

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

MINUTES
October 18, 2022

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 (12/29/21) and Hopewell Valley News (1/07/22), provided to the Hopewell Express, sent to the Borough Clerk for filing and public 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, Robert DiFalco, Ryan Fraser, Robert Ingram, and Brian Hofacker. Also present were Chief DeForte, Enrique Rodriguez, Roger Demareski from Fire Company, Joseph Carducci, C.P.A. and Attorney Donohue.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Garrett Sutherland, Lieutenant at Fire Company discussed needing an auto technician to service vehicles. Got quote from other place for all 5 trucks, including Chiefs' vehicles. The estimate is roughly \$450. Lt. Sutherland indicated that he works at the one shop, but does not get any financial benefit and will not work on the vehicles. Commissioners Ingram and Fraser asked Attorney Donohue about whether there was any procurement rules to be considered. Attorney Donohue still cautioned as to appearance of favoritism, notwithstanding financial considerations. Lt. Sutherland said he would look into other shops. Chairman Blackwell thanked Lt. Sutherland and closed public comment.

CHIEF'S REPORT

There were 45 calls in September 2022: 5 to Pennington Borough, 26 to Hopewell Township, 4 to Hopewell Borough. One house fire in District with no power, no electric and no gas. Was getting ready to be moved. House fell in on itself and is under investigation as suspicious. Initial dispatch from County is an issue that needs to be addressed. Engine leak on new truck so out of commission and back to Campbell. Estimated two weeks out of commission.

Senior Center in Ewing caught fire and Fire Company responded for about six hours. Damaged hose when truck backed up.

Inner tire went flat on driver's side of truck. Inner tire totally off the rims but now fixed and back. Will need new tires.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

No minutes for approval this 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/or funds in the 2022 budget to pay the bills as presented.

Chairman Blackwell discussed Motorola Solutions bill. Check was cancelled and reissued because was originally made out to Midstate Communications. Reissued on same P.O.; just changed the name on the check. Actually paid 2 months ago. Chief DeForte discussed radios and indicated that they were programmed. Verizon Wireless bill is a bit higher this month because was two months' worth of bills.

Motion by Commissioner Hofacker, seconded by Commissioner Fraser approving payment of monthly bills presented in the amount of \$188,529.36 (Resolution 2022-29). Roll Call – all ayes. Chairman Blackwell abstained as to bill on bookkeeper.

OLD BUSINESS

- Driver Abstract updates - Still finishing up. Commissioner Hofacker indicated almost there and should be done by the next meeting. Commissioner Hofacker to send email to Enrique Rodriguez again.
 - Official emails – Chairman Blackwell reminded Commissioners to set up official emails.
 - Fire Services agreement with Hopewell Twp – Chairman Blackwell still in the works.
 - Fixed Asset – need list for Resolution as to what is no longer needed. Commissioner Hofacker indicated that there is a list and the only thing of substance was an outboard motor. Chairman Blackwell indicated that there was some stability issues with boat. Valve inflated on boat was in “inflation” mode and it made boat unstable. Not motor issue. Commissioner Fraser discussed meeting regarding boats and training.
- Knox Box - P.O. cancelled and no longer an issue.
- Commissioner compensation – no payment to Commissioners. Attorney Donohue indicated that statute not triggered if no payment.
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- Election – will be discussed during budget discussion
- Software for Firehouse: ESO approved in bills tonight. \$3680 payment. In budget for next year and Enrique has it all set up.
- Policies and SOG's: Attorney Donohue stated that she got the proposed policies and are in review and will be ready for next month.

NEW BUSINESS

Hybrid meeting: Attorney Donohue to review hybrid meeting. One potential solution is to having one or two Commissioners rotate and combine with virtual. Attorney Donohue will research as to DCA. Chairman Blackwell discussed whether we could continue virtual meetings.

