Board of Fire Commissioners
July 20, 2021
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Room 1
Special Meeting

Commissioners present: Bruce Dutch, Tim Reynolds, Jennifer Spencer
Visitors: Rob Smith

1. Call to Order: Meeting called to order by Bruce Dutch at 5:30pm.

2. Transfer of Secretary/Treasurer Duties Discussions:
   a. J. Spencer reviewed the process of submitting invoices for processing every other week on Tuesday. Invoices are received in the Commissioners box at Company 2. Mail is currently delivered by Bob Bennett and via email from Dawn Snow. J. Spencer will review the payment process one on one with T. Reynolds for the next round of invoices due August 3rd.
   b. J. Spencer reviewed functions performed by secretary including meeting minutes with submission to Linda Zemienieski within 1 week of meeting. The Secretary will collect from L. Zemienieski the current budget and last meeting minutes on the day of meeting and have available for members.
   c. The Secretary is currently responsible for completing submission of upcoming budget. This process begins in October every year. Solicit input of volunteers and career staff for their requests for the coming year. The goal is to consolidate apparatus over 10-year period yet meet the needs of the Town. A new budgeting system, Clear Gov, was initiated for the 2021 – 2022 budget year. When the time comes J. Spencer offered to assist with the process. The Fire Commissioners/Fire Department will meet at least once with the Board of Finance Liaison prior to submission of budget requests. This year was the first time all of our apparatus were added into the budget for 10 years and beyond. This will greatly improve the town's ability to budget better for the future. The Commissioners need to be sure the requests are primarily a need versus a want. Consult with D. Angersola regarding any concerns for building and budget for that as well.

3. General Discussion:
   a. J. Spencer reviewed her hopes and concerns going forward. First to note is space for all apparatus. Company 2 now has the old Seagrave taking up one bay that could better be utilized for other apparatus making the placement of vehicles best aligned for exiting the building. The Seagrave is a Fire Department vehicle (a want not a need) not a Town vehicle. As Fire Commissioners we have say over the apparatus and buildings.
   b. Fire Commissioners oversee apparatus, buildings and budget preparation and submission. Commissioners are not involved with personnel or operations. As personnel and operations issues concerns and plans have been brought to the commissioner meetings J. Spencer touched on them as her point of view.

c. J. Spencer felt there should be set goals and all should work as a team from volunteers, career staff and Fire Commissioners. She strongly felt quarterly meetings with the First Selectman should be resumed with at least one fire commissioner, career staff, volunteer representative(s) and a representative of EHAA as well. This would be the better forum for discussing personnel and operations concerns, thus reducing the time of Fire Commissioners meetings with items not fully under our purview.
d. It is time to bring the fire department up to date – quit using the line "It's how it's always been done". The times and needs of the Fire Department are ever changing and we need to look forward and not stay in the past.
e. Treat all with respect. Don't just hear what is said but listen and offer opinions and as needed, compromise. Take the ego out of it. This is no place for egos or disrespect. Everyone is here for the residents and all need to work together. If you need something ask for it, don't demand.
f. Follow the chain of command First Selectman oversees the career staff. They work with the Volunteer Chief and together solve issues and or make changes. J. Spencer strongly felt in the near future there should be a paid Emergency Services Deputy Chief who is in command of all volunteers and career staff. She also sees the Town going to 24/7 coverage in the future.
g. Again, Fire Commissioners don't oversee personnel or operations, but attention needs to be paid to the goings on. Assure that SOG/SOP/By-laws get created and updated regularly. Make sure there is a clear line of discipline as right now there is nothing in writing. Discipline has been "off the cuff" using "understood" guidelines related to volunteers. Career staff is disciplined by First Selectman. For discipline of higher officers (Volunteer Chief and Deputy Chief), there is nothing in place. This needs to be rectified as soon as possible. The members need to have a direction for submitting complaints or issues with the Chief and Deputy Chief. Right now there is no one responsible for overseeing this concern. First Selectman Smith did note that we have access to a handbook for employees for the volunteers to use for guidance to discipline.
   There is a history of issues especially related to safety. For instance, driving a piece of apparatus with flipflops, a recent training involved safety for a junior firefighter, a tanker being taken to fire by an out-of-town firefighter and the rig was out of service. There is little to no accountability for mistakes and if issues are brought up they are quickly "swept under the rug" with a little slap on the hand saying "don't do it again. It's not fair to the other firefighters nor the residents.
h. Public relations need to be improved. Need more transparency and remember, we are in the forefront, we see people at one of the worst of times for them. We need to look and act professional at all times. Avoid smoking at a scene. Remember perception of a sentence or word, whether it's written or spoken can be perceived differently by different people. No one is perfect – all systems, homes, workplaces need to address concerns and make adjustments. Embrace the changes. Be part of the solution not part of the problem. Good leaders need to be fair, be truly open to listen and hear what's said. Any Chief is a leader not the "almighty". They have compassion, know the rules and guidelines and work well with others.
i. Thank you for all you do. Thank you for this opportunity to help make changes to help our residents and our firefighters. Stay safe.

4. Adjournment: Motion made by T. Reynolds, seconded by J. Spencer, to adjourn the meeting at 6:10pm. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Spencer, Secretary