

Town of Suffield



Board of Fire Commissioners Minutes

Minutes of the Fire Commission Meeting
September 13, 2016

Commission Chair, Jeremiah Mahoney, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Suffield Police Department Community Room. Present: J. Mahoney, J. Caron, E. O'Hurley, A. Parrish, R. Gemme, Chief Flynn, Fire Marshal M. Thibedeau and observers. Absent: P. Christian.

The meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Secretary's Report

O'Hurley moved, Caron seconded to approve the minutes of the August 9, 2016 Commission meeting as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Financial Report

The Commission reviewed current year to date financial information for 2016-17. Chief Flynn reviewed line items in order to clarify any unexpected fluctuations. Gemme moved, Parrish seconded to approve the financial report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence

None

Calls and Activities

The Commission reviewed the report for August. A total of 40 calls were received during the month. On August 30th a large fire on Newgate Road resulted in a total loss. The Chief noted his arrival time was 4 minutes and 53 seconds from time of call and when he arrived the fire was 75% involved and nothing could be saved. Fire Marshal Thibedeau reviewed the details of the fire with the Commission. He considers it "extremely lucky that it was not a fatal fire." Other calls of significance for the month of August included a mutual aid call with East Granby, two vehicle fires and two accidents.

Public Comment

Carol Thibedeau expressed her concerns about recent "chatter" and "rumors" surrounding the hiring process for new employees. Her hope is that special attention is given to volunteers that have the necessary qualifications. She feels that the current moral issues will be worsened if outsiders are hired over qualified volunteers. Mr. Gemme thanked Mrs. Thibedeau for her comments. Chairman Mahoney addressed her by stating that he is unaware of any rumors and as the Commission is involved in the hiring process he can assure her that there will be no bias involved.

Rich Faraci commented that he has attended meetings frequently and would like to suggest that the Public Comment be moved to the end of the meeting. This change in structure would allow individuals an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns immediately as opposed to waiting four weeks to address a subject. He feels that this may bring a sense of unification between the public and the Commission. Mr. Caron explained that most commissions and committees in town hold Public Comment at the beginning of a meeting and while he can appreciate Mr. Faraci's frustration with it, he does not feel that a change is necessary. He suggested that an individual has the opportunity to express their concerns on a topic via email with a request that the subject be added to the next meeting agenda for discussion. Chairman Mahoney explained that the idea of Public Comment early in a meeting is to allow members of the department and members of the public to comment on items that are on the current agenda. This allows the Commission to consider agenda items with the input of interested parties. Further discussion between Commission and audience included concerns that it is difficult to comment on a subject when the direction of the Commission has not been made public. The Commission members reiterated the fact that if individuals feel strongly about an agenda topic that they speak during the early Public Comment and present any information they have so that it may be included for consideration. Chairman Mahoney expressed his willingness to speak with any individual who has concerns and said he will make himself available via phone, email or a scheduled meeting. Mr. Faraci thanked the commission for considering his request.

Dan Godin wanted to make a comment in regard to a question that was asked of Chief Flynn at the August Commission meeting relating to the number of times the ladder truck was called into use in the last year. The answer was between 40 and 50 times. Mr. Godin explained that the reason why it was only 40-50 was due to the fact that until recently there have only been three or four individuals who were allowed to drive this vehicle. He feels that over the next 6 months the usage should increase due to the fact that more apparatus drivers are now available to drive this particular vehicle.

Amanda Thibedeau expressed her appreciation to the Commission for the feedback being provided and she understands the position that the commission is in with regard to Public Comment. She would like to see exceptions made when larger decisions, such as equipment and personnel issues are being considered as these types of issues affect the Fire Department employees directly. Mr. O'Hurley stated that the Commission's decisions are "just one step in the process." The Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance are involved in further approvals and the public is welcome to attend either of those meetings and express their concerns relating to decisions made by the Fire Commission. Conversation continued with the audience and commission and it was conveyed that both sides look forward to bridging the communication gap and working together in a positive and productive manner.

Old Business

- Chairman Mahoney references an e-mail sent from First Selectman Melissa Mack with a list of concerns for the Commission to address.
- The First Selectman's email included a request for the Fire Commission to review consideration of the three pieces of equipment that the Town is considering from both a safety and a fiscal standpoint. Feedback is due prior to the Board of Selectmen meeting on September 21, 2016
- First Selectman Mack requested the Commission to review the pros and cons of purchasing versus rehabilitating an existing piece or engaging in a group purchase with other towns.

