

**Board of Fire Commissioners
Fire District No. 1
P.O. Box 6903
Freehold, NJ 07728**

Regular Meeting

May 26, 2015

Chairman Thomas Caruso called the regular meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners to order at 7:33pm. The notice was read, and Chief Zuccarelli led the flag salute. Roll call was taken, present were Joseph Colón, Shyamal Joshi, Robert Buscaglia, John Toutouchi and Thomas Caruso. Also in attendance were Mr. Joseph Youssouf and Rachel Davis.

News was shared that Donna Pujat passed away on May 16th. She was the Board Secretary for longer than any of the current Board members. A moment of silence was held to remember Donna followed by a prayer led by Monsignor Sam. Donna was a very special person and will be sorely missed by all.

Motion made by Mr. Joshi to accept the January meeting's minutes from Donna's computer.

Second: Mr. Buscaglia

4-1 in favor (Mr. Colón abstained)

Motion made by Mr. Joshi to adopt a Resolution Commending Charles S. Buscaglia on the Occasion of his Retirement from Public Service.

Second: Mr. (Robert) Buscaglia

Roll call vote: 5-0 all in favor

Mr. (Charlie) Buscaglia thanked the Board.

Mr. Youssouf suspended the regular agenda to go to public hearing and then read the Resolution Establishing a Part Paid Fire Department. Mr. Youssouf stated for the record that the resolution itself is a framework, which will enable the Board at a future time, at the Board's discretion, to hire part-time employees and does not now appoint any individuals to any offices mentioned in the resolution. It is not a resolution hiring people, it's a resolution that makes it possible for the Board to hire people when they think it's appropriate and the budget will permit. Chairman Caruso clarified that the Board does not have to do this if they do not see a need and are able to boost the ranks of the membership. Mr. Youssouf agreed and added that if the Board chose to, it must be done with a series of steps and, most importantly, by formal resolution. Mr. Youssouf also confirmed that a civil service test must be taken by anyone being hired. It was discussed that the Board had been looking into this matter since 1998 by Dr. Harry Carter.

Public Hearing:

Susan Jane Story (476 Ely Harmony Road):

Q: How many current firefighters possess same criteria in the resolution?

A: Chairman Caruso: Can't answer right now—still in the initial stages. The only thing that we're concerned about is our number of volunteers. That's what alerted us about this, the numbers have drastically declined over the year and have slowly declined over the last five years of our study. We have a big concern about that and have approached the volunteer fire company to possibly come up with some other incentives.

Q: Can you speak more to numbers and specifics—on page one of the resolution, can you be specific as to those demands?

A: Chairman Caruso: I'm not so sure it's come to that right now. It's becoming alarming the way it's proceeding. We need to be proactive on it and be ready in case that day happens. Real numbers: Oct. 2010—58 active firefighters; Oct. 2013—51; Aug. 2014—49; May 2015—34 (only 16 that can respond during day). We felt, as a Board, that we need to be prepared in case we can't boost the volunteers. Chairman Caruso also added that the firefighters are doing a fantastic job and advised that he brought applications for everyone to take and hand out for more volunteer firefighters.

Q: What do you attribute the declining numbers to and how can we change that?

A: Chairman Caruso gave examples, including his son, who went inactive due to the fact that he got a new job. Others went inactive due to medical, moved, no longer interested or don't have the time. We have a lot of fire calls here—thirty percent might not sound like a lot, but when you run a lot, it's a lot, and it's difficult for some members to do it.

Q: That thirty percent is that a company restriction or is that a state mandate? With that, my concern is that being in a remote area, I have a concern that there are not members and trucks responding from Smithburg Fire House.

A: Chairman Caruso: That (Smithburg) is a major concern of ours. We have lost a decent amount of volunteers from the Smithburg area. And that's something that we have to work with, and we have to work with the volunteer fire company. And yes, the thirty percent is a by-law with the volunteer fire company.

Q: So perhaps that needs to be addressed?

A: It's not just the calls, it's percentages with drills, keeping up with certificates and state-mandated courses, and there is a policy we have to follow that's a six-hour SCBA policy every year to maintain. That's been difficult for some to do.

