

**MOUNT LAUREL FIRE DISTRICT #1
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

October 20, 2014

Fire Department Headquarters Station
Meeting Minutes #13

IN ATTENDANCE:

1. Commissioner Cornue
2. Commissioner Ridenour
3. Commissioner Roura
4. Commissioner Shestack
5. Commissioner Hamilton
6. Chief of Department Colucci
7. Deputy Chief Burnett
8. Administrator Jones
9. Solicitor Braslow

NOT IN ATTENDANCE:

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Shestack at 8:00 PM.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence observed.

Public announcements were read by Commissioner Roura.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

No meeting minutes were available for approval by the Board.

RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution #2014-53 "Resolution to Recognize the Service and Dedication of Ross A. Kownatsky, Sr., to the Mount Laurel Fire District #1". Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Hamilton. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

FINANCIAL MATTERS:

Commissioner Ridenour reported that he had reviewed the monthly bills for October 2014 and that all were in order. He noted that the 2011 Apparatus Capital Lease debt service payment of \$222,384.27 was due on 11/1 and was included in this month's payments. Commissioner Roura made a motion to approve October 2014 monthly bills totaling \$727,170.34 that was seconded by Commissioner Cornue. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

MONTHLY REPORT BY ADMINISTRATOR:

The Administrator had submitted his monthly report to the Board for their review prior to the meeting. He reported that he had TD Bank Bond Issue bank account signature cards for the Board members to sign tonight. He added that settlement on the sale of bonds was completed on 10/16 and that the proceeds had been deposited into this account. He reported that sealed bid proposals for the architectural work were due on 10/30 and bid proposals for the civil engineer work were due on 11/13. New Road Construction will review the architectural proposals while he was away on vacation and when he gets back he should have a recommendation to present to the Board. He anticipated scheduling an interview with the recommended candidate prior to the November Regular Meeting. He noted that the next Board Special Meeting will be on Tuesday, 11/5 due to Election Day being on 11/4. He will be on vacation and recommended that Secretarial Assistant Richardson attend the meeting to take notes.

BOARD QUESTIONS FOR THE CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT:

Chief of Department Colucci had submitted his monthly report to the Board for their review prior to the meeting. He reported that the Burlington County Junior Firefighter's Competition was held last weekend and Captain McCorkle did an outstanding job preparing our team. Commissioner Hamilton asked him what the problem was with the MUA and the leaky hydrants. Chief of Department Colucci replied that since the Township water system in some areas is pretty old and since there are some areas of town that have very acidic soil, some of the iron water pipes corrode very quickly and need to be replaced.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Building and Grounds: Commissioner Ridenour agreed with Administrator Jones' report update and felt that we are still pretty much on schedule.

Labor/Management: Commissioner Cornue reported that he, Deputy Chief Burnett and Captain McCorkle would like to give the Board an overview of the changes that have been proposed for the LOSAP and Clothing Allowance Stipend programs. These changes have been in discussion by the Volunteer Labor Relations Committee for some time and while not yet finalized, they reflect many good ideas that have been thought up about how to make these programs more effective. He distributed packages to the Board members for their review tonight and wanted to give them a couple of weeks to digest them before having more Board discussion on it in November.

At 8:17 PM, Commissioner Cornue and Deputy Chief Burnett dually provided the Board with a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed the history of these programs and the changes that were being proposed. The initial Clothing Allowance program began in 1988 and was originally based on home responses to fire calls along with attendance at drills and meetings – since then it has transitioned into an in-house duty crew system but we have not updated any of the program requirements to reflect this change. The 2014 Budget was \$34,000 for the Clothing Allowance program and \$57,443 for the LOSAP program and under the new proposal both would have to be increased significantly. Commissioner Shestack asked Captain McCorkle what the benefits were in switching from a home response basis to a duty crew basis and he replied that it was to incentivize members to participate on duty crews and crediting them for that rather than home responses because the incident activity each night can vary significantly. Deputy Chief Burnett added that members were putting in a lot of time, effort, energy and training hours in service to the Department to benefit the community and the proposed changes will be much more equitable to the members and should incentivize the kind of activity that we want to promote.

