

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
Pennington Borough Fire District No. 1
P.O. Box 387
Pennington, NJ 08534
December 19, 2023

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The regularly scheduled hybrid in-person and remote ‘Zoom’ meeting was called to order by Chairman Hofacker at 7:32 p.m. following adequate and electronic notice under the Open Public Meetings Law and N.J.A.C. 5:39. The meeting was also opened at Pennington Fire House for a hybrid meeting. 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 and Hopewell Valley News, 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.

Salute to the Flag.

Swearing in of re-elected Commissioners:

Oath of office administered by Attorney Appleby to Sandra Radice for three (3) year term commencing December 12, 2023 and terminating at 12:00 noon on December 15, 2026.

Oath of office administered by Attorney Appleby to John O’Connor for one (1) year term commencing December 12, 2023 and terminating at 12:00 noon on December 15, 2024.

Scott Schaub was absent and will be sworn-in at a later date.

ROLL CALL

Present by roll call were Chairman Hofacker, Commissioner Robert DiFalco, Commissioner Sandra Radice and Commissioner O’Connor. Commissioner Schaub was absent. Meeting is hybrid with remote access and in person at the Fire House. Quorum established.

Also present: Attorney Appleby via Zoom, Auditor Weiss via Zoom.

ANNUAL ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Chairman:

Motion to elect Brian Hofacker as Chairman for 2024 made by Commissioner DiFalco, seconded by Commissioner O’Connor. All voted in favor.

Vice Chairman:

Motion to elect Robert DiFalco as Vice Chairman for 2024 made by Commissioner Radice, seconded by Commissioner O’Connor. All voted in favor.

Treasurer:

Motion to elect Sandra Radice as Treasurer for 2024 made by Commissioner Hofacker, seconded by Commissioner O’Connor. All voted in favor.

Secretary/Clerk:

Motion to elect John O’Connor as Secretary/Clerk for 2024 made by Commissioner O’Connor, seconded by Commissioner DiFalco. All voted in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chairman Hofacker opened the meeting up for public comments at 7:39 p.m.

With no one in the public asking to speak on Zoom or at the Fire House, public comments were closed.

CHIEF’S REPORT

Chief Demarski, along with Assistant Chief Ingram, provided the Chief’s report.

TOTAL FIRE CALLS 45

Pennington Borough	10
Hopewell Township - 51	23
Hopewell Borough	2
Hopewell Township - 52	3
Hopewell Township - 53	1
Out-of-District - Ewing	5
Out-of-District - Lawrence	1
Out-of-District - Trenton	0
Out-of-District - Other	0

TOTAL SERVICE-HOURS AT FIRES 58

TOTAL MAN-HOURS AT FIRES 402

Water used at fires: 150 gallons

- Building fire 1
- CO Incident 1
- Animal Rescue/Assist 1
- False Alarm 3
- Unintentional Alarm 12
- Mutual Aid - Out of Town 6**

Chief Demarski thanked the Commissioners for coming to the appreciation event. Commissioners had not been at this event in a long time. Hold the date for February 10th. Installation dinner at Washington Crossing.

Total number of calls was 45 calls. Issue with flooding and lack of barricades. Need to have discussion with OEM Coordinator. Vice Chairman DiFalco questioned whether County should be involved.

Bomb threat at temple.

Recruitment meeting attended by Commissioner Schaub. Asked the Board if cost share possible in future for recruitment materials.

Live burn completed at Somerset.

Grant for high water truck received in amount of \$75,000.

Progress on commercial properties and access to information. Princeton West owner reached out and wants to meet.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Attorney Appleby requested any edits or comments regarding regular open session minutes and executive session minutes from November 21, 2023. Motion made by Commissioner DiFalco to approve minutes. Seconded by Commissioner O’Connor. **All voted in favor. No abstentions.**

TREASURER’S REPORT

Resolution 2023-29 was initially approved for \$35,143.33. Motion made by Commissioner Radice, seconded by Commissioner O’Connor.

Roll Call:

- Chairman Hofacker yes
- Commissioner DiFalco yes
- Commissioner O’Connor yes

Commissioner Radice	yes
Commissioner Schaub	absent

Upon discussion, the amount needed to be adjusted to \$48,724.74.

Motion was made to **rescind** approval of the original **Resolution 2023-29** and to move a **modified** Resolution 2023-29. Motion made by Commissioner DiFalco and seconded by Commissioner Radice.

Resolution 2023-29 Resolution for payment of monthly bills (Nov/Dec 2023) in amount of \$48,724.74.

Roll Call:

Chairman Hofacker	yes
Commissioner DiFalco	yes
Commissioner O'Connor	yes
Commissioner Radice	yes
Commissioner Schaub	absent

Assistant Chief Ingram had questions regarding issued PO's and how reconciled. With any encumbrance, PO's issued should have item ordered by December 31, 2023. Auditor Weiss discussed PO's and that all should be nailed down the week of Christmas.

