

Chester Board of Fire Commissioners
Minutes, June 17, 2020
Page 1 of 4

The Chester Board of Fire Commissioners held the regular monthly meeting on Wednesday, June 17, 2020 at the Fire House, 6 High Street, Chester, Connecticut. In attendance were Bob Bandzes, John Divis, Rick Schreiber and Bettie Perreault. Ex-officio members present were Selectman Charlene Janacek and Chief James Grzybowski. Also present were Fire Marshal Dick Leighton and Deputy Chief Charles Greeney.

Item 1: Call to Order

Chairman Bettie Perreault called the meeting to order at 7:36 P.M.

Item 2: Audience of Citizens

There were none present.

Item 3. The retirement of Joel Severance from the position of Emergency Management Director was recognized with appreciation with

Motion by Rick Schreiber, seconded by John Divis on behalf of the Board of Fire Commissioners and the Chester Hose Company on the retirement of Joel Severance from the position of Emergency Management Director with recognition of his many years of service to the Town of Chester in that position, and the time he served on the Board of Fire Commissioners and as a member of the Chester Hose Company. The motion passed unanimously.

On behalf of the Commission and the Town, Bettie Perreault thanked Chief Grzybowski and Deputy Chief Greeney and all the members of the Hose Company for their leadership roles and service to the residents of Chester during the current COVID-19 pandemic, with additional thanks extended to Fire Marshal Leighton for the many hours spent ensuring that residents, businesses, health care facilities and others received the care and support required.

Item 4: Update – Main Street Project

Selectman Janacek reported the Main Street Project construction has progressed, with drainage substantially installed, driveways installed, granite curbing installed, some sections of sidewalk being finished, and unexpected replacement of a utility pole in progress. Signage and the designated detour have not functioned as well as hoped and at this time the project is somewhat behind schedule. Fire Marshal Leighton continues to ensure Code compliance as sidewalk construction and connections to structures progresses.

Item 5: Report on COVID-19 responses, activities and associated expenses

Chief Grzybowski reported that expenditures have been relatively low as the result of the support received through the State's PPE funding, with health care, fire department, municipal and businesses receiving appropriate distributions on a daily schedule. Local businesses provided generous support, which is recognized with appreciation. Responses for medical calls have resulted in higher-than-normal salary expenditures but with other expenses lower due to closures and cancellations, the Hose Company

Chester Board of Fire Commissioners
Minutes, June 17, 2020
Page 2 of 4

budget should still end the fiscal year within its budget. Responses by Department personnel has been “phenomenal”, Grzybowski reported. Neck gaiters were purchased for personnel, easing the requirement for masks; they have been well received by all.

Item 6. Report of Board of Selectmen

Selectman Janecek reported the State has required the formation of a municipal Long Term Recovery Task Force. The Chester Task Force will be headed by Chief Grzybowski and EMD Ray Guasp, with multiple sub-groups addressing specific areas of need. Most sub-groups have begun the process; a meeting will be scheduled with all groups to coordinate the tasks.

Item 7. Report of Fire Chief

Chief Grzybowski distributed Reports of Activities for the months of February, March, April and May. (This Commission did not meet during the months of March – May.) The reports clearly showed that at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic medical calls increased, and as time passed people became reluctant to seek medical help except for dire circumstances and call volume decreased significantly. While reported cases of COVID-19 have stabilized, numbers during the recovery period are not yet available. Reimbursement funding should recover 75% of costs associated with Town expenditures associated with responses to the pandemic through funding from FEMA, with 25% anticipated from the State’s CARES Act, effectively providing 100% reimbursement to the Town for costs incurred.

With the release of funds, the Department’s brush truck and boat purchase will be able to move forward July 1. Application has been made for a Port Authority Grant for additional funding for the boat purchase.

Floors in the Fire House have been removed, forms prepared for new drains, and the new floor will then be poured. The Hose Company and its members are serving as the general contractor for the project, with much labor being donated. It is anticipated the project will be completed during July.

Commission member and Hose Company member and engineer John Divis was complimented for his service to the Department, with particular note of the grounds and landscaping care he provides.

Chief Grzybowski reported that he has received good responses to requests to various State agencies and that approvals have been received which will allow Juniors in the Department to begin to resume duties.