He reported that the working team has met with DCA representative Don Huber to discuss the proposed LOSAP changes along with the process required to change the maximum authorized amount. Commissioner Shestack shared history on how the current \$57,443 LOSAP budget amount was initially arrived at. He asked Solicitor Braslow whether we can exceed the budgeted amount if necessary and Solicitor Braslow felt that it could be exceeded in one year as long as you budgeted for the extra amount the following year. Administrator Jones clarified that we pay the annual LOSAP contribution from the current year budget and he did not believe that the statute permitted us to exceed the budgeted amount for that year.

Commissioner Shestack believed that it was solely at the discretion of the Board to decide on the annual amount budgeted for the LOSAP program as long as it doesn't exceed the maximum authorized amount approved by the voters when the LOSAP program was initially approved in 2005. Solicitor Braslow clarified that the LOSAP governing statute does require the Board to fully fund a LOSAP program once it is established by the voters. Commissioner Shestack agreed but the actual annual budget amount is at the discretion of the Board and what happens if that amount is insufficient to pay all of the awards earned in a given year. Solicitor Braslow replied that the awards must be paid and if the total amount of the awards is more than the budgeted amount, the Board would have to pay them, transfer funds into that line item to cover it and then reevaluate the budgeted amount the following year. Commissioner Shestack agreed and stated that this has never been a problem for us in the past as we have always spent less than the \$57,443 that we budgeted for. Solicitor Braslow stated that if the program is substantially modified and if it is determined that those modifications would exceed the \$57,443 maximum authorization, the Board would need to calculate a new authorization amount and get voter approval at the next annual election. Commissioner Shestack agreed and stated that the proposed changes are obviously substantial and need to go before the voters for approval but what happens if they do not approve it? Chief of Department Colucci confirmed that DCA representative Don Huber agreed with these comments. Administrator Jones stated that with this total revision of the LOSAP program, it was imperative that we evaluate the maximum authorization amount to make sure that it will sustain us for the next few years and not require us to go before voters too often for approval. Solicitor Braslow felt that the LOSAP statute did not require the Board to go back to the voters for approval of a new maximum authorization amount but that he would check on this when he meets with Don Huber tomorrow on some other LOSAP issues raised by his clients. Commissioner Shestack asked him if the Board ever faces a situation where they have more awards to pay than funding permits, can they reduce those awards across the board to fit the budgeted amount and Solicitor Braslow replied that he did not believe so because the Board has a statutory obligation to adequately fund the program as defined in their Eligibility Document. The Board would have to pay the awards as calculated and transfer funds to cover the over-expenditure. He added that he has never had a client go back to the voters for authorization of a new maximum funding amount.

Deputy Chief Burnett suggested that we could control the number of volunteers that we take in to make sure that this situation never occurs. Commissioner Shestack stated that he was committed to fully funding the LOSAP program to cover any awards that members qualify for, but he had a concern that the cost of the program could become hard to manage, which is not something that our taxpayers expect to happen. Captain McCorkle asked whether the revised program requirements could be used for the 2015 LOSAP cycle if the voters approve it at the annual election and Administrator Jones replied that he believed that we could if the DCA also approves the changes. Commissioner Roura agreed with Deputy Chief Burnett that we can always control the number of active volunteers we have in order to stay under the maximum budget authorization amount. Deputy Chief Burnett added that Don Huber was impressed with our proposed LOSAP revisions and felt that our volunteers had to significantly contribute in order to qualify for an award and that this is not the case with many Departments. Administrator Jones stated that if the Board agrees to make the proposed revisions, it needs to be ready to include them on the ballot that will be advertised in late December. Captain McCorkle expressed his concern about making the shift in qualifications from home based responses to duty crew attendance because the forecasts indicate that it will allow many more members to qualify for awards and that this would require a new maximum authorization amount. Administrator Jones expressed his concurrence about instituting caps on Clothing Stipend program awards to help prevent that program from going significantly over budget. He felt that the Board could be in for some criticism if the stipend payouts to the volunteers start to cost \$70,000+, which will be over twice as much as we have been paying out. He was concerned about whether the Board will be prepared to defend giving out \$3,000 to \$5,000 to some active members if this question is ever raised by the public. Captain McCorkle added that Battalion Chief Bigoss reminds the members every month that this is a must larger volunteer operation than it was 10 years ago. Deputy Chief Burnett confirmed that cost containment of the stipend program has been a discussed as a concern but that no acceptable solution has yet been developed. He felt that Captain McCorkle and Battalion Chief Bigoss would argue that this is still money well spent for the hours that the volunteers were contributing but that we still have to be smart about how we budget for it. Commissioner Shestack agreed and estimated that we save about \$2.2 million each year in labor costs because to our volunteers. Administrator Jones added that there is a fine line to be cautious about here because of what happened in Cherry Hill where the volunteers were earning significant stipends to staff duty crews that almost made them part-time employees and not volunteers. He wanted to make sure that we can defend the proposed revisions that we approve.