Gordon Prochnow, Jr. (478 Ely Harmony Road):

We've had this downturn in the past. As far as fire calls, we've only gone to third alert on this department in the past year ten times or less. I don't think we need to put into the record that we need to start hiring people.

A: Chairman Caruso explained that there are many steps to get part-paid. It's the very early stages of it. Offered applications, again, for people to take them home to family and friends, if they want to avoid part-paid.

Mr. Buscaglia added that we have to set the foundation; it takes 16-20 weeks or longer to get a new member in.

Andy Prochnow (2 Peninsula Avenue, Sea Bright):

Q: My concern is that the way it's written right now, it's a blank check.

A: Mr. Youssouf reminded that it's just a structural framework.

Q: Shouldn't it be rewritten not leaving it open-ended?

A: Mr. Youssouf: It just says this is what you can do, when you're ready to do it.

Gordon Prochnow, Jr.:

Q: Right now, your resolution, as it states, outlines specific officers you want to hire. We already have a chief making ninety percent of his calls, why do we need another district chief? Why should we pay someone?

A: Chairman Caruso: These are all the things we will be discussing.

Andy Prochnow:

Q: In the position descriptions, nowhere does it say that to be a lieutenant, etc. you have to meet the requirements of a Class 1 or Class 2 firefighter, so what are the specifications?

A: Chairman Caruso: There are so many things that have to be adjusted and fine tuned.

A: Mr. Youssouf: We are bound by civil service regulations; those qualifications will define the employments.

Q: 5-10 years down the road, when you guys aren't commissioners, somebody else sees it as a blank check.

A: Chairman Caruso: There are still laws they have to follow, and we have to keep records.

A: Mr. Youssouf: This discussion is going to be in the record, kept by the Board. There's no mystery to it. It's all transparent and open. This is not a move to hire anybody now. When it comes to a hiring resolution, you specify what position the person is being appointed to and flesh out with great detail all the duties and obligations of office.

Marjorie Tuff (285 Monmouth Road):

Q: Dr. Carter—did he implement that program in Adelphia?

A: Mr. Youssouf: No, there's been no movement in Adelphia to create a part-paid fire department.

A: Chairman Caruso: He has to be hired for it and do a study.

A: Mr. Youssouf: He's a volunteer firefighter in Adelphia and he's the Chairman of the Board of Fire Commissioners in Adelphia, and Adelphia, as a Board of Fire Commissioners, has not moved to establish a part-paid fire.

Q: Some of these people here are firemen, right? They're not the ones getting paid, it's the top echelon who are being offered a payment.

A: Mr. Youssouf: That's not in the resolution.

Q: Those are the ones that are going to be paid.

A: Mr. Youssouf: No, those are the positions that *could* be paid.

Q: What about the little fireman?

A: (Few answer) Firefighter 1, Firefighter 2, that's the classifications.

Q: Civil service—is this advertised in the Asbury Park Press?

A: Chairman Caruso: Yes

A: Mr. Youssouf: Any of those firefighters that want to apply for this position already has a leg up, provided they meet the qualifications, which means they have to take the civil service test and pass it.

Q: You have young people here that are barely making it...give them some incentives, something that they can come in for, a tax break on their homes.

A: Mr. Youssouf: This is a common problem. A lot of towns are having it, shortage of volunteers. We asked Trenton to help us out, give some incentives to our volunteers. We fought for almost 20 years to get the LOSAP program adopted in the State.

Helena Yaeger (40 Burke Road):

Q: Why are we even looking at a paid department? Don't our guys get paid \$4 or \$5 per call now?

A: Chairman Caruso: Not by us.

Q: Who do they get paid by?

A: Chairman Caruso: I am not at liberty to answer for the fire company.

Q: But they're getting paid, and you're asking that we pay them out of our taxes, when they're already getting paid out of our donations.

A: Chairman Caruso: You'll have to address those questions to the fire company.

Marjorie Tuff:

Q: You're not at liberty to say anything about your fire departments individually?

A: Mr. Youssouf explained that the volunteer fire companies operate within their own by-laws. They're a separate, sovereign entity.

Helena Yaeger:

Q: We've had three structure fires and lost all three structures?

