

Regular Meeting of the
Board of TFD Fire Commissioners

DRAFT -- Meeting Minutes – March 17, 2021

Thompsonville Fire Station, 35 N. Main Street, Enfield, CT

1. Call to Order: by Comm. Perry at 7:02 pm.

2. Roll Call: present were Comm. Perry, Comm. Dodd, Comm. Bouthiette, Comm. Gillespie, and Comm. Pliszka. Also, present was Chief Deskis.

3. Chief's Report:

Chief Deskis said he received a quote to paint inside the fire station. The quote was emailed to the Board. I have contacted several painters and only one responded back with an estimate. That estimate is reasonable. The estimate is for painting the common areas and the kitchen.

Chief Deskis said the department is going to switch cell phone service providers from Verizon to T-Mobile. The NextGen response app does not work on the Verizon network. It was difficult working with the Town's IT Dept. and Verizon trying to get the program to work. T-Mobile will be a bit cheaper anyways.

Chief Deskis said he contacted a contractor regarding moving the dirt pile in the back of the station that is on the Town's property. I have asked our attorney to contact the Town's attorney about filling out paperwork. Part of the skateboard park's fence needs to be removed in order for the excavation equipment to get to the pile. The contractor is not going to charge for removing the dirt.

Chief Deskis said the Town has mentioned in the water mains legal issue that station's fence is on the Town's property. The Town wants us to remove it. It's a shame that the District paid for that fence and now the Town wants it gone. Comm. Bouthiette asked which fence. Chief Deskis said the chain-link one. Comm. Bouthiette asked can we move the fence over to our property. Comm. Perry said there isn't room. We had to receive permission from the Town to put it there. Comm. Dodd said the Town approved it and now they disapprove of it. Comm. Gillespie asked is the approval in writing. Chief Deskis said it was a lease agreement. Comm. Bouthiette asked is the driveway right on the property line. Chief Deskis said yes.

Chief Deskis said he talked with Comm. Pliszka about using some of the contingency fund money to purchase the ESO RM program. It is the replacement program for the Firehouse software. The software is being phased out in December. Comm. Dodd said the Board said okay. Chief Deskis said he just wanted to make sure.

Chief Deskis said the fire apparatus research committee had a meeting with a fire apparatus representative from Shipman's to discuss the various options.

the Ford Explorer has been prepared to be put up for auction with the Board's approval. It will be listed on the CT public surplus auction site. That is the same site we used to sell the compressor. Comm. Dodd asked how long is it up for bid. Chief Deskis said I could leave it up for 1-2 weeks. Comm. Bouthiette asked have you thought about selling it in house. Maybe somebody needs a vehicle. Comm. Dodd asked why we are selling it. Chief Deskis said we don't need it. Comm. Dodd asked who's was it. Chief Deskis said it was the assistant chief's vehicle. Comm. Dodd asked how old it is. Chief Deskis said it is a 2007. The Fire Marshal's vehicle is a 2006. When the Tahoe comes in, then that one will be put up for sale as well.

Chief Deskis said there has been some attention about the General Assembly Proposed Bill No. 6050 which addresses the PILOT program. It may be reinstated with some help from our political partners. This bill would ensure that monies received by the Town will be shared with the fire districts. Currently the Town keeps all the money. I have asked if we are going to receive any money from the Covid Relief bill. They didn't respond back to me. Same thing happened with the Pequot funds for public safety. Comm. Perry said I don't want to hear crying from the Town regarding the Covid relief money. I'm tired of the fire departments being cut out. That's not right. I am going to contact Congressman Courtney and Senator Murphy. We really need to get some of the money, and we need to know what the Town is doing with it. Most town budgets include the fire departments.

Chief Deskis said there was a structure fire at 8 Thistle Lane last week. The members who responded did an excellent job. They responded quickly and the fire was contained to one unit. Having a full-time staff allows us to have such quick response times.

Chief Deskis said he has been working on next year's budget. I am waiting on some estimates. The IT maintenance fee increased due to the new CAD system. I have reached out to the Town Manager and the Finance Director to see if there are any other increases. I have not received a response back. I assume they are busy dealing with the pandemic.

Chief Deskis said department received another grant from the CT Water Company. The grant will be used to purchase water flow equipment.

4. Treasurer's Report:

Comm. Dodd said one of the things she likes to do around this time of year is see where the budget is at and see how the funds are looking against the budget. There is \$2,618,579 in the municipal investment account. There is \$23,874 in the operating account. I am going to focus on the municipal investment account.