Item 8: Report of Fire Marshal

Fire Marshal Dick Leighton distributed the activity report for May, which showed extensive activity associated with responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Leighton stated, the current situation “is different from a hurricane” and responses were different. With the Chief establishing parameters for protocol, the Fire Marshal addressed safety and licensing, with both coordinating tasks on a daily basis. Local

Chester Board of Fire Commissioners
Minutes, June 17, 2020
Page 3 of 4

health care facilities were visited daily or more often if needed. It was pointed out that most of the COVID-19 costs incurred would be reimbursable to the Town.

Relocation of office functions from the Town Hall in response to concerns by other personnel resulted in holding meetings with contractors and others at the Exit 6 commuter parking lot. Inspections and ensuring Code compliance in connection with the Main Street Project continues, as well as verification of compliance with liquor licenses and occupancy limits.

Leighton said that the teamwork throughout everything associated with the pandemic situation has resulted in smooth operations for all parties.

Item 9: Financial Reports

(a) 2019-2020 Fire Department Budget

Chief Grzybowski distributed reports on the current Hose Company and Ambulance budgets. He reported that as the result of tight control of expenditures he anticipates that the budget will not be over-expended at the end of the fiscal year, although only a minimal amount might remain. After an earlier prediction of as much as a \$10,000 over-expenditure this was welcome news.

Ambulance income during the COVID-19 pandemic showed clearly the reduction in calls as patients became reluctant to leave home. Lost revenue may be offset by the CARES Act but there is no way at the present time to know the full impact the pandemic will have or the future will bring. It was noted that municipal ambulance services are in better shape than private companies, which do not have access to government reimbursements

(b) 2019-2020 Fire Marshal Budget

Fire Marshal Leighton reported that with the cancellation of programs for Code books and training, those items in the budget will not be spent this year. Potential over-expenditures may be eligible for reimbursement.

(c) 2020-2021 Fire Department Proposed Budget.

The 2020-2021 Budget has been approved. The history of capital expenditures was discussed, with note of the "good fortune" for the Hose Company of the engineers who have been so diligent in maintaining and repairing vehicles, minimizing expenditures and extending the life of vehicles.

(d) 2020-2021 Fire Marshal Proposed Budget

There was nothing to report.

Item 10: Old Business

There was nothing to report.

Chester Board of Fire Commissioners
Minutes, June 17, 2020
Page 4 of 4

Item 11: Approval of Minutes of February 19, 2020:

Note was made that there are no minutes for March, April or May 2020 because the Commissioners did not meet.

On motion by John Divis, seconded by Bob Bandzes the minutes of February 19, 2020 were approved as filed.

Item 12: Reports and Status of Events

The Hose Company Annual Banquet will be held on October 17 this year if all conditions are favorable. If this is not possible, there will not be a Banquet in 2020.

John Divis was recognized for his 50 years of service in the Chester Hose Company and his contributions over the years as a Chief, an engineer and committed member.

Item 13: New Business:

Chief Grzybowski reported that the Hose Company's Letter Drive has generated nearly \$44,000 that will be used to purchase a second Lucas Device and three Thermal Imaging cameras. Grant submission for slow close valves has been submitted; COVID-19 has delayed responses to most such applications. Other grants have been submitted or are being submitted.

Because of the current pandemic, meetings of the Hose Company have not been held for the past three months. The meeting this month was conducted as both an in-person and virtual meeting, with limited in-person participation. The annual election process was changed for this year, with the following changes made:

- Nominating Committee established at June meeting.
- Report of Nominating Committee to be done at July meeting.
- Election of officers for 2020 – 2021 will be held at August meeting.

Chief Grzybowski expressed his appreciation for the apparatus parade the Hose Company had carried out on the day of his wedding in May, saying the "tremendous pride and comradery" of the Department was an emotionally rewarding experience for him. John Divis countered by saying the recognition of the Chief was "well deserved".

Item 14: Correspondence – none had been received.

Item 15: From Members or Guests: Nothing further was brought forward.

Item 16: Adjournment

Motion by Rich Schreiber, seconded by John Divis to adjourn at 8:50 P.M. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Bettie Perreault, Chairman