Board of Fire Commissioners where it can be discussed and to get public comments.

Motion was made by S. Breen to forward the ARPA Request to the Board of Fire Commissioners.

Second by B. Pepin. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (4-0-0).

6. Discussion on Next Steps to Proceed

Regarding the volunteers, Mr. Podzalne stated that the tax abatement, hopefully, will help and that he thinks there is more that the Town can do to reward the men and women of both Fire Departments.

7. Next meeting schedule – No meeting was scheduled.

8. Public Comment

John DonFrancisco asked for clarification regarding, fire fighters that are not medically certified and EMT's that are not fire fighters, getting credit for calls in the abatement program. He also asked if there is a benefit for EMR's. He asked whether ambulance crews are considered R-1's since they are already being paid. He asked if an emergency call would be defined or put in columns.

Chief Breen explained that, in one column or the other, you are either going to focus on EMS or on Fire to make the 20 percent of calls as non-certified, similar to the LOSAP program many years ago.

Mr. Podzaline explained that the \$1,000 benefit would be for EMR's (anything under Emergency Medical Technician).

Regarding the question about R-1's, Chief Breen confirmed that they are not and Mr. Podzaline stated that R-1's are specified.

Regarding the question about emergency calls being defined, Mr. Brodeur stated that if there is an auto accident and the fire department is toned out for it, it becomes a fire call, so the firefighters would get credit as an R-1 responder with the Fire Department. Mr. Podzaline explained that if you are certified as an Interior Firefighter, any fire call you go on would count toward the \$2,000 abatement. There was discussion regarding qualifications, fit testing, and whether, maybe at some point in the future, members from each Department can go out on each other's engines. There was discussion regarding tracking and that sometimes it doesn't work.

There was discussion regarding if the Fire Department gets toned out for something like a lift assist with the ambulance. Chief Breen explained that, with ESO Reporting, it becomes very important how a call is categorized.

Mr. Podzaline noted the importance that the Chiefs maintain transparency through membership and that this be started and, if it needs amendments, he is open to changing things for the better.

Mr. Pepin explained that they can sign on and view their percentages. Chief Pepin stated that the goal is that the Departments create their filters to be exactly the same.

9. Adjourn

Motion was made by S. Breen to adjourn at 6:44 p.m. (18:44 hours).

Second by L. Brodeur. No discussion.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (4-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

J.S. Perreault
Recording Secretary

2 Attachments: BoFC ARPA Request; Proposed Ordinance Town of Brooklyn Tax Abatement Program for Certain Emergency Services Volunteers.