Commissioner Shestack asked how much a volunteer making the minimum 40 duty crews that were required to be an active member would get in a LOSAP award and Captain McCorkle replied that it would be \$430. Administrator Jones thanked Captain McCorkle for always getting him the data needed to complete the LOSAP and stipend calculations and hoped that he would be able to continue doing it. He also hoped that he might be able to run the data from this year and last year to compare the total amounts that we would have paid out and how many more members would have qualified so that we can do some annual cost comparisons to help us come up with good 2015 Budget figures for each program. Commissioner Roura agreed with the concerns about capping the stipend program to keep it from getting out of control in the future and asked if we've ever looked at the optimal amount of volunteers that we need to have on staff. Each volunteer that we bring on has a significant cost associated with it, so if we know how many we need to staff the duty crew system adequately, we can more accurately anticipate the funds we need for recruitment and retention of those volunteers. Deputy Chief Burnett replied that he has had conversations with Captain McCorkle and Battalion Chief Bigoss about these issues and balancing the current staffing of duty crews. We have always been short on drivers and officers, but more members are stepping up to take on these positions, which will hopefully resolve that problem over time. We have also discussed backfilling some of the career companies at 361 and 362 with excess volunteers from 363 on certain nights to make them more effective. Chief of Department Colucci replied that we have not determined the number of volunteers that we need to cover all of the duty crew slots and that it is his belief that as long as we have empty seats on fire trucks we need more volunteers. Commissioner Roura stated that we could determine the number but we just have not done so and Chief of Department Colucci said that we could do it and use our ePro scheduling software to match volunteer availability to open seats. He added that it's not so much the number of volunteers that we can bring in but how we can utilize them most efficiently and effectively. The pressing need for drivers and officers will take time to resolve because if we have 100 volunteers but nobody to drive the apparatus or supervise them, the system won't work. The presentation concluded at 9:16 PM.

OTHER MATTERS:

None.

COMMENTS OF FIRE DISTRICT PROFESSIONALS:

None.

COMMENTS OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS: Commissioner Roura reported that he attended the Junior Firefighter Competition last Saturday and that our kids did great. Although they didn't place in the top 3, from what he observed they worked well together and were well coached. This year our kids teamed up with juniors from Stratford for the competition and were led by Captain McCorkle and Lieutenant Sylvan Einstein. He was very proud of them.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

None.

Resolution #2014-54 "Closing of Meeting Pursuant to Open Public Meetings Act". Commissioner Hamilton made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Roura. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

THE OPEN SESSION ENDED AT 9:18 PM.

A CLOSED SESSION BEGAN AT 9:19 PM.

THE CLOSED SESSION ENDED AT 10:12 PM.

The need for the 11/5/14 Special Meeting was discussed and Commissioner Cornue recommended that we hold it. Commissioner Shestack stated that he would not be there nor would Administrator Jones but that he trusted the Board to make progress on the CBA extensions in his absence. Chief of Department Colucci felt that there were enough things to discuss to make the meeting productive.

Commissioner Cornue felt that everybody should be here for the LOSAP public hearing and Administrator Jones summarized the dates and agenda topics that would be addressed during the remaining meetings of 2014.

Commissioner Hamilton made a motion to adjourn the meeting that was seconded by Commissioner Roura. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 10:16 PM.