

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

**MINUTES September 21, 2021**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The regularly scheduled remote 'Zoom' meeting was called to order by Chairman Blackwell at 7:30 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. Absent: Commissioner Rob Ingram. Also present were Chief DeForte (fire call; arrived late), Deputy Chief Demareski (fire call; arrived late), Ass't. Chief Baldorossi, Lt. Rodriguez, LOSAP Admin. Rodriguez, Jon Weiss and Attorney Griswold.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes from the August 17, 2021 meeting will be held over for approval at the October meeting.

**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. 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 2021-34** – Approving payment of bills as presented in the amount of \$24,291.43 was approved by roll call vote.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** - none

**OLD BUSINESS**

- Auction Sale of '91 Engine (pumper) - The high bid received through the Municibid auction was \$9,600.00. Motioned by Hofacker and seconded by Fraser, **Resolution 2021-35**, Approving the sale of the 1991 engine to the highest auction bidder for \$9,600.00 was approved by roll call vote.

- SOG's – Draft revised and under review.

- Outstanding Pagers – No update.

- Fixed Asset Inventory and Appraisal – No update.

- Fire Protection Agreement – Commissioner Blackwell will contact the township board regarding status and timeline for renewal.
- Electronic Funds Transfer Policy – The board will adopt a policy
- Tablets – Mounts received. The tablets were supposed to be delivered today, but they were not. Will be investigated.
- Obsolete or Surplus Equipment – Work in progress. Commissioner Hofacker will assist in Ass't. Chief Baldorossi in organizing items for auction or other disposition. Discussion of a policy and process for retiring old or outdated equipment will continue.

Qualified Purchasing Agent (QPA)– Commissioner DiFalco opened follow-up discussion of hiring a QPA. Attorney Griswold presented the benefits a QPA brings to the table, including increased bid/quote thresholds, professional liability insurance, knowledge of the purchasing process and legal documentation and recordkeeping requirements. Board members generally acknowledged the advantages of having a licensed professional assist in the process and oversee compliance with local government purchasing rules, however some present were not on board with the idea nor convinced of the need. Commissioner Blackwell again voiced concern over the board's ability to take on the expense and stay within budget constraints. Commissioner DiFalco offered to put forward a vote to approve hiring a QPA, to which there was no response. After lengthy discussion the consensus was to postpone a decision at this time since the process will not work unless personnel can work comfortably with the specialist. A suggestion was made to hold off until the new attorney is hired, as that person may have someone they already work with. A further suggestion was to look into proposals by others who fit the QPA qualifications prior to making a decision. Further discussion will be required.

Attorney Search – Ms. Griswold will work with Commissioner Fraser to advertise and post the position. All commissioners will be able to access responses by e-mail at [theboard@pbbfc.org](mailto:theboard@pbbfc.org)

## **CHIEF'S REPORT**

There were 42 calls in August, 2021: 5 in Pennington Borough, 22 in the Township, 1 in Hopewell Borough and 14 other. Calls included 1 residential, 1 motor vehicle/rescue, 1 automobile/machinery, 1 cellar pump and 1 CO alarms. There were 19 accidental alarms and 15 mutual aid calls. 2 scheduled drills were held.

Storms associated with Hurricane Ida at the beginning of September resulted in an extraordinary volume of calls in a short period of time, a number of which necessitated swift water rescues. The chief expressed his thanks and appreciation to members of the fire company who spent numerous hours providing emergency services to businesses, residents and those endangered by the storm. Ass't. Chief Baldorossi thanked the board for supporting the emergency responders with swift water gear and training, both of which was essential to their providing life-saving services during the storm. Commissioner Hofacker, joined by other board members, thanked fire department officers for their professionalism in safely leading emergency personnel through the floods and storm conditions.

- Aerial – Leak in foam tank; no update.
- New Engine (pumper)– While at the Wildwood Expo it was discovered that a switch on the ladder rack was defective. The truck is at Campbell Supply now being repaired under warranty.
  - Radio noise; no progress.
  - Transfer of modem from old engine to this vehicle; the installation was included as part of the cost of the truck but Mid-State Radio's technician has yet install. The vendor will not be paid until the job

is complete. Commissioner Blackwell will contact Mid-State, as there has been no effort made on the technician's part to address this issue or the radio headset interference.

FEMA – Commissioner Fraser informed that public assistance through FEMA may be available for any damage to vehicles, equipment, infrastructure, truck hours used, etc. resulting from the Hurricane Ida storm. If there was any qualifying loss he suggested that someone contact the borough or township Emergency Management Coordinator and comply with the 60-day time limitation for filing claims.

Brush Truck Decking – The truck bed is rusting under the Rhino-Lining so the lining has lifted. It may be that the bed needs to be sandblasted prior to installing a new lining. Discussion will follow as to the best method of proceeding.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

- 2022 Budget – Discussion of the proposed fire operations budget presented by the chiefs. It is apparent that the proposed line item for Firefighting Equipment and Radio Repair is insufficient. Other costs will be studied. Administratively, Chairman Blackwell reminded board members that with Attorney Griswold's retirement additional funding for professional services will likely be necessary. LOSAP and other administrative costs will be reviewed. A cap bank is available to meet budget needs if necessary. A budget proposal for the township board's review should be ready after next month's meeting.

Deputy Chief Demaraski cautioned that despite best efforts it is inevitable that some paid or per diem staff will be needed in the foreseeable future to augment volunteer efforts, particularly with respect to daytime response. He alerted the board it might consider planning now for this impending expense.

### **Purchase Orders**

PO 2021-57 for tires for the deputy chief's vehicle was approved pursuant to NJ State Purchasing Contract from Champion Tire in the amount of \$671.31, chargeable to the Truck Repair appropriation in the 2021 budget.

PO 2021-58 for hydro-testing an SCBA air bottle and an O-ring was approved to Witmer Public Safety Group in the amount of \$27.75, chargeable to the Firefighting Equipment and Radio Repair appropriation in the 2021 budget.

PO 2021-59 for a laptop computer to be used for fire district purposes was approved to the lowest quoting vendor or pursuant to State Contract, at a cost not to exceed \$2,500.00, chargeable to the Education and Training appropriation in the 2021 budget.

LOSAP – Discussion of formally adopting a standard and procedure for the return to the fire district of funds being held in inactive, unvested members' accounts, as well as addressing other provisions for clarification or inclusion in the board's LOSAP document. Discussion will continue.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the board, motioned by Fraser, seconded by Hofacker and passed, the meeting adjourned at 9:51 p.m. The next regular meeting of the Board will be held remotely, via 'Zoom', at 7:30 p.m. on October 19, 2021.