

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

November 5, 2014

Fire Department Headquarters Station

Meeting Minutes #14

IN ATTENDANCE:

1. Commissioner Cornue
2. Commissioner Ridenour
3. Commissioner Roura
4. Commissioner Hamilton
5. Chief of Department Colucci
6. Deputy Chief Burnet
7. Secretarial Assistant Richardson

NOT PRESENT:

1. Commissioner Shestack
2. Administrator Jones

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Roura at 8:07 PM.

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

The Public Announcements were read by Commissioner Hamilton.

OTHER MATTERS:

LOSAP / Stipend Program Changes – Commissioner Cornue provided the Board with a copy of the proposed LOSAP changes and briefed them on a few updates that have been made since the last meeting. In discussions between DCA representative Don Huber, Solicitor Braslow and others, it was determined that the proposed changes were significant enough to require approval by the voters at the annual election. There was not a lot of time to prepare the ballot question and calculate the new authorization maximum amount required for the program, so the working team has recommended that discussions on the Stipend program be set aside for the moment so that we can prepare the proposed LOSAP changes ready for the vote. The team still needs to discuss the potential IRS & FLSA impacts that the proposed changes in both programs will have and a scheduled meeting with a Capehart & Scatchard IRS consultant today was postponed until Administrator Jones can attend so that he can understand any impacts that we need to address.

Commissioner Roura clarified that although we are being presented with changes to both the LOSAP and Stipend programs, they are separate issues with the LOSAP changes requiring voter approval and the Stipend program changes only requiring Board approval. Deputy Chief Burnett stated that the LOSAP program is governed by State Statute with certain benchmarks that have to be met in order to get the proposed changes approved.

Commissioner Roura assumed that the draft administrative policy that he received tonight is what the Volunteer Labor Management Committee and the working team was recommending and only required Board approval to put it on the ballot. Chief of Department Colucci provided the election timeline and milestones that we have to meet to do that, stating that the LOSAP program changes need to be approved by resolution of the Board at a Public Hearing before they can be added to the ballot that must be advertised no later than 12/24/14. The LOSAP Eligibility Document and ballot question need to be finalized and sent to the DCA for approval at 1 of the 3 remaining meetings – the 11/17/14 Regular Meeting, the 12/1/14 Special Meeting or the 12/15/14 Regular Meeting. Commissioner Hamilton asked whether the maximum authorization amount that will be part of the ballot question has been determined yet and said that we need to make sure that it is enough to meet the additional needs of the program. Chief of Department Colucci replied that DCA representative Don Huber has confirmed that if we have insufficient budget to pay the annual LOSAP awards, we would have to transfer funds from another line item to cover them. The current maximum authorization of \$57,443 has been more than adequate since the program was approved by voters in 2005 but the proposed changes to the program should permit more members to qualify for a LOSAP award because it more accurately tracks their contribution of time and activity. Commissioner Hamilton added that it should also encourage more members to become drivers and officers, which are needed. Chief of Department Colucci reminded everyone that the annual LOSAP award is capped at \$1,230 per member under the proposed changes but the Stipend program is not capped at a maximum amount, which the working team still has to resolve.

Commissioner Cornue reported that Captain McCorkle has made projections for this cycle for both programs to compare the costs with our current qualification rules. He anticipated that we would pay out about \$47,000 in LOSAP awards this year under the proposed changes but this does not take into account the additional members that we anticipate recruiting over the next few years, which could easily increase the program cost above the current \$57,443 maximum authorization. Commissioner Cornue proposed that we include an

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increase in the maximum authorization with the proposed changes that we are recommending so that it can sustain the program for at least another 5 years. The goal of tonight's discussion was for the Board to understand the proposed changes and agree to place a question on the ballot for the voters to consider. Chief of Department Colucci reported that Administrator Jones' calculations using the \$1,230 annual award maximum and an estimated 56 volunteer members earning the maximum award each year results in the maximum authorization being raised to about \$69,000 or about \$12,000 more than the existing amount. Realistically, every volunteer would not qualify for the maximum each year, but anticipating that additional members will join the Department and more Junior members will become Senior members, it is a realistic amount to use. Commissioner Hamilton suggested that if we increase it to the \$75,000 that Administrator Jones has suggested, we will definitely be covered for a period of time. Chief of Department Colucci added that the \$1,230 annual award limit can be changed by the Board if they choose to approve the State approved CPI cost of living increase each year. This increase is not automatic and has only been approved by the Board twice since 2005. Commissioner Hamilton likened this increase to the raises that career staff get in their CBA.

Deputy Chief Burnett highlighted the changes that were made to the LOSAP Eligibility Document, which brings it in line with our minimum requirements for volunteer active membership. Points for longevity or years of service with the Department will be given to members based on their start date with the Department with exceptions for years that they may have not met the minimum requirements. The minimum requirements include attending 40 duty crews with 24 of those being the early evening duty crews and attendance at a minimum of 2 per month. Administrator Jones has advocated including a provision to prorate some of the qualifications to fairly reflect the requirements for those members that join or leave the Department in mid-cycle, which everyone agreed made the program more fair and equitable. Commissioner Cornue added that the proration provision also includes areas such as for certifications and promotions that occur during the cycle so that newly promoted Officers and drivers can be compensated for their additional responsibilities as soon as they receive them and not making them wait until the beginning of the next cycle.

