

Regular Meeting of the
Board of TFD Fire Commissioners

DRAFT -- Meeting Minutes – March 20, 2019
Thompsonville Fire Station, 35 N. Main Street, Enfield, CT

1. Call to Order: by Comm. DuFour at 7:00 pm.

2. Roll Call: present were Comm. Perry, Comm. DuFour, and Comm. Dodd. Absent were Comm. Reidy and Comm. Crowley. Also present were Chief Deskis and Dept. Secretary Wawer.

3. Chief's Report:

Chief Deskis said the department responded to a structure fire on D'Annunzio Avenue. The fire was extinguished quickly, and two pets were rescued from the residence. There was a lot of praise on social media for the quick response time.

Chief Deskis said there was also a structure fire on Belle Avenue a few weeks ago. The fire was difficult to extinguish due to the number of items in the structure. Squad 21 was first on scene and did their best to put out the fire. One of the members was taken to the hospital due to a medical issue after exiting the structure. He was released from the hospital later that evening.

Chief Deskis said the station sustained minor damage from the wind storm a few weeks ago. A piece of flashing came off the top of the building. Enfield Builders gave me an estimate of \$600 to reinstall it. The members of B Group were able to reinstall the flashing which saved the District some money.

Chief Deskis said there has been some plumbing issues in the apparatus bays. The drains had to be unclogged twice in the past month. Some of the fitness equipment was damaged due to the sewage.

Chief Deskis said there are several items in the building that will need to be repaired in the future. The sheetrock is cracking around the doorways. There are cracks in the floor. The primer is showing through the paint on the walls.

Chief Deskis said one of our fire officers is out due to gall bladder surgery. He is scheduled to return on April 8th. One of the firefighters needs shoulder surgery with an estimated recovery time of at least eight months.

Chief Deskis said the Fire Marshal asked if some of the language of the Fire Marshal fees can be changed to include smaller plan reviews. One example would be reviews for a HVAC system plan. We currently do not charge for that. The Fire Marshal could charge one percent of the job cost. Most construction projects have that one percent figured into the cost. Because we do not charge for this, the contractor receives the money.

Chief Deskis said he represented the fire district at a 2019 Special Olympics fund-raising dinner in Enfield. It was a great event and I look forward to attending next year.

Comm. DuFour said he likes the packet the Chief put together for the Board. Chief Deskis said the packet includes his notes for the Chief's report, a letter regarding the boundary dispute, the 2017 Supplemental Grand List Tax Levy, Enfield Fire Chief's Association dues invoice, the communications center assessment fee invoice, and Enfield's 2018 fire district summary.

4. Treasurer's Report:

Comm. Dodd said currently our total assets are \$3,015,722. Our July through February profit and loss statement shows an overage of \$308,310. Some of this morning is coming from our Fire Marshal Ordinance fees. The year to date budget is \$22,000 and so far, we have collected over \$49,000. That is great for the district and helps with next year's budget. The apparatus maintenance and repairs line item is over budget due necessary repairs on two vehicles. The year to date actual is \$48,000 and the budget was \$23,000. Everything else is under budget. I spoke with Chief Deskis about using the contingency fund to cover the repairs overage. We don't have to transfer any money because it is covered right now because of the overage. Comm. Perry said it is a line item that is in the red. You are talking bottom line budget and we don't do bottom line budget. Comm. Dodd said there is money in the fuel budget that can offset this. This could change as the year goes on. We need to project out the next four months' expenses to see if there will be any carry over for next year's budget.

5. Public Communications:

Jeff Cross, 1116 Enfield Street, said Comm. Reidy is sick and therefore unable to attend tonight's meeting.

Mr. Cross said the financial statements for January and February are not on the website. That makes the Treasurer's report hard to follow. I believe the overage of \$308,000 is a misstatement because two of the line items are not reflected. Those items are the contingency fund and the building fund. The Board has indicated that both of those items were funded but the line items are reflecting zero expenditures. That is overstating the amount of money that is available.

Mr. Cross said the February 26th and the March 12th meeting minutes are not posted on the website. We don't know what happened at those meetings. Not everyone can attend meetings.

Mr. Cross said there are limits built in the Charter. You cannot go over budget. If it's more than \$20,000 and falls above the percentage limit the Board can move, there needs to be a special meeting to approve the expenditure.

Mr. Cross said it was mentioned at a meeting that there were a lot of injuries and several people retiring. There was a discussion about how to fix the employee shortage. There is nothing on the agenda about staffing needs. I hope the Board can talk about where we are. If we still are under budget year to date, that means we have a padded budget.

Mr. Cross said I hope to hear what the Board is going to discuss about the pension.

6. Commissioners' Communications:

Comm. DuFour asked Dept. Wawer to post the minutes on the website.

Comm. Dodd said Dept. Secy. Wawer was very ill and out sick for a few weeks. She is still catching up.

