

**The Board of Fire Commissioners  
Portsmouth Fire Department**

Fire Station 1  
March 24, 2015

Portsmouth, NH  
1900 hours

**I. Call to Order:**

Chairman Richard Gamester called the meeting to order at 1900 hours and led pledge of allegiance. Along with Chairman Gamester, present were: Commissioners Michael Hughes and Jennifer Matthes; Chief Steven Achilles; Deputy Fire Chiefs Carl Roediger and James Heinz; Firefighters: Russell Osgood, Mark Herrholz, Eric Detweiler and Brian Ryll. Portsmouth Herald writer Jeff McMenemy.

**II. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting:**

Motion, to approve the minutes of February 4, 2015, was made by Commissioner Hughes, seconded by Commissioner Matthes, unanimous.

**III. Public Comment Session: None**

**IV. Recognition of Groups or Individuals:**

Chief Achilles recognized the department's officers and firefighters who answered numerous calls during the months of January and February. With the increased call volume he thanked them and appreciated their efforts.

**V. Reports:**

**A. Fire Chief's Reports:**

Chief Achilles reviewed reports with the Commission.

Report (016), 2015 Response Report with Service Activity and Safety message for February. The report shows the department responding to 194 Fire Calls in February and 264 Ambulance Calls for the month. To date the department has responded to 302 fire and related service calls and 547 ambulance service calls. The Safety Message section reminds all home owners and businesses to prepare for water leaks during the spring thaw. Check sump pumps and drainage systems for proper operation in the event that heavy or prolonged rains are forecasted. Service Activity and Safety Message report was submitted to the Portsmouth Herald for publication in local newspapers. Report (017), Fire and EMS Calls by District, identifies the number of calls broken down by districts for the month with district 1 being

the highest in call volume. Falls and motorized vehicle crashes were the top reasons for EMS dispatch followed by breathing problems. Report (018), FY15 Budget, currently shows department with a surplus if actual costs match that of projected costs. Some stressors on the budget are a firefighter on suspension without pay, a firefighter enlisting into the military, and a firefighter sustaining an injury off duty and it is unknown at this time what his status is. These stressors have created shift vacancies which are currently being covered through overtime. In order to offset the cost of the firefighter who enlisted, an ad was placed in the local papers and we have received several resumes. Deputy Heinz will be scheduling resume reviews next week and an oral board will follow. We hope to have someone onboard by the end of April. We will continue to monitor the budget closely Chief stated. Report (019), Overtime Analysis, provided a breakdown of how overtime was used in the month of February along with a summary of what was charged to OT-Recall for the month.

Motion, to approve Chief's Reports 15-016 through 15-019, was made by Chairman Gamester, seconded by Commissioner Hughes, unanimous.

**B. Staff Reports:**

Deputy Roediger reported on the number of projects happening within the City. He noted that Inspector Howe has just completed his first 2-weeks of Executive Fire Officer Program which was held at the National Fire Academy in VA. The program is a 4-year process meeting 2-weeks of each year and a research paper. He stated that he himself is heading to the National Fire Academy next week for the fire sprinkler and plans review class that Inspector Howe took in January. The classes taken at the National Fire Academy are at no cost to the department. The only cost to the department is the meal ticket. Portsmouth is in the forefront of serving on the State's Coalition Team with Residential Fire Sprinkler Systems. With all kinds of new technology and codes, it is making it more cost competitive for residential sprinkler systems. The Coalition will hopefully be able to instrument some changes in the way the codes read now with what is allowed and what isn't. Commissioner Matthes inquired about the status of radio communications. Deputy Roediger reported on the last piece of the puzzle need to put this all together, which seems to be the most difficult, is the obtaining of four (4) frequencies that work together. The process requires going through federal communications which 2-Way Communications has done with two (2) of the four (4) frequencies approved. Commissioner Matthes then asked for an update on the building projects within the City. He replied that Harbor Corp is moving slowly and is currently going through land use. 111 Maplewood Avenue will have commercial and seventy-one residential units. 3S Arts Space project is complete. Walk-throughs were done for the condos at the end of State Street and is in the process of working with engineers on sprinkler designs. 77 State Street, 100 Arboretum Drive, and 249 Corporate Drive projects are all in the works.