Comm. Dodd said looking at the budget, our average expenses are \$262,800 a month. There are 4 months left in the fiscal year. So, the total expenses for those 4 months is \$1,051,205. I just want to reiterate that these are averages. We need to have 2 months-worth until we received funds in August. The two-month expenses are \$525,602. The total expenses for those 6 months is \$1,576,807. We are supposed to have approximately 3 months of expenses in reserve, which is \$788,403. That equals \$2,365,210. Subtracting that amount from what is in the municipal investment account, we will have \$253,369. Our budget is on target.

Comm. Pliszka said we can have up to 25% of the year's taxable revenue. Comm. Dodd said so that is just the Grand List revenue which equals \$878,560. Comm. Pliszka said so anything over the \$878,000 can be used for next year's budget. Comm. Dodd said yes. These are just average numbers though. It looks like this year is going to be a wash. We are exactly where we are supposed to be just like last year after the audit. It took us 3 years to get here to where we are running a very tight budget.

5. Public Communications:

Vincent Grady said at last meeting I approached the Commission about getting back on the District's dental insurance. I lost my dental insurance from my previous employer. I wanted to re-enroll but there were concerns about paying for the insurance. Union President Provencher told me the money from the retiree government trust can be used to pay for dental insurance. So, the District would not be involved in any payments. All I need is for the District to contact BeneCare to say it is okay for me to join. The premiums for other insurance companies are double the cost of BeneCare's.

Comm. Perry said basically what you are saying is there will be no paperwork for the District. Mr. Grady said that is correct. Comm. Perry said that was our issue with it before. Mr. Grady said the first time I approached the Board, I didn't know this was possible. I was made aware of it thanks to President Provencher.

MOTION to allow Vincent Grady back on the District's dental insurance with no administrative cost to the District made by Comm. Perry, seconded by Comm. Bouthiette. Discussion: none. Roll Call- Motion passed 5-0.

6. Commissioners' Communications:

Comm. Pliszka said he and the Chief met with Herb Holding about removing the dirt pile. There are 2,000 yards of clean dirt in the pile. It would have cost \$80,000 at \$40/yard to remove if the dirt was not clean. He is going to remove the dirt for free and sell it. Comm. Perry said thank you for doing a great job with this. Chief Deskis said the only problem is he wants to get the dirt really soon and the Town is dragging their feet. Comm. Dodd said the Town that wants it moved is dragging its feet. Chief Deskis said yes. Comm. Perry asked who are you dealing with. Chief Deskis said the woman

that we met last night. I haven't heard back from her yet. Comm. Perry said we have to keep at it because we could be stuck with that pile of dirt. The District doesn't have the money to move. Comm. Bouthiette since the Town wants us to take the fence down, we can take it down and they can drive in through our property and remove it. Comm. Perry said the company is accessing the Town's property because that is where the dirt is.

Comm. Pliszka asked is the quote for painting the station in this budget. Chief Deskis said yes because we will use the building maintenance fund.

7. Old Business:

None.

8. New Business:

Comm. Perry said the Chief has asked for some time off. My only issue is that it is so close to the budget. He is requesting the 25th – 31st off. I wanted to talk with the Board before granting any time off. It is not the most opportune time but it is his time to take. Comm. Pliszka said is it for this month. Comm. Perry said yes. Comm. Dodd asked why is this an issue. Comm. Perry said I was thinking about the budget. The budget presentation is March 31st. Comm. Dodd said he gave us a full accounting of the budget. Comm. Perry said absolutely. She asked Chief Deskis if he would be available by phone in case the Board has any questions. Chief Deskis said he can use Zoom.

9. 2021-2022 FY Budget Workshop:

Comm. Dodd said Chief Deskis and Dept. Secretary Steneri gave me a budget. He did a good job of line-iteming. I use an Excel spreadsheet that contains a formula. After talking with Comm. Pliszka, the Chief broke out the spreadsheet even more based on the Charter. I was able to take his figures and plug them into my formula. Our bottom-line numbers and groupings are the same. My spreadsheet allows me to play around with the mil rate.

Comm. Dodd said the grand list is the net of the real estate and business personal property. The calculation is the grand list multiplied by the mil rate then divided by 1,000. The grand list total is \$529,548,630. Multiply that amount by the proposed mil rate which is 6.86 right now. Then divide figure by 1,000 which equals \$3,632,704. Chief Deskis said his budget has a different figure because he used a mil rate of 6.46. Comm. Dodd said the Chief's budget is a starting point and then we play around with numbers from there.