Comm. Dodd said our budget is overbudgeted. We have been trying to cut along the way because we don't want money sitting around. I commend Chief Deskis for working really hard to try to cut along the way. We still have four months to go. Three hundred and eight thousand dollars is a drop in the bucket for a \$4.5 million budget. Chief Deskis has done a great job on dialing back.

7. Old Business: a) Pension, b) Boundary Dispute, c) Chief's Contract, d) Amended Charter Vote:

Pension: Comm. DuFour said he has to email Prudential with the wording that was forwarded to him from Beirne Wealth. Dept. Secy. Wawer said the email has to come from a plan representative.

Comm. Perry said part of the process is to remove the funds but keeping back enough to make the next payments. After those payments are made, the rest of the funds will be transfer. Beirne Wealth will then be in charge of managing all of our money. This company is very thorough and very hands-on. They have offered to attend meetings.

Comm. Dodd said Ms. Allard did call me but she was unable to connect with Prudential.

Comm. DuFour said Prudential is looking a release into order to talk to Beirne Wealth. They need something in writing. I will send the release and then Prudential will let us know what is needed to terminate our plan with them.

Boundary Dispute: Comm. Perry said Attorney Landolina sent her a letter stating that Hazardville does not acknowledge there was a boundary dispute. If we send Hazardville a letter, the district is opening themselves up to a law suit if someone were to get hurt. If there is no boundary dispute, then we need to let it go.

Chief's Contract: Comm. Dodd said the contract has been updated. The two corrections were the chief's salary and the contract term.

MOTION to accept the amended Chief's contract and offer it to Chief David Deskis for his review made by Comm. DuFour, seconded by Comm. Dodd.
Discussion: none. Roll Call- Motion passed 3-0.

Amended Charter Vote: Comm. DuFour said this will be voted on in May. It will be done at the same time as the election. It will be on the ballot.

Comm. Perry said the proposed amended Charter has already run in the newspaper. It will be included in the warning. Comm. Perry suggested running the ballot wording by Atty. Landolina.

8. New Business: a) Fire Commissioner Applications:

Comm. DuFour said applications are due April 1, 2019. Dept. Secy. Wawer said she will post the application on the website and have copies available at the station.

9. Approval of Minutes from November 21 special meeting, November 21 regular meeting, and December 12 special meeting:

MOTION to accept the November 21 special meeting, the November 21 regular meeting, and the December 12 special meeting minutes made by Comm. DuFour, seconded by Comm. Perry. Discussion: none. Roll Call- Motion passed 3-0.

10. Discussion and Approval of Invoices/Bills:

Commissioners reviewed, discussed and approved checks for invoices/bills.

11. 2019-2020 FY Budget Workshop:

Comm. Perry said there are a couple of items that we don't know how the Town Council is going to move on. One is them is the water usage. We don't own our hydrants, but the Town doesn't realize that. Comm. DuFour asked Comm. Perry to explain what she is talking about. Chief Deskis said the water company wants to charge each linear foot for the water mains. But residential water goes through those mains too. The Town taxes the water company for the mains and now the water company is taxing the Town back.

Comm. Perry said the other thing is the fee for the dispatch center. We are looking at a hefty increase from last year. All the fire districts are fighting that. Chief Deskis said that cost increased from \$8,000 to over \$19,000. Com. Perry said there is talk of padding the budget, but we could make it totally lean and not be able to pay the bill. Then we won't be part of the dispatch center. Comm. Dodd asked could we not be a part of it. Comm. Perry said no.

Comm. Dodd asked why the building and apparatus account hasn't been funded. Dept. Secy. Wawer said it has been funded. Comm. Perry asked if Comm. Dodd means funded or pulled out as it's used. Comm. Dodd said pulled out as used. Dept. Secy. Wawer said none of the money has been used. It's in the bank account. Comm. Dodd said when we move it into an account then we are spending it. We are pulling it out of this budget. It shows that it's still there. It has to reflect that the money has been pulled out. We can talk about it after the meeting.

Comm. Dodd handed out a working budget to the Commission. Comm. Dodd said the first column is our current budget. The second column is the Chief's proposal. The third column is the difference between the first two columns. The fourth column is the Commission's proposal. The last column is the difference between the current budget and the Commission's proposed budget.

Comm. Dodd said on the chief's proposal, there is a reduction in the tax revenue. But there is an increase in the motor vehicle grand list. There is a \$41,000 increase in the heart & hypertension payments. The employees' insurance and benefits line has a \$23,000 increase. Property and liability insurance will increase by \$2,000. The chief reduced the vehicle maintenance and fuel costs by \$4,000 but increased the apparatus equipment by \$4,000. There are minimal increases for the station and operational expenditures. The fees remain the same as last year. The other expenditures category increased due to the increase in the communications center fee. The chief added \$175,000 in capital expenditures for new air packs, a new air compressor, gym equipment, and a cutting tool for the apparatus. The building and apparatus fund remains the same. Debt service decreases significantly because we paid off the leases

this year. The total proposed expenditures are \$4.993 million. The revenues will be short by \$1.2 million. Last year \$1.4 million was carried over.

