

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

August 4, 2014

Fire Department Headquarters Station

Meeting Minutes #9

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

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

**NOT PRESENT:**

1. Deputy Chief Burnett

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

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

The Public Announcements were read by Commissioner Hamilton.

**ADOPTION OF RESOLUTIONS:**

Resolution #2014-40           “Establishment of the Part-Time Paid Position of Fire Prevention Specialist for the Mount Laurel Fire District #1 (Second Reading)”. Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Cornue. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

Commissioner Shestack asked Chief of Department Colucci what the next steps in the process were in filling these new positions. Chief of Department Colucci replied that we will advertise the availability of the positions and post notices on the website and the stations. He will review applications as they are submitted and begin the background evaluation of candidates. He hoped that we could find 4 good candidates that would accept the positions, which would be funded using leftover 2014 Budget salary for Fire Official Kownatsky.

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:**

None.

**OTHER MATTERS:**

Commissioner Shestack brought up an e-mail from Supervising Mechanic Skeenes regarding a potential shared service agreement with the Hainesport Fire Company that the Chief of Department had distributed to the Board. He stated that when the Board hired the Assistant Mechanic several years ago, the possibility of marketing the services of our apparatus shop to other Departments had been discussed. Chief of Department Colucci added that Supervising Mechanic Skeenes request was for the shop to initially perform minor apparatus maintenance, pump testing and warranty type issues for Hainesport apparatus and reminded everyone that repairs to our apparatus would remain the primary mission for the shop and that any shared service agreement work would be scheduled around it. He had some concepts for pricing of the services that could be provided and if the Board was agreeable, he would begin the process of preparing a draft agreement. Issues involving insurance liability for this kind of work would need to be investigated.

Commissioner Shestack asked the Board members how they felt about the concept and what their concerns were. Commissioner Roura stated that his main concern would be with the potential insurance liability for work that we perform on vehicles that we do not own. Chief of Department Colucci added that the Board should be aware that Supervising Mechanic Skeenes is a longtime volunteer with the Hainesport Fire Company and has been doing some of their vehicle maintenance for many years. He wanted to make sure that there would be no conflict of interest involved between the repairs that he has been doing for them as a volunteer member and any work that he would do under a shared services agreement. Commissioner Shestack stated that this is a good point and that he could see a potential conflict of interest between work he does here for them and something that he may do for them as a volunteer. Chief of

Department Colucci added that he didn't want anyone to be able to question Supervising Mechanic Skeenes integrity and that this would be something that we have to address in the agreement. Commissioner Ridenour felt that all work done under the agreement should be done in our Shop. Chief of Department Colucci felt that the services that we would agree to offer under any agreement should be limited to what has already been mentioned and not involve 24/7 responses for after-hours issues or emergencies. Commissioner Shestack felt that we might want to do an agreement on a trial basis until the end of the year. Chief of Department Colucci stated that we will check with Solicitor Braslow and our insurance broker on this before we prepare an agreement. The Board agreed that this was a good course of action.

#### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

Commissioner Roura asked about the status of the bond issue financing and the plans for the facilities maintenance project. Administrator Jones and Commissioner Shestack stated that there is a kickoff meeting with the financing professionals tomorrow morning and that we are awaiting a proposal from New Road Construction for their participation.

Commissioner Roura thanked former Fire Official Kownatsky for his service and wished him luck with his retirement.

Resolution #2014-41 "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 ADJOURNED AT 8:23 PM.**

**A CLOSED SESSION BEGAN AT 8:24 PM.**

**THE CLOSED SESSION ADJOURNED AT 9:31 PM.**

Commissioner Shestack asked for a motion to approve Firefighter Cimino's request to participate in the Employee Leave Donation Program as outlined in Administrative Policy #04-020. Commissioner Roura made a motion to approve his request that was seconded by Commissioner Hamilton. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

Fellowship Fire Company President Paul Guelich asked whether the Board would hear his comments under Public Participation and Commissioner Shestack indicated that the Public Participation portion of the tonight's agenda was over, he would allow him to briefly address the Board now that he was present.

