

**MOUNT LAUREL FIRE DISTRICT #1  
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS  
SPECIAL MEETING / WORK SESSION**

March 4, 2014

Fire Department Headquarters Station

Meeting Minutes #3

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

1. Commissioner Cornue
2. Commissioner Hamilton
3. Commissioner Ridenour
4. Administrator Jones
5. Chief of Department Colucci

**NOT PRESENT:**

1. Deputy Chief Burnett

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

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

The Public Announcements were read by Commissioner Hamilton.

**SWEAR-IN OF COMMISSIONERS-ELECT ROURA AND SHESTACK:**

Commissioner Hamilton administered the oath of office to Commissioners-elect Roura and Shestack.

**REORGANIZATION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Commissioner Roura made a motion to nominate Commissioner Shestack for the position of Chairman that was seconded by Commissioner Cornue. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board with Commissioner Shestack abstaining.

Commissioner Cornue made a motion to nominate Commissioner Roura for the position of Vice-Chairman that was seconded by Commissioner Hamilton. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

Commissioner Roura made a motion to nominate Commissioner Ridenour for the position of Treasurer that was seconded by Commissioner Cornue. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

Commissioner Roura made a motion to nominate Commissioner Cornue for the position of Deputy Clerk/Treasurer that was seconded by Commissioner Ridenour. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

Commissioner Shestack announced Standing Committee Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson assignments as follows:

<b><u>Committee</u></b>	<b><u>Chairperson</u></b>	<b><u>Vice-Chairperson</u></b>
Buildings and Grounds	Commissioner Ridenour	Commissioner Roura
Community Relations	Commissioner Shestack	Commissioner Cornue
Equipment	Commissioner Hamilton	Commissioner Cornue
Finance	Commissioner Roura	Commissioner Shestack
Fire Prevention	Commissioner Hamilton	Commissioner Roura
Information Technology	Commissioner Roura	Commissioner Ridenour
Insurance	Commissioner Shestack	Commissioner Hamilton
Labor Management	Commissioner Cornue	Commissioner Shestack
Long Range Planning	Commissioner Cornue	Commissioner Hamilton
Personnel	Commissioner Cornue	Commissioner Ridenour
Training	Commissioner Ridenour	Commissioner Hamilton

Commissioner Roura made a motion to approve the Standing Committee assignments that was seconded by Commissioner Hamilton. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

**COMMENTS OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS:**

Commissioner Shestack commended Commissioner Roura on the job he did as Chairman last year and thanked everybody for all that they did. Commissioner Ridenour echoed his comments and added that the Board along with the Chiefs and the Administrator have worked very hard moving the Department forward. Commissioner Cornue added that we've made great progress over the last few years that has resulted in a good solid organization. Commissioner Roura thanked everyone for their support in 2013. Commissioner Hamilton echoed the comments of the other Board members and congratulated everyone involved with the Department for the fantastic job that they have been doing.

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:**

Commissioner Roura made a motion to approve the 2/18/14 Regular Meeting minutes that was seconded by Commissioner Cornue. The motion was approved by the Board with Commissioner Ridenour abstaining.

**ADOPTION OF RESOLUTIONS:**

Resolution #2014-16 "2014-2015 Special & Regular Meeting Dates". Commissioner Roura made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Ridenour. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

Resolution #2014-17 "Appointment of Devin Vasoya to Active Membership in the Fellowship Fire Company #2 and the Mount Laurel Fire Department". Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Roura. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

**STANDING COMMITTEES:**

Building & Grounds: Commissioner Ridenour reported that with the election now concluded, the Board needed to spend time deciding on the scope of work that they want to include in the Facilities Maintenance Bond Issue Referendum that has been discussed. Commissioner Shestack referred to the scope of work summary that had been prepared by Administrator Jones and Commissioner Ridenour at the end of 2013 indicating various options that the Board should consider. Commissioner Roura noted that Plan "A" included the entire scope of work that had been developed by New Road Construction (\$4.6 million), Plan "B" was a subset of Plan "A" and included only those items that needed to be done within the next 2 years (\$2.6 million) and Plan "C" was Plan "B" minus a few of the least critical items that reduced the total down a little further (\$2.4 million).