A: Chief Zuccarelli: Not true at all. One house on Jackson Mills—only garage roof was not intact, we saved the body of that house; second house on Jackson Mills—only damage to that house structurally was garage; Adam's place—very minor damage to the inside of the house. While this department is losing members due to a nationwide drop in volunteerism, the guys that are here are doing a fantastic job. It's only going to move forward in the future as a very viable volunteer fire company.

Susan Jane Story:

Q: Further verifies that there is not currently a need and a concern of your citizens.

A: Chairman Caruso: We were here for those fires. Imagine if we weren't here. The way we're working right now and the percentages that we're responding to—the fire companies are doing a fantastic job for what we have. We want to keep it that way. That's what we're looking at—to be ready for it. If you guys don't pick up applications and don't return them with someone's name on it...

VP Kevin Lagravis:

A: Confirmed that he doesn't get paid. We're not here for the money.

Helena Yaeger:

Q: If we have a paid system in place, how much is it going to be?

A: Mr. Youssouf: Our tax rate is 3.6 cents per \$100 assessed value, one of the lowest ones in the county. (Mr. Youssouf compared other towns' fire districts.) People are working longer and going further away, and what does that do, that diminishes the pool of volunteers. Every suburban community has exactly the same pressure. Being proactive is what the board is trying to do.

Q: When we go part paid, isn't there a certain amount of hours a fireman can work and then has to be off the clock? So, an example, like you came in to eat your dinner and then you got the Adams call, what if you were paid, what would you do? Get in your car and go home? You're clocked out already.

A: Mr. Youssouf: Doesn't matter, mandatory recall on every paid department, the call comes in and you're back on the clock. The object is to have the personnel to fight the fires. We don't have the personnel that we need to operate on a full-time basis anymore.

Q: Were all the calls answered with volunteers?

A: Chairman Caruso: Yes, so far.

Q: Freehold Township has Freehold Township Day. Didn't we have a table?

A: Chairman Caruso: We're there all the time—all day, every year.

Q: What programs do you give the high schools to encourage these men and women?

A: Chairman Caruso: We have some volunteers who will take time off and go to the high schools.

A: Chief Zuccarelli: We go to the high school and they allow us to set up a table and take names from the students who are interested. A lot of these kids have so much going on with sports and college; they don't have the time to do both.

A: Chairman Caruso: We do get junior firefighters, unfortunately, most recent ones left as soon as their college application was filled out and they got the letter from us saying they were a firefighter.

Jim McGallister (Freehold Borough):

Q: Can you elaborate on the resolution taking care of EMS?

A: Chairman Caruso: That's a rumor.

A: Mr. Youssouf clarifies the resolution.

A: Chairman Caruso: A number of our firefighters are also involved in Freehold First Aid and interested in obtaining an EMT to choose which avenue they want to go in. We, as a Board of Fire Commissioners, embrace that, we reimburse that, we like them to have as much knowledge and certificates as they can hold.

Peggy Haas (31 Fern Avenue):

Q: The second part of the resolution, whereas section, it could include emergency services?

A: Chairman Caruso: We were thinking more towards extrication, pumping out 200 basements, wires down.

Q: Also, section 6c, where it talks about life saving services. As far as EMS, there are some provisions in this resolution that could include EMS.

A: Chairman Caruso: Right now, life saving—we're talking about a grab, pulling someone out or CPR. Let's make it clear that there's nothing in there for EMS.

Q: 800 calls? Was that dispatch or answered?

A: Chief Zuccarelli: 443 calls to date. Last year 862; year before 1,200; year before 1,100 (storm years). Generally, we answer 700-1000 on a really heavy year. This year we're looking at about 850.

Q: Out of those 800+ calls, how many were fire alarms, smoking ashtrays....

A: Chief Zuccarelli: You're 100% right, if that's where you're going with it.

A: Mr. Buscaglia: But you never know when that one alarm is a fire.

Q: How many of these calls we have to go mutual aid because we didn't have the staff to cover?

A: Chief Zuccarelli: We have automatic mutual aid dispatch to us from the Borough...mutual aid only gets called for structural fires or threats of structural fires. Third alert mutual aid has not happened here in...I can't tell you when.