Mr. Guelich stated that he was glad that the Board had invited him to the meeting to discuss the Board's e-mail to the membership recently regarding a 7/10/14 e-mail that he had sent to the volunteer membership. He felt that the Board owed him an apology for the manner in which they and the Chief of Department had handled this situation, which he felt was outrageous. Commissioner Hamilton stated that he would absolutely not get an apology from the Board. Mr. Guelich asked if that was how everyone on the Board felt and Commissioner Roura replied that it absolutely was. Mr. Guelich stated that he took issue with the fact that a letter was sent via e-mail on behalf of the Board by the Chief of Department to the entire Department membership, many of which had no knowledge of and nothing to do with an issue that was closed, resolved and dead. This action has sparked new fires and new issues and he was disappointed that the Board had nothing to say about it. Commissioner Hamilton asked him why he sent out his 7/10/14 e-mail in the first place, urging the recipients to vote against the bond referendum and making accusations about the past and potentially future conduct of the Board. Mr. Guelich stated that he did what he did, whether it was right or wrong, with the best intentions and that it was what he truly felt and believed. He added that the letter that the Board e-mailed to the membership in response was inflammatory, not based on the facts and much more incendiary than anything that he had sent out. He felt that it was poorly written and terribly unprofessional and stated to Commissioner Roura that if he wanted to address something like that to him that was fine but it was inappropriate to send it out to the entire Department membership. Commissioner Roura replied that the letter was addressed to him and was then made public to counter the inaccurate accusations that he had made against the Board. Mr. Guelich repeated his assertion that it should not have been sent out to the entire Department including secretaries, mechanics and new employees because it had nothing to do with them. Commissioner Shestack disagreed and stated that the bond referendum had everything to do with the residents of this Township and would have an effect on the facilities used by every volunteer and career member, all of whom should have been supporting it. Commissioner Shestack added that in sending such an e-mail, Mr. Guelich had improperly used Department e-mail and acted in his capacity as the President of the Fellowship Fire Company, both of which was inappropriate. Mr. Guelich agreed that he did both of those things and saw no problem in doing so. Commissioner Roura told Mr. Guelich that he sent his 7/10/14 e-mail to the members of both Fire Companies and asked them to publicly campaign against the bond referendum, falsely claimed that the Board did something in an underhanded manner and denied the Board an opportunity to respond to his allegations in public before the public voted.

Commissioner Shestack told Mr. Guelich that he clearly recalled him commenting in the Open Session of a public meeting in December 2013 that he supported the bond referendum, would help us with the plans/specifications or whatever we needed done because of his construction background and was satisfied with the answers that had been given to all of the questions that he had asked and then he had the nerve to go out and do something completely different on the day of the election. He added that this is why the Board felt that it had every right and an obligation to respond to his allegations and whether he approved of the grammar that the Board used or not, it was jointly written by the Board and approved by our legal counsel. Mr. Guelich stated that there are a lot of things going on around here that have supposedly been reviewed by legal counsel and he would love to know how big the legal bill has been over the 2 months. Commissioner Shestack welcomed any request that Mr. Guelich wanted to make for that information or for the audio tape of the meeting last December. Mr. Guelich said that he has been getting a lot of phone calls and texts from members and people he doesn't even talk to telling him that the Board's letter was outrageous and that not one person has said to him "well Paul you kind of had that coming." He felt that it would have been more appropriate for the Board to write him a letter expressing their concerns instead of e-mailing it to over 100 people.

Commissioner Shestack asked him why he didn't give the Board the same courtesy so that they could be addressed in an open and public forum instead of campaigning against the bond referendum behind our back and making false accusations against the Board in an e-mail on election day. Commissioner Roura asked him why he never even opened his mouth with a question or a comment at the 6/30/14 Open House that 3 residents took the time to come to, and which he left early and waited in the parking lot to talk to them. Mr. Guelich stated that it was a shame that only 3 people turned out but those 3 residents said it all that night and that those guys walked all over the Board's arguments for 2 hours.

Commissioner Shestack stated that the Board is not going to sit here and be accused of hiding things from the public, doing this or that illegally or with other intentions, not supporting the volunteers and burying money in the budget that will be used to hire more staffing so that Station 363 can become a 24 hour staffed career station. He added that the Board has been nothing but supportive with LOSAP and all of the other volunteer programs that continue to increase in cost every year, all for the benefit of our volunteers. Mr. Guelich countered that the Board was supportive of LOSAP because it was statutory and Commissioner Shestack responded that it was totally up to the Board each year whether to include LOSAP funding in the budget and suggested to Mr. Guelich that he should make sure he has his facts straight in what he is saying and stop putting forth inaccurate information.