Commissioner Shestack noted that Plans "B" & "C" exclude the significant renovations proposed for Station 362 and questioned how that will affect the operation of that facility. Commissioner Ridenour explained that all 3 plans provide funding for maintenance of the building "envelopes" and prevent further damage and deterioration from the weather. Commissioner Shestack agreed that our main concern should be the building "envelopes" but he was concerned about the interior conditions of Station 362 because we have staff living there for 24 hours at a time. It is not just a "workplace" for them and the uncomfortable work environment that currently exists there concerned him. Commissioner Ridenour added that Station 362 was primarily designed and built to accommodate the needs of the Fellowship Fire Company volunteers and not the current career staffing now in place there. The idea at the time was to provide facilities that were suitable to house small "in-house" duty crews at night, not 24 hour career staffing. The existing layout may not be ideal for 24 hour career staffing, but it is probably adequate for the short term. The staff currently make it work but it is far from ideal for them and we should consider changing the layout through renovations at some point.

Commissioner Shestack asked the Board how we could fund the estimated \$2.5 million cost of the remaining scope of work items if we choose to put Plan "C" before the voters. Commissioner Ridenour stated that he originally pushed for the Board to fund the entire scope of work identified (Plan "A") but after several discussions with the staff and Board members, it was felt that this would be too difficult to "sell" to the voters. This concern, along with the current re-evaluation of the tax base, resulted in the bond issue question not being included on the ballot at the annual election that was just held. He felt that our residents are still having a tough time with the economy and would probably have a tough time entertaining a significant tax increase for these projects, which is why he and the Administrator have tried to give the Board a few other options to choose from. Chief of Department Colucci asked whether we could nurse the maintenance needs of our facilities along until the current bond debt service is paid off. Administrator Jones stated that our current bond issue will be paid off in 2021 and the current apparatus capital lease will be paid off in 2020.

Commissioner Shestack asked Chief of Department Colucci if he felt that we could postpone these major maintenance projects until the bond issue is paid off in 2021 and then throw that \$688,000 in debt service into improvements at Station 362. Chief of Department Colucci replied that he still wasn't sure what he wanted to do but he believed that Township Council would oppose our decision to raise

taxes for a bond issue this year. He would like to postpone voting on a significant Facilities Maintenance Bond Issue as long as we can, doing what we can each year to get by and only taking on new debt once the current bond issue is paid off. Commissioner Ridenour felt that the problem with that idea is that we need to address the building "envelopes" immediately and if we wait 6 years to do so, we may have to raze some of our facilities because the additional damage done during that time will be too much to repair. Chief of Department Colucci asked him what was involved in the building "envelope" repairs. Commissioner Ridenour replied that it included roof repair/replacement, exterior stucco work, HVAC replacement, parking lot repairs/milling and things that are required to prevent further damage from the weather, all of which cannot wait another 6 years. Administrator Jones added that although it might potentially be possible to push these projects out on the timeline until the current bond issue is paid off, these maintenance projects are not the only other things that we will likely have to deal with between now and then. He added that we have a 2<sup>nd</sup> batch of apparatus that should be replaced and the County is pursuing a change in the radio frequencies that we use. This will require the replacement of all mobile and portable radio equipment, which will be a significant expense for us unless they provide us with much of those assets. Chief of Department Colucci added that as of last week, the County's plan to replace radio equipment would be similar to what they did in the early 2000's and we would be responsible for anything that they did not provide. Regarding apparatus replacement, although the rest of the Emergency One fleet continues to get older, we have a huge advantage over most Departments because of the outstanding maintenance program provided by our mechanics and our shop, which should be enough to get us through the remaining years of our current apparatus capital lease. Administrator Jones cautioned that this would put all of these apparatus at the 20 years of service mark and would likely require significant investment in major maintenance to keep them all in-service until then.

He added that he agrees with Commissioner Ridenour that the exceptionally harsh winter this year came at the worst possible time for our building "envelopes" as evidenced by a lot of new roof leaks that are now showing up. As much as he would love to postpone these projects until 2020 or 2021 when we will be "debt-free", few of the most critical items on the list will wait that long and we will have to spend a lot more to address them if they are not addressed now. There is also no way that we can put enough money into the annual budget to complete many of these projects because they are so expensive. Commissioner Ridenour agreed that the roof work involved at Station 361 and here at Headquarters in particular will be very expensive and impossible to do through annual budget appropriations.