Extended discussion with Chief and Assistant Chief as to outstanding items to be purchased and issuance of PO's.

BUDGET:

Auditor Weiss discussed the Excel sheet that was distributed to the Board. Operating appropriations increased from \$479,462 in FY 2023 to \$558,573 in FY 2024. This is an increase of \$79,111. Of this, \$40,000 is for a retention of clothing allowance, which is new for 2024. Emergency appropriation that was deferred now has to be paid in the amount of \$17,380. In addition, QPA is going to be about \$2,500. Equipment purchases (turn out gear) will be \$31,600 more compared to last year. Anticipate less expense on LOSAP. Professional fees will be increased by \$10,000. Debt service will remain the same as 2023. Banking \$110,000 for future capital needs. Total appropriations are \$849,726.

Chief had questions about use of capital funds. Chairman Hofacker indicated that this was only Pennington, not Township taxpayers. All funded by Pennington Borough. Vice Chairman DiFalco said it was good business practice rather than financing. Discussion as to Township Fire District and potential issues.

capital reserve), Hopewell Township \$424,515 fronted per Shared Service Agreement. Deferred charge for emergency appropriation is covered by unrestricted free fund balance. Reduces the amount due by Hopewell and Pennington. Use of surplus to address that emergency appropriation. Hopewell contribution is \$411, 306 compared to \$364,391, an increase of 12.87%. Increase for Pennington to \$27,103, which includes use of cap bank. Increase is 5.8% for Pennington. Amounts due for debt service from Hopewell Township – budget is in balance. Pennington tax rate from 0.049 to 0.051 at moment.

Chief asked about the reserve for capital expenditures and how categorized. Auditor Weiss indicated that there is no way to alter what that is called, per State. Can make a note on the Excel form, but not on Budget as submitted to DCA.

Chairman Hofacker opined that either need to cut budget to get down to 2% or face issue later. Cap bank from 2021 is included, and only affects Pennington, not Hopewell. Where can budget be cut? Reduction has to come from operating budget. If \$10,000 out of capital reserve, will it reduce budget? Doesn't help Hopewell issue. Auditor Weiss indicated that the number that needed to reduce was \$52,142. Commissioner Radice asked as to any other options. Can use unrestricted fund to eat away at \$39,628 portion for Hopewell Township, but that is Pennington funds.

Discussion as to Hopewell Township PILOT agreements with new developments and how no tax dollars funnel to fire service. Restricts availability of monies to fund budget.

Auditor Weiss stated that cap balance does not affect Hopewell portion.

If do not introduce tonight, need to have an additional resolution to submit to State.

Resolution 2023-30

1ST reading/introduction/approval

2023 Fire District Budget Resolution. **TABLED to January 16, 2024.**

Motion was made to table Resolution 2023-30 so as to continue finalizing budget.

- Motion/second O'Connor/DiFalco
- **Roll Call:**
- Chairman Hofacker yes
- Commissioner DiFalco yes
- Commissioner O'Connor yes
- Commissioner Radice yes
- Commissioner Schaub absent

Resolution 2022-31

Public Hearing on 2023 Fire District Budget. **TABLED to January 16, 2024.**

- Motion/second Hofacker/O'Connor
 - All voted in favor.

OLD BUSINESS:

- Old First Aid Building – no status update
- District vehicle transfer of title to District – Title was in the mail? No update
- Tanker replacement and communications from Hopewell Township. update.

NEW BUSINESS:

ANNUAL RESOLUTIONS: By Consent Agenda

- **Resolution 2023-32 Authorizing Shared Services Agreement with Hopewell Township for fire services**
- **Resolution 2023-33 Resolution to appoint Public Agency Compliance Officer (Scott Schaub)**
- **Resolution 2023-34 Appointing Joseph M. Carducci, CPA of BKC as Auditor for 2024 under professional services (non fair and open)**
- **Resolution 2023-35 Appointing Melanie Appleby, Esq. and Matthew Donohue, Esq. of RMSHC Law as Fire District Attorneys for 2024 under professional services (non fair and open)**
- **Resolution 2023-36 Appointing Insurance Broker of record (Nottingham Insurance Agency)**
- **Resolution 2023-37 Designating depositories of funds and adoption of cash management plan for 2024**
- **Resolution 2023-38 Appointing Official Newspapers**

Motion O'Connor Second DiFalco

- **Roll Call:**
 - Commissioner Hofacker yes
 - Commissioner DiFalco yes
 - Commissioner Fraser yes
 - Commissioner Radice yes
 - Commissioner Schaub absent

- **Motion for approving dates for 2024 meetings**
Motion Hofacker
Second O'Connor
All in Favor

Motion to close made by Commissioner O'Connor and seconded by Commissioner Radice. All in favor.

Adjournment

Meeting ended at 9:15 p.m.