

MOUNT LAUREL FIRE DISTRICT #1
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING
February 23, 2015
Fire Department Headquarters Station
Meeting Minutes #3

IN ATTENDANCE:

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

NOT IN ATTENDANCE:

1. Commissioner Hamilton
2. Commissioner Shestack

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Roura at 8:11 PM.

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

Public announcements were read by Commissioner Cornue.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Resolution #2015-11 "Appointment of Kevin P. Tirota to the Position of Firefighter for the Year 2015". Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Cornue. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.
- Resolution #2015-12 "Appointment of William J. Glassman Jr. to the Position of Firefighter for the Year 2015". Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Cornue. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.
- Resolution #2015-13 "Resolution Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for Special Counsel Services in Fiscal Year 2015 to the Firm of Martin Melody, LLC". Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Cornue. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

The Board took a brief recess at 8:23 PM so that the families of Firefighters Tirota and Glassman could take pictures. The Board meeting resumed at 8:38 PM.

RESOLUTIONS (continued):

- Resolution #2015-13 "Resolution Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for Special Counsel Services in Fiscal Year 2015 to the Firm of Martin Melody, LLC". Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Cornue. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner Cornue made a motion to approve the 10/20/14 Regular Meeting Minutes, 11/5/14 Special Meeting Minutes, 11/17/14 Regular Meeting Minutes and the 2/2/15 Special Meeting Minutes that was seconded by Commissioner Ridenour. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

Commissioner Cornue made a motion to approve the 12/15/14 Regular Meeting Minutes that was seconded by Commissioner Ridenour. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board with Commissioner Roura abstaining.

FINANCIAL MATTERS:

Commissioner Ridenour reported that he had reviewed the February 2015 monthly bills prior to the meeting and found everything to be in order. Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve February monthly bills totaling \$525,904.04 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. There were no questions for the Administrator and he had nothing to add to his report.

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. There were no questions for Chief of Department Colucci and he had nothing to add to his report.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

None.

OTHER MATTERS:

Commissioner Roura reported that the vote-by-mail vote totals were received this morning from the County Board of Elections and he happy to confirm that Commissioners Hamilton and Ridenour had been re-elected and that both of the ballot questions were overwhelmingly approved. He added that even with the horrible weather that we had on Election Day, voter turnout was still pretty decent.

COMMENTS OF FIRE DISTRICT PROFESSIONALS:

Solicitor Braslow referred to the bill that has been in discussion regarding the annual election date – it was currently still in committee with no date scheduled for a vote and has no idea why it was not moving.

COMMENTS OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS:

Commissioner Ridenour thanked everybody that supported the budget and personally thanked everybody that supported him. Commissioner Cornue seconded that, stating that it was great to see that many people come out on such a miserable day and he thanked everybody for supporting the budget and the election process.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

PATRICK BIGOSS, MOUNT LAUREL, NJ, 08054

Patrick Bigoss (2 Brookwood Court, Mt. Laurel) addressed the Board. He stated that the Fire Department currently has over 80 Administrative Guidelines (AG's) and 70 Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG's), many of which are updated routinely and disseminated to the staff through the Target Safety training software. Many of these Guidelines are routinely reviewed and updated.

He distributed a prepared statement to each Board member along with a copy of a flier that he had distributed to people that had asked him why he was running for Fire Commissioner in this year's election. He briefly went over the highlights of the flier and stated that he wanted to help the Department progress. He felt that there were clear needs that have not been addressed, including the development of a long range plan for the Department. He stated that he had been on the last Long Range Planning Committee that produced a long range plan back in 1998, but since then there has been very little effort spent on updating it. He expressed his concern about the central/southeastern area of Mount Laurel that has long been identified as needing a better first alarm response but nothing has been done to address it. He felt that we should be investigating and participating in more shared services with other Departments, which he has articulated to the IAFF local leadership and their members. Unfortunately, they chose to support the current incumbent Board members and he understands that. He asked Commissioner Roura why he had sent out an e-mail on 2/19/15 that he took great offense to and then read the contents of that e-mail aloud. He stated that he took great affront to the statement "they have 2 challengers

running against them and although I can't speak to the motives of these challengers, I can assure you that Commissioners Ridenour and Hamilton have served our community selflessly over the last 3 years and without any motivation due to a personal agenda." Mr. Bigoss added that he has been a member of the Department for 34 years and was one of the people that participated in the creation of the Fire District in 1983 by getting the 2 volunteer fire companies together. He added that he had served as a Fire Commissioner in the early years of the Fire District, created many of the programs that we have had over the years and had devoted his life to the Department. He found it personally insulting and distasteful to be referred to as someone with a personal agenda and to have it implied that he might have ulterior motives that would hurt the Department.