Commissioner Roura suggested that we should change the nomenclature that we have used on the scope of work by numbering the Plans that have been outlined to eliminate any confusion with the alphabetical Priority designations at the top of the page. Commissioner Shestack clarified the Boards' previous concern that since Plan "A" is really out of the question due to the cost, we should probably be concentrating on the Plan "B" list at \$2.6 million. Administrator Jones agreed and noted that the \$494,000 cost estimate for professional services is a significant part of it and the contingency cost budget is also pretty high at \$197,000. He felt that we may be able to shave those numbers down a little bit if we need to. Commissioner Ridenour stated that he understood the Chief of Department's position and that we needed to be able to sell this to the public but the "envelope" work needs to be done soon before any more serious damage is done. Commissioner Shestack asked Administrator Jones what our annual apparatus capital lease payment is and Administrator Jones replied that it was about \$223,000. Commissioner Shestack calculated that payments on a 20 year \$2.5 million bond issue would probably be around \$180,000 a year or about \$230,000 annually for a 15 year bond issue and the question was whether we needed to raise taxes to cover it or whether we could find enough money in our annual budget. He felt that with the \$400,000 we have included in this year's budget for roof repairs if the bond issue referendum fails, we could cover this payment for a couple of years. Administrator Jones noted that any new bond issue payments would not start until 2015. Commissioner Roura felt that we needed to be cautious about projecting available funds in future budgets because the CBA's expire this year and we don't know what additional costs the new CBA's will bring. Administrator Jones suggested that part of our sales pitch to the voters is that our last big expenditures for facility maintenance was the improvements we did in 2001 and it is now almost 15 years later. Commissioner Hamilton expressed concern about future interest rates and felt that we almost have to look at borrowing enough to do as much as we can now while the rates are still extremely low because they can change very quickly. Commissioner Shestack agreed that interest rates are crucial to our annual payment estimates and perhaps we should borrow the entire amount in Plan "A" while they are still so low.

Commissioner Roura felt that Plan "A" was too much to ask voters to support and that we should decide between Plans "B" & "C" as proposed by Commissioner Ridenour and Administrator Jones. Commissioner Shestack asked him why he thought Plan "A" was not an option and Commissioner Roura replied that in the current economy we should not be doing anything that is not absolutely necessary. Administrator Jones stated that many of the Priority "D" and "E" items will still eventually have to be done, but that we may be able to handle most of them as annual budget appropriations as long as our maintenance budget remains sufficiently funded. Commissioner Shestack felt that he could support the Priority "A", "B" & "C" items at a total cost of around \$3.457 million. Commissioner Roura disagreed with a lot of the listed Priority "C" items. Commissioner Cornue stated that the ideal situation would be to bridge the next 6 years until the current bond issue debt is paid off, putting us in a good position to justify taking on this new debt. Commissioners Shestack & Roura reminded the Board that we would need to have voter approval of any new debt in place to replace our current bond issue payments when they are paid off. Administrator Jones clarified that we are currently spending a total of about \$750,000 each year in debt service.

Commissioner Ridenour added that for a long time there has been a discussion internally about the need for a 4<sup>th</sup> station in the Springville area, which will be something that we can never do if we let our existing stations fall too far into disrepair. Chief of

Department Colucci added that the need for a 4<sup>th</sup> station is based on our response times and that our ISO rating reflects this but he has not given any thought about how we could sell this solution to the voters. Commissioner Shestack added that about a decade ago Commissioner Nash, as the Chairman of the Long Range Planning Committee, reached out to the neighboring communities of Evesham, Lumberton, Hainesport, Medford and Moorestown to discuss the feasibility of building a new station in that area so that costs could be shared. None of them expressed interest, probably in part because they knew that we would respond to that area anyway lessening their need to address the problem. Administrator Jones estimated that it would cost at least \$2 million just to build a basic building without factoring in the cost of the ground. We would have to put at least 1 piece of apparatus there at a cost of at least \$500,000 and would almost certainly have to staff it with 24 hour staffing (12 people @ roughly \$100,000 each (salary & benefits) of annual recurring costs) since we do not have many volunteers available in that area of town. The bottom line is that it will cost about \$2.5 million to build a new basic building with a piece of apparatus plus another \$1.35 million in additional recurring personnel, building and apparatus operating costs. Chief of Department Colucci stated that we don't have the call volume to really justify that kind of expense and Commissioner Shestack added that we would probably have to do it all without any cooperation from the surrounding towns. Administrator Jones felt that it has been a long time since we approached our neighbors about this and a lot of circumstances have changed since then, so it may be worth looking into it again to see if their outlook has changed. Commissioner Roura felt that Commissioner Ridenour's point was that he was not an advocate of adding a Station 364 and that we should be putting an emphasis on maintaining the facilities that we have.