Mr. Guelich stated that he would like an explanation as to why the Board was hiding money in the budget by increasing the maintenance budget and the professional service line items by \$450,000 and not mentioning this at any of the public meetings or in any of the newsletters that were put out. He has never heard the Board explain that this money was put into the budget in the event the bond referendum failed and they needed money to make emergency repairs. Commissioner Roura replied that the Board did include a block of contingency funds for emergency repairs at a station in case the bond referendum failed and that certainly was discussed by the Board during the budget process and at meetings where you may not have been present. Commissioner Shestack added that the budget contains many maintenance line items for apparatus, facilities and equipment of all kinds and that we never know what will break and that this money will be needed for. Mr. Guelich commented that this \$500,000 is about 18% of the \$3 million being requested in the bond referendum and was amazed that members of the Board can sit here and believe what they are saying. Commissioner Shestack replied that the \$450,000 in question would only have been barely enough to replace a roof or a partial roof at one station and that it was prudent for the Board to include this contingency funding this year to maintain facilities owned by the taxpayers.

Commissioner Roura stated that we can go point by point, on this all night but the bottom line is that Mr. Guelich tried to discredit the Board and encourage the volunteer membership to vote against the bond referendum and he felt that this behavior was totally unprofessional for someone representing himself as the President of the Fellowship Fire Company and that he has lost any respect that he had for him as a leader. Mr. Guelich replied that he was entitled to his opinion.

Commissioner Shestack told Mr. Guelich that when he writes a letter or sends an e-mail and signs it as the Chairman of the Board, the recipients' perception is that he is sending that letter or e-mail in his official capacity, not as a resident or a citizen and Mr. Guelich agreed. Commissioner Shestack then asked him whether he understood that this is what he did when he sent out the 7/10/14 e-mail to the volunteer membership, using his Department e-mail account and his title as President of the Fellowship Fire Company, so he can't claim that what he wanted the members to do wasn't underhanded and an attempt to undermine the Board and the Fire District. He asked him if he had permission from the Fire Company Trustees to send out that e-mail and Mr. Guelich replied that it didn't matter because he did not need their permission to do so. Commissioner Shestack said it does matter because if he were to do that as the Chairman of the Board, he is then officially representing the Board and would need the approval of his fellow Board members. He wanted to come to an upcoming Fellowship Fire Company meeting and ask the membership and Trustees if they approved the content of the e-mail that was sent out under the pen of their President. He asked Chief of Department Colucci to formally request copies of the minutes of all Fellowship Fire Company meetings held in 2014 so that he can see if the membership and the Trustees approved the content of the e-mail message that Mr. Guelich sent out on 7/10/14.

Commissioner Shestack asked Mr. Guelich how fast he would be fired if he sent out an e-mail or letter on his employer's letterhead that discredited them, which was exactly what he did when he used Department e-mail as the Fellowship Fire Company President and it was uncalled for. Mr. Guelich replied that he was absolutely within his rights to send that e-mail and pointed out that within the body of that e-mail he stated that he was proud to be a MLFD firefighter and proud of our Department overall, but was not happy with what the Board had done in this situation. Commissioner Shestack stated that it was funny because last December you totally supported everything and had offered your support to help with the plans and specifications. Commissioner Shestack added that he would have the tapes pulled to prove it to him, with Mr. Guelich stating that he has already asked the Administrator for this information because he did not see his comments reflected in any of the meeting minutes posted on the website.

Mr. Guelich clarified that as the President of the Fellowship Fire Company he was their Chief Executive Officer and doesn't have to ask the Trustees for permission to do anything unless it involved the real property owned by the organization. Commissioner Shestack stated that it sounds more like a dictatorship over there if he can do whatever he wants and that he can represent his membership any way he wants. Mr. Guelich stated that his membership can vote him out anytime they want to and that he would be happy to provide the Board with the Fire Company meeting minutes even though they cannot be compelled to do so. He would welcome the attendance of Board members at their meetings and has openly extended a formal invitation to them many times. He recalled that Commissioner Cornue came to a meeting a few years ago when he was running for re-election to the Board. Commissioner Ridenour stated that he has also attended a Fire Company meeting as a member of the Board and maybe Mr. Guelich just didn't see him there.

Mr. Guelich stated that he is not alone in the opinions and beliefs that he has expressed and asked the Board what they intended to do with the \$450,000 that is in the budget but not needed now that the bond referendum passed. Commissioner Shestack stated that this money would be used to make annual payments on the bond issue and Mr. Guelich asked why he didn't just say that in the first place instead of hiding it. Commissioner Shestack stated that the Board has been transparent about what is in the budget, discussed everything at public meetings and been more than willing to answer any questions about it that anyone wanted to ask, noting that the Board communicates information to our residents far more than any other Fire District that he knows of, which is evident in the almost 3 to 1 approve ratio that we had on the bond referendum. Mr. Guelich stated that there was a very good absentee ballot campaign in place to get out the votes in favor of the bond referendum and he credited whomever was behind that. Commissioner Shestack stated that the bond referendum would have passed even if all of the absentee votes were excluded and Commissioner Roura asked Mr. Guelich whether he was inferring that the Board had conducted some sort of underhanded absentee ballot campaign. Mr. Guelich stated that he was not inferring anything just like his e-mail effort shouldn't be considered underhanded and which has been a topic of discussion among his members for weeks.

