

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS  
Pennington Borough Fire District No. 1  
P.O. Box 387  
Pennington, NJ 08534

**MINUTES May 18, 2021**

*Ryan Fraser and Robert Ingram were sworn in as Commissioners prior to the meeting.*

**CALL TO ORDER**

The regularly scheduled remote 'Zoom' meeting was called to order by Chairman Blackwell at 7:32 p.m. following adequate and electronic notice under the Open Public Meetings Law and N.J.A.C. 5:39 (annual meeting notice including information on how the public could access and participate in the remote meeting, make public comment and where relevant documents, if any, would be made available published in the Times of Trenton (1/27/21) and Hopewell Valley News (1/29/21), provided to Packet Publications and Hopewell Express, sent to the Borough Clerk for filing and posting and posted on the board's website, at the firehouse entrances and at board offices, as well as provided to any person requesting same in advance of the meeting.

**ROLL CALL**

Present by roll call were Commissioners Mark Blackwell, Bob DiFalco, Ryan Fraser, Brian Hofacker and Rob Ingram. Absent: None. Also present were Chief DeForte, Ass't. Chief Baldorossi, Joe Carducci and Attorney Griswold.

**CHIEF'S REPORT**

There were 40 calls in April, 2021: 7 in Pennington Borough, 19 in the Township, 1 in Hopewell Borough and 13 other. Calls included 1 non-residential, 1 gas leak and 4 CO alarms. There were 18 accidental alarms and 14 mutual aid calls (mostly to Ewing). 6 scheduled drills were held.

Call Box - The tanker recently was dispatched to a tanker shuttle at a large fire in New Brunswick and Upper Makefield, PA was dispatched to cover for Pennington. This is not protocol for this type call. Pennington Fire Company's tanker is the most centrally located in the township and is to stay behind to cover the valley when the other valley tankers are called to respond outside the region. The chief spoke with the county coordinator and was assured he would correct the situation.

Duty Crews - In the process of being re-instituted for nighttime calls.

Gear - Needed for new member who is experienced and ready to respond. The fire company has no spare gear of the size needed. As delivery for new gear is backlogged 6-8 months the chief is looking into borrowing or renting gear for this member in the meantime. Rental would be about \$600 for 6 months with a 2-3 week lead-time for delivery.

Junior Firefighter Program - The chief will circulate a copy of a new legislative bill addressing Junior Firefighter Auxiliary Programs, for participants ages 14-18. The fire company has a Junior Program (ages 16-18) and would like to organize a Cadet program for younger participants. Discussion tabled until a future meeting.

Command Vehicle – In service.

New Truck (Pumper) – Radios from the old truck are being transferred and installed now. Awaiting delivery of hose and fittings to mount tools. Will go into service thereafter. Handheld radios will be used in the old truck until the new vehicle is in service.

1991 Engine (pumper) – Once the new truck is in service Cmsr. Blackwell will contact the Chairman of the township board to discern whether that board has any interest in the vehicle or its disposition. If not, the old truck will be placed for sale at public auction.

## **TREASURER’S REPORT**

A copy of the treasurer’s report was made available to each Commissioner with a list and description of the bills to be paid. Three invoices were added to the list of bills being paid at this meeting – Danya Sanders (\$54.23 – Election expense) for Mercer County Clerk Services during election; Joanne Bainbridge (\$250.00 – Election expense) for poll teller services; Joanne Blackwell (\$250.00 – Election expense) for poll teller services. The Chief Financial Officer certified there were sufficient encumbered funds from a prior year’s budget and funds in the 2021 budget to pay the bills as presented. Motioned by Hofacker and seconded by DiFalco, **Resolution 2021-24** – Approving payment of bills as presented in the amount of \$20,751.38 was approved by roll call vote.

## **Elections and Appointments-**

### **A. Nominations:**

Chairman – Mark Blackwell (motion by Hofacker; second by Fraser)  
Vice-Chairman – Robert DiFalco (motion by Hofacker; second by Blackwell)  
Treasurer – Brian Hofacker (motion DiFalco; second by Blackwell)  
Secretary – Ryan Fraser (motion Blackwell; second by DiFalco)

**B. Appointments:** The following appointments were made by Chairman Blackwell and approved by board members:

Chief Financial Officer – Brian Hofacker  
LOSAP Administrator – Enriquez Rodriguez (previously appointed)  
Public Agency Compliance Officer – Brian Hofacker (previously appointed)  
Public Records Custodian – Robert DiFalco

## **OLD BUSINESS**

- Banking - Cmsr. DiFalco has researched services, account options and interest rates at local banks. Further discussion tabled until next month.
- 2020 Financial Audit – Finalized. Will be submitted to the state and distributed to board members.
- SOG’s – Draft revised and under review.
- Outstanding Pagors – For those still outstanding, process to locate and reclaim to begin anew.
- Insurance – The insurance broker’s presentation to the board and to fire company members will be arranged when COVID restrictions allow.
- Gear Dryer – Electrical work almost complete; vent to be installed this weekend.
- Trailer Striping – Underway.
- Rescue Truck - “Open Door” warning light – no update.
- Tablets – In progress.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the April 20, 2021 will be held for approval at the next meeting.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

- Election Results - At the April 20<sup>th</sup> election the 2021 fire district budget passed with 70 YES and 18 NO votes. Robert Ingram was elected to a 3-year term, and Ryan Fraser was elected to fill a 2-year unexpired term on the Board of Fire Commissioners.

- Moving Annual Election Date - Pennington is the only fire district in the county that has not yet changed the date of its annual election to coincide with the November general elections. There will be significant cost savings associated with changing the election date, however there was some concern that district voters will no longer vote on the annual budget if the proposed tax levy is within the legally allowable 2% levy cap. After discussion, given that the board's meetings are open to the public, the budget is openly discussed at the meetings and the public is welcomed to participate in those discussions, the consensus was that the board's objectives of both ensuring public participation and transparency in the budget process as well as securing the administrative and cost benefits of moving the election date could be met. Motioned by Hofacker and seconded by Fraser, **Resolution 2021-25** - Approving moving the date of the annual fire district election to coincide with the November general election date beginning with the November 2022 election was approved by roll call vote. The resolution will be distributed to appropriate state and local officials for approval.

- Chairmen Blackwell met with the Township and Hopewell Borough fire district chairmen for a general discussion of the fire districts, new development within Hopewell Valley and upcoming regional purchases. Airpacks will be due for replacement in the next year or two. Chairman Blackwell suggested representatives from the valley fire departments, including paid personnel, form a committee to begin discussing needs, alternatives, timing, relative costs, etc. In an effort to contain the number of debt service obligations existing at one time he also raised the possibility of refurbishing instead of replacing Pennington's 30+ year old tanker to extend its life. The chairpersons will try to get together every couple months or so to discuss matters of general interest to the three fire districts.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** - none

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Motioned by DiFalco, seconded by Hofacker and passed, the meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m. The next regular meeting of the Board will be held remotely, via 'Zoom', at 7:30 p.m. on June 15, 2021.