District Vehicle: Chairman Blackwell received renewal of registration for District truck, but it was in Chairman Blackwell's individual name. MVC said that Chairman has to go to MVC in person to fix. Not sure how MG plate issued and no sales tax to individual; assume MVC just used Chairman's driver's license and made a mistake. The vehicle is Spartan, new truck. Chairman Blackwell indicated that he does not have the title; bank has title. Paperwork all made out to the Borough, but MVC entered it in error. Chairman Blackwell will go to MVC to straighten out.

- Budget: Chairman Blackwell discussed the budget. Auditor had sent Excel spread sheet. Capital reserve raised by Chairman. Reviewed items what changed from last year. Equipment that was requested by Fire Company reviewed. Grand total is \$825,226.00. Last year, the total was \$795,419.00. Number can be lowered, but putting less away. Chairman feels District needs to ask for waiver of 2% cap. Tax rate is not changing. Assessed values are higher, but rate is the same. Comparison made from last year to this year. Increase in needs accounts for budget increase. Operating piece is 12% increase. Is rest of Board okay with asking for voter approval? Commissioner DiFalco said timing is bad in light of inflation. Above 2%, need to get voter approval. Auditor indicated to make "apples to apples" to explain that inflation for same things from last year. If adding expenses, need to explain that. Commissioner Hofacker asked if rate did not increase, do we need to ask for voter approval? Attorney Donohue discussed how budget increase presented to voters and that December 20, 2022 is deadline to submit question to Mercer County Clerk for February election. Chairman Blackwell discussed Hopewell Township paying more money. Last year, \$318,000 from Hopewell but need \$42,000 more this year. Both Hopewell Township and Hopewell Borough are submitting a question. Pennington Borough would be also needing to submit a question to voters.

- Equipment and Services for Firehouse. Chairman Blackwell discussed some of the new items requested from Fire Company – exhaust system in firehouse and service contract. After floors done at firehouse, concerns with switches and hoses. Without the service contract, get a different rate for parts and service. Service contract is 20% discount. Maintenance contract and replacement parts is \$1329.50. Commissioner DiFalco questioned as to whether it was an annual contract and how often the company would

come out to inspect. Chief DeForte discussed need for service contract. Chairman Blackwell noted that parts still need to be paid for. Evernote not in for 2023. Fireman's Association should not be a line item. Chief DeForte to rework this as things are missing and adjust. Commissioner Hofacker asked about Chief discretionary item and whether included. It is in training line item. Operating budget will be affected. Excel sheet to be sent to all Commissioners for review and possible edit.

- Chairman Blackwell discussed meeting tomorrow with Township regarding first aid.
- Commissioner Fraser asked regarding election costs and incorporating into budget numbers. Chairman Blackwell will contact County regarding costs for election. November election is run by County so no additional costs. February election will have costs – 2 poll workers at firehouse, mail in ballots, printing costs, pay County to count votes. Whole cost was around \$1200 previously.
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- Proclamation - Commissioner Fraser proposed proclamation as to recognition for service to District and Borough for Barbara Griswold. Chairman discussed getting plaque and having a dinner to honor her.
- Tanker issue – Chief DeForte discussed refurbishment of old tanker. He had spoken with a local Township Committee members as to refurbishment. Township does not want to put money into refurbishing District truck. New tanker truck discussed is 3500 gallon, Kenmore chassis and will fit under Titus Mill Road bridge with cost of \$565,000 Township trying to look for a long range solution. Refurbishment is about \$125,000. Hopewell does not want to pay 75% towards that for District's existing truck. Chairman wants to discuss this at later date; Township does not pick District equipment. Borough does not need a tanker. Chief just wanted to keep Board advised. Chairman stated that District cannot afford another truck payment.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the board, Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner Fraser, seconded and all voted in favor. Meeting adjourned at 8:43 p.m. The next regular meeting of the Board will be held remotely, via 'Zoom', at 7:30 p.m. on November 15, 2022. Instructions for joining the meeting can be found on the board's website at www.pbbfc.org