Q: If we're going part-paid, we're talking daytime only, correct?

A: Chairman Caruso: We haven't discussed it yet. This is the first step framework; it's all very basic...take one of these (applications) when you leave.

Susan Jane Story:

Q: Mention was made to the amendment to the current addendum could be offered, and my suggestion is that a time frame and more decisive mechanisms be put into it.

A: Chairman Caruso: We can't do anything unless we do it as a group, as a Board, and we have to abide by the laws. We act accordingly.

Q: What are the steps to put in an amendment in it for a time frame?

A: Mr. Youssouf: The question is for the Board. If they're ready to adopt it, they can adopt it tonight; they can table it and continue it.

Andy Prochnow:

Q: What have you done as a Board to encourage membership?

A: Chairman Caruso: We've had discussions with the Vice President and President.

Motion made by Mr. Joshi to close public hearing.

Second: Mr. Colón

5-0 all in favor

Motion made by Mr. Buscaglia to table Resolution Establishing a Part-Paid Fire Department for one month.

No second

No action taken on this motion

Motion made by Mr. Caruso to take a two-minute recess.

Second: Mr. Buscaglia

5-0 all in favor

(recess at 9:02pm; resumed at 9:07pm)

Motion made by Mr. Colón to go into Executive Session.

Second: Mr. Joshi

Roll call vote: 5-0 all in favor

(9:07pm)

Mr. Caruso opened regular session back up at 9:19pm.

Motion made by Mr. Toutouchi to adopt the Resolution Establishing a Part Paid Fire Department.

Second: Mr. Colón

Roll call vote: 5-0 all in favor

Motion made by Mr. Joshi to adopt Resolution Accepting Audit Report for the Year Ended December 31, 2014.

Second: Mr. Buscaglia

Roll call vote: 5-0 all in favor

Mr. Youssouf read Annual Audit Review Group Affidavit (attached to minutes) for Board to sign, to be witnessed and sent to auditor to be filed.

Mr. Youssouf ended his legal report. Chairman Caruso gave Mr. Youssouf permission to leave the meeting. Mr. Youssouf excused himself from the remainder of the meeting.

Correspondence:

E-mail from boy from France about patches that he collects. Referred over to fire company (Kevin L.) to mail a patch out.

Treasurer's Report (attached):

Motion made by Mr. Joshi to pay bills in the amount of \$375,288.10.

Second: Mr. Buscaglia

5-0 all in favor

Insurance:

We had an annual review from workman's comp., and will be saving money due to the decrease in firefighters from 70 to 34, so we will get a credit back.

Buildings:

District

- Ceiling tile tomorrow
- Carpet tomorrow
- Dan Peterson turned the lights around in parking lot

Georgia Road:

- Replace all exit lights

Property tax forms need to go out—we're good for another 3-5 years

Construction going good—digging up foundation, dug footings, pour by week's end. Done with change orders, meeting on Friday, switched two doors to be facing towards the building instead of sides.

Chief's Report (attached):

- Contract for tool (attached), also has a letter that they want sent out (gave to Board to put a stamp on and send out)

- He and Lt. Peterson went out to Appleton to finalize specs on truck, truck will start construction in August, probable delivery time some time end October, beginning November

President's Report:

VP Kevin Lagravenis said auditor being met with tonight, attorney filed paperwork for correction application for charter.

Old Business:

(none)

New Business:

(none)

Audience:

Jim McGallister (Freehold Boro):

Q: Narrow banding—East Freehold will buy 1 ½ if we buy 1 ½ Can we do that? \$1,100 each side.

A: Mr. Caruso: Can't give a yes or no, must check budget. Board requested that Jim e-mail a written request on letterhead.

Motion made by Mr. Buscaglia to adjourn meeting.

Second: Mr. Joshi

5-0 all in favor

Mr. Buscaglia thanked all the residents for coming out to the meeting. Chairman Caruso, once again, reminded everyone to take a volunteer firefighter application. No applications were taken.

Meeting adjourned at 9:38pm.

Respectfully submitted,

John Toutouchi, Secretary

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Attachments