Comm. Dodd said there was a duplication of a number in my budget which has been corrected. Chief Deskis spoke with Milliman regarding the pension contribution. The contribution can be reduced. Chief Deskis said our actuary said the District is putting in too much money into the pension. There is a couple of recommended contribution amounts to consider. Comm. Dodd said I used the \$332,000 figure in my budget.

Comm. Dodd said the motor vehicle grand list has the same calculation as the grand list. The rest of the revenue figures were provided by the chief. We budgeted \$25,000 in Fire Marshal fees for this year. We have collected over \$29,000 so far with 4 months left. The FM fees figure is very conservative but we don't want to over project it. We can lower the mil rate if we want to increase the amount. We are running a tight budget. There is not a lot of room for fluff or overage. That is something to think about. The Board agreed to keep the FM fees figure. The rest of the budget is the numbers that the Chief came up with.

Comm. Dodd said our current mil rate is 6.46. The mil rate has continuously decreased since I became a member of the Board. It decreased because there was leftover monies from previous years.

Comm. Dodd said the tax collector fee is based on the grand list revenue. Comm. Bouthiette asked is the tax collection fee going to remain the same. Comm. Dodd said yes. I budgeted \$29,062 for the contingency fund. Comm. Pliszka said the Charter says 1 percent. Comm. Dodd said we can go under 1 percent. We just can't go over. I didn't use the full 1 percent because I was trying to balance the budget.

Comm. Dodd said the mil rate is going to slightly increase by 0.40. I spoke with Chief Deskis about keeping it at 6.46. He said that wasn't going to happen. We would have to cut \$205,465 from the budget.

Comm. Pliszka said we are going over the 25 percent of our reserve. Comm. Dodd asked are you talking about this year. Comm. Pliszka said yes. We can only have up to 25 percent of excess funds. Comm. Dodd said after we have paid everything out. Comm. Pliszka asked are we going to have more or less. Comm. Dodd said we are not going to have more. We should speak with our accountants to see if we are going to have any money to roll over.

Comm. Perry said I want to know about the communications center. Chief Deskis said we have not received a bill yet. Comm. Dodd said we kept it the same in the budget. Comm. Perry said I would like to know what the Town is going to do. Comm. Bouthiette said the Town better not try to significantly increase it next year. Can they do that? Chief Deskis said no. Once the budget year is done, that is it. If we don't receive a bill by June 30, then we don't have to pay it.

Comm. Dodd said I think we just need to have the accountant review the budget to determine if there is an overage. I look at the profit and loss statement. The accountant factors in other things into the audit. Comm. Bouthiette asked is there a problem if we

keep it the same and then the overage is higher. Comm. Pliszka said we are not supposed to have more than 25 percent. Comm. Dodd said it's hard to predict how much money we are going to have at the end of the year. Comm. Perry said the Charter doesn't want the District to raise taxes and just keep the excess money in the bank. Comm. Bouthiette said we should keep a bumper if we can. Comm. Dodd said we have used the excess money to contribute more to the pension and lower the mil rate. Comm. Bouthiette said as long as we are within a window. Comm. Pliszka said we can have close to a million dollars. Comm. Bouthiette said what if we collect more money from FM fees than we budgeted. Comm. Perry said we have one year with a lot of new buildings going up. That is not going to happen every year. Comm. Dodd said that is where the audit helps us. It will tell us if we are over or under. Comm. Bouthiette asked what if the money we expected doesn't come in. Comm. Dodd said it is possible. Our budget is tight. Comm. Pliszka said that is why we said 25 percent. Comm. Dodd said the 25 percent depends on the tax revenue. The figure I came up with for the amount of money remaining at the end of the year is less than 25 percent. Comm. Bouthiette said as long as we don't get caught short.

Comm. Pliszka asked do we have any money in this year's budget to purchase some of the capital expenditures. Chief Deskis said it is tight. We could use the building fund for the ice machine. I don't want to take money out of the apparatus maintenance for tires. I don't want to take money out of the contingency fund in case we do come up short towards the end of the year. I don't think we are going to be short but I would like to have the money there just in case. Comm. Dodd said you can look at the profit and loss statement to see which items have some money in them. You can use the extra money for something else in the same budget category. Comm. Pliszka said if there is money left over in the contingency by June 30 then we can use it. Comm. Dodd said the 21-22 budget will already be in place. Chief Deskis said removing some of the smaller line items isn't going to make a difference. Comm. Pliszka said we need to start funds for the capital expenditures so when the time comes we will have the money.