Commissioner Shestack stated that Mr. Guelich is always asking the Board to provide the volunteers with this and that and improvements within the stations and you say last year that you support what we are doing and then you send an e-mail out on the day of the election asking the volunteer membership not to support the bond referendum that would help improve our facilities and working conditions overall, which is a very confusing message that he can't understand. Mr. Guelich replied that last December he did offer his support for the bond referendum and assistance with the projects that it would fund but he never received a response from the Board and felt that his offer fell on deaf ears. He added that he didn't speak up at the 6/30/14 Open House because he felt uncomfortable talking openly to the Board about it while he was on duty that night and he didn't feel comfortable voicing his opinion while on duty in front of 3 residents. Commissioner Roura asked why he had no qualms about wearing his MLFD t-shirt and being on duty when he took the time to wait and speak with those 3 residents in the parking lot after the Open House ended. Mr. Guelich stated that he didn't.

Commissioner Hamilton asked Mr. Guelich what his real purpose was in being here tonight if all he was going to do is beat a dead horse and waste the Boards' time. Mr. Guelich replied that Commissioner Shestack had indicated to him that the Board would be pleased to meet with him tonight to discuss their concerns about his 7/10/14 e-mail with him in person. He agreed with Commissioner Hamilton that since the bond referendum passed it was already a moot point before the Board sent out their e-mail to the entire Department but he was angry with the content, tone and wording of their e-mail and the fact that this went from being an issue that was completely between him and the Board and maybe the Fellowship Fire Company membership and now it involved the entire Department. Commissioner Shestack clarified that the 7/10/14 e-mail that Mr. Guelich sent out didn't just go to Fellowship Fire Company members, it went out to the Masonville Fire Company members as well, none of whom you represent. Mr. Guelich replied that he felt that he represented all of the volunteers at this point and had the authority to send it to all of them. Commissioner Shestack the passage of the bond referendum, the Board and staff have a great deal of work to do and whether he believed it or not, the Board greatly cares about and appreciates our volunteer members. Our Department is very good at providing a service to our residents because we have great people within our organization and at this point it doesn't matter what you put in your e-mail and what the Board put in their e-mail. We felt that your allegations needed to have a response and we felt that it was appropriate just like you believe that your original e-mail was appropriate. The Board will overlook your allegations and inferences and continue to do what they believe is right as recruitment and retention programs, LOSAP and other programs are continually evaluated. The Board hopes that in the future, if someone has a grievance about something they will follow the proper chain of command in bringing it to our attention so that it can be addressed because the door has always been open for a dialogue to occur. The Board has never knowingly lied to anyone about anything and taken pride in being accessible to the public and the membership in a spirit of full disclosure and transparency because we care and because we want to

improve programs, make our stations a great place to work and avoid expensive maintenance issues in the future. This Board has never discussed nor has absolutely any intention to replace our volunteers with a fully career staff because they are a significant part of our success and strategy. He hoped that the members will use the Board's open door policy to continue to question things and bring things to their attention in the future so that progress can be made and the Department can move forward.

Mr. Guelich repeated that his main reason in being here tonight was to take issue with the Board's e-mail and that he was entitled to send out e-mail communications on behalf of his membership. If in the future the Board wants him to use his personal e-mail and send it to his members' personal e-mail addresses when he feels the need to communicate his personal opinion or feelings, he will be happy to do so. However, he would appreciate being able to use Department e-mail for Fire Company business. He repeated that he doesn't need permission from the Fire Company Trustees or anyone else to send out an e-mail or do anything else as the Fire Company President, but he didn't consider that to be a dictatorship. Commissioner Shestack agreed that if personal opinions or viewpoints are involved, the Board would appreciate that members not use Department e-mail because it attaches an official perspective. Mr. Guelich stated that there are other things that he wanted to talk about and might come to the next Board meeting to bring them up. Commissioner Roura reminded him that he needs to go through the proper chain of command and if they cannot be resolved it will eventually come before the Board for discussion on an agenda so that the Board is not blindsided and unprepared. Mr. Guelich stated that the only issues he would like to bring to the Board are those issues that have been addressed through the chain of command but are still not working. Commissioner Hamilton asked him if the issues that were discussed tonight have been sufficiently addressed and could be considered closed and Mr. Guelich replied that he considered them closed and thanked the Board for their time.

Commissioner Hamilton 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 10:03 PM.**