Commissioner Shestack suggested that the Board propose a bond issue for \$2.95 million to the voters and squeeze in as much of the most immediate needs that we can from the scope of work. Commissioner Ridenour felt that we could go to the community, explain how old our buildings are and what we needed to do at each location and how we can expect to extend their useful life by "X" # of years. He recalled that when Station 362 was built, an article in the newspaper said that it was built to stand for 50 years, which he agreed with but only if it was properly maintained during those 50 years. Administrator Jones agreed that it is important for the public to understand that every 20 years or so we have to be prepared to replace some major long term components such as roofs and HVAC equipment, which generally cannot be allocated for in the annual budget due to the high cost. If we get the \$3 million that we are asking for, we can take care of the items that are critical and many that may not be absolutely critical at the moment but will be in the next few years, putting all of the major maintenance expenditure items on a 20 year schedule. Commissioner Ridenour added that we can then start looking at replacement of more apparatus and building Station 364 if we still find that it is necessary. Commissioner Shestack estimated that our annual debt service payment over 20 years would be about \$200,000 and that he was comfortable with it. Commissioner Roura asked Administrator Jones why he wanted a bond term of 10 to 15 years and he replied that although the annual payment was higher, the total amount of interest paid out goes down significantly. Commissioner Shestack estimated that a 10 year bond issue would cost about \$360,000 annually and that a 15 year term would be about \$240,000 per year. He asked Administrator Jones how long it would take from voter approval to the issuance of the bonds and Administrator Jones stated that it would be about 4 months. He added that the longer we delay putting the question to the voters, the greater the chance that some of the outside work will not be possible this year because it will extend into the colder weather. Commissioner Shestack stated that we could get started on some of the work with the \$400,000 that we have included in the budget such as the engineering and bid specification work so that we can award contracts as soon as the bonds are sold.

Commissioner Shestack asked the Board members if they were comfortable with the \$2.95 million amount. Commissioner Hamilton suggested that we round it up to \$3 million and Commissioner Roura was still in favor of Plan "B" for \$2.65 million. Commissioner Shestack suggested that we form a "Citizens Committee" of prominent influential residents and present them with the scope of work we have developed, our sales presentation and invite them to provide feedback as they get to know their fire department. He suggested we prepare a 15 minute sales presentation on the buildings and what is needed. Commissioner Ridenour added that we could give them tours of each building and point out the needs we have identified. Commissioner Shestack offered to work with Chief of Department Colucci on the preparation of a video tour to help document things.

Commissioner Shestack asked the Board what date they would like to schedule the special election for. Chief of Department Colucci suggested that we should shoot for a date 8 to 10 weeks away so that we have time to get everything done, which brings us to around May 13<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Cornue expressed concern that 8 weeks was too soon and it was decided to go with 10 weeks.

Commissioners Shestack and Cornue, Chief of Department Colucci, Deputy Chief Burnett and Administrator Jones agreed to meet on Friday, 3/14/14 @ 9:30 AM to begin working on what needed to be done.

**OTHER MATTERS:**

None.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:**

None.

Resolution #2014-18 "Closing of Meeting Pursuant to Open Public Meetings Act". Commissioner Roura made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Hamilton. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board

**THE OPEN SESSION ADJOURNED AT 9:27 PM.  
A CLOSED SESSION BEGAN AT 9:28 PM.  
THE CLOSED SESSION ADJOURNED AT 9:36 PM.**

Commissioner Roura 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 9:37 PM.**