Comm. Dodd asked what happens to the money in the contingency fund if we don't spend it. We can't add to it. There is \$35,000 in it now and then we are going to add \$29,000 to it next year. Comm. Pliszka said that money goes away. It would roll into our overage. But we are going to spend that.

Comm. Dodd asked weren't there some items that were cut from previous budgets. There was a tool and some gym equipment. Chief Deskis said we bought the tool. We are going to use any left over money from the replacement vehicle to buy lights and radios. We haven't spent the money for the Plymovent system because the people coming to work on it were unreliable. Comm. Pliszka said we can roll over any money after the lights and radios are bought to the S.C.B.A. loan.

Comm. Gillespie said let's talk to the auditor to get a solid figure. We can figure out what to do from there and then finish up the budget.

Chief Deskis said he added more money to the legal expenses in case there is a consolidation study. It is up in the air right now.

Comm. Pliszka is there any money we can take from somewhere and use it to preserve historical items. Items such as restoring and preserving old photographs. Chief Deskis asked can we use the building fund for that. Comm. Pliszka said just \$250. Comm. Perry said that can come out of the building fund.

Comm. Perry asked for an update regarding the bell. Chief Deskis said due to Covid-19, it was hard finding someone to do the stonework. Someone could possibly come out and work on it in the spring. Capt. Pliszka and Firefighter DeMur were working on it. Comm. Pliszka said we just need to pour some concrete, put some bolts on it and attach the bell. Chief Deskis said we can use the building fund for that.

Comm. Dodd asked can we review the important budget dates. Chief Deskis said March 31st is the budget presentation. Comm. Dodd said so the budget has to be done by then. Comm. Bouthiette said I am fine with the budget as long the auditors take a look at it. Chief Deskis said April 3rd is when the public hearing notice is published in the paper. April 5th is when the Fire Commissioner applications are due. April 14th is the public hearing and a special meeting. April 24th is when the annual meeting notice, Commissioner candidate list, and budget appropriations are published in the paper. Business affidavits are due by April 26th. May 5th is the budget vote, commissioner election, annual meeting, and a special meeting. A special district meeting is on May 19th in case the budget does not pass. May 27th is the last day to fix the mil rate.

Comm. Perry said she wanted to bring up that Chief Deskis needs a job evaluation done. He has never had one since he has been hired. I am not sure if Comm. Pliszka is allowed to do an evaluation on the chief. It is a sticky situation because the chief evaluates Comm. Pliszka. Comm. Pliszka said he does not have to do it. Comm. Perry said there are some comments about budgets that Comm. Pliszka can fill out. We are going to try to get this done by the end of the year. Comm. Dodd said it needs to be done soon because his salary is part of the budget. Comm. Perry asked did he receive a raise this year. Comm. Pliszka said he refused one. Chief Deskis said I asked for some extra vacation days instead. Comm. Perry said I am not sure we can get this done in time before the budget is presented. Comm. Gillespie asked can we add some money to the salaries whether it's used or not. Comm. Dodd said but we get a lot of overtime. Comm. Bouthiette asked can the Board make a motion to give him some vacation time in lieu of salary. Comm. Dodd said yes. We need to look at what the Board would have given him as a raise and turn it into a certain number of days. Chief Deskis said I would rather take more time than take a raise. Comm. Pliszka said we should probably do that in executive session. Comm. Perry said salaries are public. Comm. Bouthiette said the Board should discuss it in executive session and then the decision is public. Comm. Dodd asked can we discuss it today since there is already an executive session on the agenda. Comm. Perry said we can't discuss things in executive session that are not on the agenda.

10. Approval of Minutes from February 17 regular meeting:

MOTION to approve the minutes of the February 17 regular meeting made by Comm. Gillespie, seconded by Comm. Perry. Discussion: none. Roll Call- Motion passed 4-0-1 with Comm. Pliszka abstaining.

11. Possible Executive Session re: Employment of Keith Pliszka and Michael Forsyth:

MOTION to enter into Executive Session made by Comm. Bouthiette, seconded by Comm. Gillespie. Discussion: none. Roll Call- Motion passed 4-0-1 with Comm. Pliszka abstaining. Entered into Executive Session at 8:10 pm.

12. Possible Action regarding Employment of Keith Pliszka and Michael Forsyth:

Returned from Executive Session at 8:25 pm. No action taken.

13. Adjourn:

MOTION to adjourn made by Comm. Perry, seconded by Comm. Bouthiette. All in favor by ayes at 8:30 pm.