- First Selectman Mack wanted the Commission to provide feedback on the perception that the Fire Department has been over budget for “several years.” It is important that the cause or causes of the overage are explained and corrected. This information will be valuable as the Town is entering into Union negotiations. Chairman Mahoney noted that he responded to the First Selectman and asked for clarification of the overage issue as it is not his understanding that they have been over budget on a consistent basis.
- Chief Flynn gave an overview of the budget for 2015/16 with explanations of occurrences, both expected and unexpected, that resulted in the Fire Department budget being \$10,416 over for the year. This number is inclusive of all four stations.
- O’Hurley commended the Chief on his perseverance for sticking with his belief that the numbers were being reported incorrectly and finding the discrepancy by working with the Finance Department.
- It was determined by the Commission that the perception of being over budget was unfounded.
- Chief Flynn provided the Commission with an Apparatus Replacement Validation Report for review.
- Chief Flynn explained the components of the report and emphasized the Apparatus Replacement Schedule section which outlines the life expectancy of various types of fire apparatus.
- Chief Flynn summarized the changes that have occurred from a mechanical and safety perspective since the Town’s current trucks were manufactured in 1989 (Rescue Truck), 1991 (Aerial Tower) and 1999 (Pumper.)
- Chief Flynn reported on the pricing that he received from three sole source vendors (Pierce, Sutphen and Seagrave) which range between \$1.1 and \$1.3 million dollars. These prices are directly from the salesman in State of CT
- Caron reviewed pricing information he received from the GSA (Government) website which was between \$705K and \$1.2 million for a 100 foot aerial platform.
- Discussion occurred regarding the possible differences between what is included in the GSA pricing versus the sole source vendors. Chief Flynn emphasized that until the item is actually put out to bid with the required specifications there is no way of determining an exact number with regard to cost.
- Hurley expressed his desire for all three pieces, however, perhaps two vehicles being purchased and deferring the third might be an option.
- Caron addressed the issue of refurbishing the rescue and/or ladder vehicle and explains why this is not a viable option.
- The Commission discussed the option of purchasing a piece of equipment with another town. It was determined that this would not be a viable option.
- The Commission discussed what they feel the First Selectman and the Board of Selectman are looking for from the commission in regard to direction on purchases of the three pieces of equipment in question.
- Chief Mahoney proposed that a statement be prepared indicating that the Commission has considered the request for further info from the First Selectman and has determined the following:
 - Refurbishing existing equipment is not a workable option,
 - Cost sharing/purchase with other towns is not a workable option.
 - The Commission is in favor of purchase of a new rescue vehicle.
 - A majority of Commission had not received enough information that would allow them to vote favorably for the ladder truck.
- Chief Flynn discussed Standard Operating Procedures with the Commission.
- Chief Flynn discussed the Hiring Process with the Commission. He currently has 19 applications and two of these are internal.

- Gemme and Parrish asked what the testing process entailed and what the qualifications for internal applications included. Chief Flynn explained the different testing and the qualifications required.
- Chief Flynn noted there was a letter of denial regarding a Thermal Imaging Camera grant. He suggested the Town should re-submit for the grant, however, Engine 2 (Radley Road) is in need of a Thermal Imaging Camera immediately. He suggested approximately \$7,500 will be required to purchase the camera needed. Continued discussion ensued about possible ways of funding this purchase.
- A review of the Equipment Account is given by Chief Flynn.
- Chairman Mahoney motioned to authorize Chief Flynn to utilize funds from the Equipment Fund for replacement of the thermal imaging camera at Engine 2. O’Hurley seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

New Business

- None

Chief’s Report

- All oil separators have been completed
- Station 4 should be repaved this week
- Roof still on agenda
- Station 2 sprinkler work will start Tuesday of next week
- All vehicles are up to date on repairs and maintenance

Chairman’s Report

- None

Fire Marshal’s Report

- Chairman Mahoney commended Fire Marshall Thibedeau for being proactive in running the Department smoothly during Chief Flynn’s bereavement absence.
- 96 contacts for service for
- Residential fire will come in at almost \$1,000,000. Working with homeowner and is waiting to hear from insurance company
- Major project at the Suffield Academy has been completed. Fuller Hall is fully sprinklered which means that all dorms at the Academy have a sprinkler system.
- Suffield Academy has another big project – two residential dormitory buildings. Breaking ground in October/November.
- Site plans for proposed dormitory buildings will be presented to Fire Marshall Thibedeau for review.
- East Street Apartments and Hydroponic Tomato Farm – still on standby
- The Suffield Fire Department was issued a Life Safety Award

Other

None

Personnel

None

Executive Session

Gemme moved, Caron seconded and invited the Chief to join. Executive Session entered at 8:38 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Caron moved, O'Hurley seconded to return to regular session at 9:29 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

Mahoney moved, Gemme seconded to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Paul Christian, Secretary