Commissioner Roura had no objections to any of the proposed changes. Deputy Chief Burnett added that Battalion Chief Bigoss was in favor of the proposed changes and felt that he could speak on behalf of the volunteer membership. Commissioner Roura asked him if the Board was being asked to formally approve and adopt this as a new administrative policy or the ballot question that will be considered at the election. Deputy Chief Burnett replied that this is the draft proposal that we want to send up to the DCA for their review and approval. Commissioner Roura clarified that a Board vote on this doesn't automatically implement it, but is just a step in the process of getting it to the voters for their approval, which Chief of Department Colucci confirmed. Chief of Department Colucci suggested that the Board vote on the proposed changes as quickly as possible so that the DCA can review it and give us their comments so that we can change anything that is problematic before we add it to the ballot. Commissioner Roura stated that Commissioner Shestack wanted to be involved in this process but unfortunately, due to work commitments that he is juggling he may not be able to attend meetings this month and we don't have the luxury of time to postpone a vote on it until he is in attendance. Commissioner Hamilton agreed that we should move forward tonight because we don't know how long the DCA will take to review it and get back to us.

Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve the draft document so that it can be sent to the DCA for review that was seconded by Commissioner Hamilton. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

Commissioner Cornue reported that he had spoken with Commissioner Shestack today and briefed him on everything and that he understood that we had to keep things moving forward but asked that we keep him in the loop so that he can provide input. Commissioner Roura thanked everyone for moving this along and hoped that we can have a draft ballot question to review at the next meeting.

Commissioner Roura asked whether we needed to discuss the proposed changes to the Stipend program tonight or table it for now. Deputy Chief Burnett replied that the consensus of the working team was to focus on the LOSAP program for now because of the tight timeframe that we have and that we would address that later. Commissioner Roura agreed and noted that he would like to see consideration given to capping annual awards under this program as well so that we can anticipate the budget that is needed to fund it. Deputy Chief Burnett replied that the working team is looking at this to help manage that program but had nothing to recommend yet. Commissioner Cornue suggested that we could overview the proposed Stipend program changes tonight for the Board and get their input. Commissioner Hamilton expressed his concern about the potential IRS impact of the program because it was an annual cash distribution and not a retirement type of program like the LOSAP program. He also disliked the word 'stipend' and preferred to refer to it as a 'clothing allowance' because it could have different tax implications. Chief of Department Colucci replied that since we now actually provide uniforms for our volunteers, it is really no longer a 'clothing allowance' reimbursement program for damaged clothing like it was when it was first created in the late 1980's. Commissioner Roura confirmed that the meeting with the IRS consultant was going to happen in the next few weeks, so we should probably see what comes out of that before we get into that too deeply. Commissioner Cornue added that Battalion Chief Bigoss understood the concerns about capping Stipend program awards and wanted to work out a solution as well. Deputy Chief Burnett stated that both of these programs provide a great value to the Department and we get a tremendous return on the investment that we make in them. Commissioner Cornue added that the working team will come back to the Board in the next few months once they can firm up the proposed changes.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

None.

Resolution #2014-56 "Closing of Meeting Pursuant to Open Public Meetings Act". Commissioner Ridenour made a motion to approve the resolution that was seconded by Commissioner Hamilton. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

**THE OPEN SESSION ENDED AT 8:36 PM.
A CLOSED SESSION BEGAN AT 8:37 PM.
THE CLOSED SESSION ENDED AT 8:59 PM.**

Chief of Department Colucci presented the Board with a draft shared service agreement for the servicing of Hainesport Fire Company apparatus for their review. Supervising Mechanic Skeenes has reviewed it to make sure that he is in agreement with what it will require him to do. He wanted to have Solicitor Braslow review it next but wanted the Board to provide feedback before he did so. He did want to make one additional change involving approval for up to the \$2,500 scope of work limit because he wasn't sure where Hainesport officials wanted to draw the line. This was important because Supervising Mechanic Skeenes is also a member of Hainesport Fire Company and he wanted to avoid any conflicts of interest involving monetary issues. Once we have Solicitor Braslow's comments, he will sit down with Hainesport officials and review the final draft with them. He added that he also wanted to explore the possibility of having our Maintenance Shop do some of the initial customization work on new police vehicles that our Police Department currently has done by outside contractors. Commissioner Ridenour asked him if this was something that we might want to explore with EMS as well and Chief of Department Colucci stated that it could be expanded to Township vehicles in general if the Township wanted to explore it further. He has had complaints from Township employees about shoddy workmanship and we all know that our Shop does great work. Commissioner Roura asked him if our Shop had enough spare time to get involved in all of that work besides the work that will come from Hainesport and Chief of Department Colucci felt that he wanted to start with the Hainesport agreement and then see where that takes us and how much time that leaves the Shop with. Deputy Chief Burnett felt that our involvement with Hainesport would not be significant and will mostly involve annual pump testing and perhaps some general preventative maintenance on their 3 apparatus. Commissioner Hamilton asked him how the insurance would be handled with our employees driving their trucks on test drives and Chief of Department Colucci replied that our employees would be covered under the scope of work that is being developed and that they would be added to the Hainesport driver list that their auto insurance policy covers. Commissioner Roura liked the idea of extending an offer to the Township for some of their work as long as it doesn't become a burden on our Shop staff. Commissioner Cornue felt that it would be a good relationship builder with the Township as well.

Commissioner Roura congratulated Chief of Department Colucci on his participation in the Marine marathon this past weekend.

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 9:07 PM.