Comm. Dodd said now let's take a look at my proposal. Currently we are over in the Fire Marshal fees with the potential to be over even more. The Fire Marshal fees were increased to \$50,000. The heart and hypertension is the same as the Chief's proposal. The pension contribution is reduced to \$500,000. There weren't any changes made from the Chief's proposal for insurances, vehicle, and operational expenditures. The legal fees were reduced by half. We budgeted \$80,000 last year because of the contract negotiations. We can't make any changes to the communication center fees. The capital expenditures only includes the air packs and compressor. Comm. Perry said she didn't think we can spend \$160,000 without a vote. Dept. Secy. Wawer said it is part of the proposed budget. We can spend that money if the budget passes. Comm. Perry said she was thinking about leasing something. Chief Deskis said the department applied for a grant for 12 air packs. Comm. DuFour asked if the air packs could be phased in. Chief Deskis replied yes. Comm. Dodd said the gym equipment and cutting tool were cut out. We need to shave the budget where we can. The building and apparatus fund was also cut. We shouldn't fund a savings account if we don't have money to pay our bills. The difference was \$1.2 million and my proposal brings the difference down to \$794,000 that we need to come up with.

Comm. Dodd said there are a couple of things in the works that are going to take a year to show it works. That would allow us to keep the mill rate the same for the next budget. We have to keep the mill rate where it is. The Charter states if the budget gets voted down twice, then we go back to the 2018 mill rate. We need to keep it close to the 2018 numbers. We just have to work really hard to be there. Comm. Perry said we need to present the budget by March 27.

Comm. Dodd said we need to figure out how much money we will have at the end of the year. Looking at the year to date expenditures, I'm not sure if we'll have any money left over. I don't know where else to trim the budget. The wages and benefits and the heart & hypertension are what is sinking us. Comm. Perry said there is nothing we can do about the heart & hypertension. Comm. Dodd said if we want to make it work then we are going to have to raise the mill rate. If it get voted in then we are right back to where we started. What happens if we can't pay the bills? We will have to close the doors and nobody will have a job.

Captain Pliszka suggested using a 5-year loan to pay for the air packs. We can spread the cost over 5 years. Comm. Dodd said that isn't going to make much of a difference. We have to come up with eight hundred thousand dollars. We can't change fuel or equipment costs. All the things we could trim won't make a difference. The only thing we can do is increase funds. Comm. DuFour said we are going to have to raise the mill rate. We don't have a choice. Comm. Perry said it's either you have a budget or you don't have a budget. The mill rate was cut too much last year. We were backed into a corner. We had to go with the budget in order to keep this place going. Comm. Dodd

asked is there anything the Board wants to change if the mill rate is raised. Comms. DuFour and Perry said no.

Comm. Dodd suggested cutting the contingency fund. Dept. Secy. Wawer said I think it has to be funded per the charter. Comm. Dodd said so that money can be used to pay for any unexpected expenses. How do we move the money? Comm. DuFour said the Board would have to make a motion. Comm. Dodd read Section 9.4 of the charter. There is nothing that says we have to fund the contingency fund. We can't exceed one percent of the budget. So, we are not going to fund the apparatus & building fund and the contingency fund.

Comm. Dodd said what happens if we have money left over at the end of the year and we didn't have to raise the mill rate. Comm. Perry said unfortunately that's the nature of a budget. The budget is a projection. Anything could happen during the year. Comm. DuFour said I don't want to raise the mill rate but we have to.

Comm. Dodd asked what the number is we are basing the mill rate on. Dept. Secy. Wawer said in order to calculate the amount of revenue, multiply the grand list by the mill rate and then divide that figure by one thousand. Comm. Perry said Della Froment can go over the grand list and tell you how to calculate the mill rate. Chief Deskis said he will contact her tomorrow.

Comm. DuFour said the public isn't going to be happy. I'm not happy about it. Comm. Perry said I'm not happy about it. Our treasurer said this reduction is for one year when the budget was presented last year and we were going to have to raise the mill rate the following year. We should have gone with the Chief's proposed budget. Comm. Dodd said she will look at her figures again. Comm. Perry said last year's budget was a one time deal to clean up money that was carried for a few years. Everybody needs to tighten their belts. We need to watch every penny. The residents are getting hit hard with taxes and we don't know what the Town is going to do. The Town could keep all the money from motor vehicles. Comm. Dodd said she needs to know where we are getting our money from. The figures need to be right. Chief Deskis said he will visit Della tomorrow.

12. Adjourn:

MOTION to adjourn made by Comm. DuFour, seconded by Comm. Perry. All in favor by ayes at 8:21 pm.