Commissioner Roura clarified that this is not what his e-mail said. He stated that he couldn't speak to the motives of the challengers because he had no direct contact with them about their campaigns and did not know what their motives were. He added that as an individual he can support whomever he wants to support and that he had made a decision to support the 2 Board members that were up for re-election.

Mr. Bigoss stated that if Commissioner Roura had stopped after he said he supported the 2 incumbent Board members he would not have any issue with his e-mail but he felt that drawing doubt about the challengers and their motives was over the line and highly insulting. Commissioner Roura replied that he was sorry that Mr. Bigoss felt insulted by his comments and added that on several occasions he has told Mr. Bigoss how much he values the service, experience and leadership that he has and continues to provide to the Department and residents of Mount Laurel. Mr. Bigoss stated that he takes great pride in the fact that he did not run a negative campaign or imply anything negative about any member of the Board and felt that his skillset is something that could greatly enhance the Board and that it was why he had decided to run for a Commission seat. He accepts the fact that he didn't win and that he was okay with it because life goes on and he will continue striving to be an asset and supporter of the Department. He thanked the Board for their time and asked that his prepared statement be attached to the meeting minutes.

Kathleen Kirvan (14 East Coach Lane, Mount Laurel) stated that on behalf of the members of Mount Laurel Professional Firefighters IAFF Local 4408, she would like to congratulate Commissioners Ridenour and Hamilton on their re-election and thanked those residents that turned out to vote on the 2015 Budget and the LOSAP proposal despite the horrible weather.

Resolution #2015-14 "Closing of Meeting Pursuant to Open Public Meetings Act". Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Cornue. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

**THE OPEN SESSION ENDED AT 8:58 PM.
A CLOSED SESSION BEGAN AT 9:01 PM.
THE CLOSED SESSION ENDED AT 10:18 PM.**

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

THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 10:19 PM.

Comments for the Board
February 23, 2015
Prepared by : Patrick Bigoss

On Feb 17 the Board issued a broad based communication pertaining to me as the referenced "individual". This communication was provided to clarify my forced removal from active fire service based on AG 01-610. The communication implied that I was seeking special treatment and/or wanted to secure something not available to all membership. Further all of the options for administrative service have been and are being discussed and I fully understand the needs. At this time since we have never done this to any individual before it is un-chartered territory. To facilitate I met with the Chief and Deputy as recently as Friday morning and collectively we addressed many issues needing resolution. So I agree I am not being separated and drummed out

However there are errors and points that may not fully explain my efforts and position in this matter. Therefore I offer the following:

"Last year a member had been informed that he is approaching the mandatory age (65) outlined in AG 01-610."

The fact is I raised the issue in July 2014 because I believed at that time, and still do today, that AG 01-610 is flawed and may be a violation of age discrimination laws. It was quickly conjured up as a means to remove elderly fire police from service in 2006. Thus having raised the validity of the AG I was asked by my boss to research same and I did. Over the course of a number of months I met several times requesting adjustments or elimination of the guideline because all research show that there is no basis for mandating retirement of a volunteer at 65. Furthermore I pointed out to the Board at the January meeting that there are a variety of legitimate ways to assure individuals who are not fit for duty are removed. So far this Board chooses to ignore what has been presented.

"Changing rules to fit each individual case that is presented to the Board, whether they are to the benefit or the detriment to an individual, would lead to disparate and inconsistent treatment to the entire membership"

"...Any change in current policy should not be done on emotion and it takes time and considerable discussions to change"

Our department adjusts, modifies and changes rules as the need arises. That is their job! When I raised the issue in July 2014 there were nine months available to make adjustments which would either eliminate that AG or modify it to remove objectionable arbitrary language. Should the AG have been adjusted it would not be for me, the individual, but for the department and its members of which I am one. However there has been absolutely no willingness to evaluate alternative options which were presented to management in August, September and finally on October 9, 2014 any or all of which could avoid some of the loss that you the Board cites in your e-mail. However there was

no such discussion and in fact the proposal I put forward on 10/9/14 was eventually denied on 12/31/14 with no dialogue in between. Therefore what I believe we have is either an unwillingness to do the right thing or an inability to do what is right.

I challenge this board to sit down and negotiate a reasonable standard of service based on NFPA 1582 and NFPA 1500. In the interim should I or any other individual meet the arbitrary deadline enforcement should be stayed until the AG has been reviewed and re-issued.