

Chester Board of Fire Commissioners
Minutes, January 17, 2018
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The Chester Board of Fire Commissioners held the regular monthly meeting on Wednesday, January 17, 2018 at the Chester Fire House, 6 High Street, Chester, Connecticut. In attendance were Joel Severance, Rick Schreiber, Peter Zanardi, and Bettie Perreault. Ex-officio members present were Fire Chief John Brainard, Selectman Charlene Janacek, Fire Marshals Richard Leighton and David Roberge. Also present was Assistant Chief Kim Brainard. Chairman Severance called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M. In the absence of Judy Brown, Bettie Perreault provides minutes.

Item 1: Approval of Minutes of November 15, 2017.

Motion by Zanardi second by Schreiber, to approve the November 15, 2017 Minutes. Unanimously approved.

No meeting of the Commissioners was held during the month of December 2017.

Item 2: Audience of Citizens

There were none present.

Item 3: Report of Fire Marshal

Report of activities of the Office of Fire Marshal for the months of November and December 2017 were distributed and reviewed. There were no questions or discussion.

Item 4: Report of Fire Chief

- Chief John Brainard and Assistant Chief Kim Brainard reported that Chester Ambulance Unit 2 is on loan to the Haddam department as its units are out of service. It is anticipated Unit 2 will be stationed there for approximately 72 hours or until no longer needed.
- The Chief's car has been taken back to the dealer for service/maintenance/repair associated with an oil leak. The cost of this work should be covered under the vehicle's existing warranty.
- To better record working times by daytime paid personnel for the Ambulance service, a time clock will be installed in the Ready Room. The Chief, other officers and Selectmen are working to establish guidelines for duties and responsibilities for Town employees who are paid as daytime responders for the Ambulance service.
- There has been a high volume of calls for ambulance service as well as inadequate notice to officials of staffing absences, leading the few available volunteer responders to cover numerous calls.
- At this time all trucks are in good shape; the duce-and-a-half saw heavy use during the recent high water situation resulting from ice jams and recent weather events as responders checked on residents in low-lying areas abutting the Connecticut River who were or could become isolated.

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Item 5: Report of First Selectman

Selectman Janacek had nothing to report at this time and extended thanks and appreciation to the volunteers who worked with officials and others during the high water events.

Item 6: Report of Emergency Management Director

EMD Severance reported that three roads had been closed in connection with the recent high water event (Dock Road, Ferry Road, and Castle View Extension). EMD and Fire Department responders patrolled each area. All residents were apprised of the potential dangers posed by the rising water and ice on the river and a mandatory evacuation order was given to all residents present, which was signed by all, whether evacuated or not. Four residents were evacuated via a Fire Department vehicle. Some residents self-evacuated, some chose to shelter in place. It was noted that with the trend for many to no longer maintain telephone landlines and to rely only on cell service, contact information for residents in vulnerable areas needs to be updated promptly and distributed to all responsible responding agencies and departments.

Severance and others noted that the Coast Guard had advised that there is a responding ice cutter vessel in route to the Connecticut River. Arrival time, while not definite at the time, was anticipated to be within a day.

Item 7: Financial Reports

(a) 2017 - 2018 Budget – Fire Department

Copies of the budget as of January 9, 2018 were distributed and reviewed, with note that with half the fiscal year already passed and reported expenditures to date only 39.86% of the approved budget, the officers' attention to expenditures and a concerted Team Effort were to be commended.

(b) 2017 – 2018 Budget – Fire Marshal

Copies of the budget to date were distributed and reviewed. FM Leighton advised that expenditures for the Office of Fire Marshal are tracking almost exactly the same as last year, and that a year-end shortage should again be anticipated. He pointed out that, "Historically, this is what it takes to run this Department correctly." Purchase of 2018 Fire Code sections will be made as required, with specialized codes utilized in mutual aid assistance with other Fire Marshals.

Item 8: Old Business

There was none brought forward.

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Item 9: New Business

FM Leighton distributed copies of spreadsheets detailing activities of the Office of Fire Marshal from April 2011, when the current officials assumed their duties, through the present. Note was made of the steadily increasing level of activities and required inspection, showing actual use of 1,577 man hours annually, versus 608 hours utilized by the Town to establish an annual budget. This has resulted in an annual shortfall within the budget for this Office at the end of the fiscal year as a result of required or mandated duties and responses.

At the instruction of the office of the Selectmen, the 2018-2019 budget for the Office of Fire Marshal has been submitted. Note was made of the fact that professional development and required training was not included in the submission as Chester's officials qualify through training in other positions. With the previously submitted spreadsheets providing a multi-year track record, the need for professional development, training, regular update of required Codes, etc. should be included in the budgeting process going forward.

Motion by Zanardi, seconded by Schreiber to approve the budget for the Office of Fire Marshal as submitted. Unanimously approved.

Referring to earlier discussion in connection with Ambulance service and personnel, it was noted that a coordinator or similar professional could handle staffing and assignment duties, relieving the Chief of being first-on-call for coverage. Area towns are currently reviewing options as most departments are facing the same shortage of personnel, volunteers and staffing. How to achieve the needed coverage at an affordable cost to municipalities, while still providing coverage by local response and personnel was discussed.

Chairman Severance advised of on-going review by Town officials involving personnel matters.

On motion made by Perreault, seconded by Schreiber, at 8:16 P.M. the Commissioners voted to go into Executive Session in connection with personnel matters with ex-officio members remaining. Unanimously approved.

On motion by Zanardi, seconded by Schreiber, at 8:36 P.M. the Commissioners voted to return to the open meeting. Unanimously approved.

Motion to have the minutes reflect that no action was or will be taken by the Commission in connection with the Executive Session was made by Perreault, seconded by Schreiber. Unanimously approved.

No other motions were made and no actions were taken during the remainder of the meeting.

Item 10: Adjournment

Motion by Schreiber, second by Zanardi to adjourn at 8:39 P.M. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Bettie Perreault

Acting Clerk