Deputy Chief Heinz reported on operations and trainings happening within the department noting Portsmouth Regional Hospital receiving Level II Trauma Center designation by the State of New Hampshire's Trauma medical Review Committee. It is the only level II trauma center on the Seacoast and one of only three in New Hampshire and our department personnel were instrumental in helping them obtain this designation. Working with Rye Fire in coordinating training at Rand Lumber. Have been working with the Portsmouth High School Safety Committee on an active shooter drill which is being planned for this summer and will involve the police department, state police, FBI and DHSEM. The new ambulance has arrived and department members are being trained on it and it should be in-service sometime next week. Child Passenger Safety course currently underway at station 2. Three of our administrative staff are attending. Fire extinguisher training at the new Sarah Long Bridge site with Cianbro Safety personnel.

**VI. Old Business:**

Chief Achilles added that the new ambulance mentioned by Deputy Heinz has departed from previous designs on the chassis in order to reduce maintenance costs. This one has a medium duty chassis and we were very fortunate to get a demo model to help save on cost.

The rescue, he stated, is being revisited due the need of replacing the 1986 truck. He has reached out to dealers regarding demo model availability and will not have a lot of equipment on it but does hope to be able to integrate a generator on the new rescue for hydraulic rescue tools.

As far as the request by City Council for a self-assessment audit, he reported on the data he has collected and that he is now looking at strength, weaknesses and opportunities. He noted that he has reached out to external stakeholders for their input and peer reviewers to look at the data to be sure that the data being reported is on target. Before it goes public, the Commission will have a copy to review along with labor and collective bargaining members. Looking at some time in mid-April of submitting it to City Council. It will be a great tool for strategic planning he noted. Commissioner Matthes provided her feedback on the report as it is today stating it is very data driven and by reaching out to the other departments she feels this will be very helpful and commended the Chief of his efforts.

Commissioner Hughes asked about the process of letting the public know that our department was instrumental in helping PRH obtain the Level II Trauma designation? Deputy Heinz noted an article in the newspaper perhaps.

**VII. Presentations of Written Communications:**

Chief Achilles read thank you letter from Master Chief Leslie Dorr, USCGR (ret) recognizing and commending the five men that answered his call and being extremely prompt, exercising their skills with efficiency and being professional.

Motion, to accept and place on file, was made by Commissioner Matthes, seconded by Chairman Gamester, unanimous.

**VIII. New Business:**

Chief Achilles spoke briefly of the voluntary enlistment by one of our firefighters to the US Army. He will be active duty for three years and due to federal laws, the department is required to hold his position until he returns. Currently the vacancy is being filled with overtime however, an ad has been placed and plans are to hire a firefighter to fill the vacancy so it isn't impacting overtime costs.

With interest from the public as to why we were no longer providing assistance with car seat installation, the department is hosting a Child Passenger Safety Technician class at station 2 this week which is a 4-day class. Three of our administrative staff are attending since most of the calls come in during the work day primarily at station 1. Chief will work with these three individuals on establishing a schedule so that it doesn't impact their normal work load. Again, Chief stated we will see how this all plays out and if other seacoast towns are able to pick up some of the calls.

Commissioner Gamester read a letter from Local 1313 President, Russell Osgood, regarding the contamination found at the city-owned Haven well on the Pease International Tradeport, which was discovered about ten months ago. The now closed Haven well was found to have elevated levels of the unregulated contaminant Perfluorooctane Sulfonic Acid (PFOS). According to state and federal officials, they believe the contaminants got into the well from firefighting foam that was used on the main runway years ago. With station 3 being located on the tradeport, Osgood is pushing for the Commission to develop a clear plan to notify and test employees, both current and retired. Osgood's letter goes on to say that "there is evidence that this pollutant can lead to adverse health effects in humans and has a long half-life, remaining a threat for many years". "We know there have been many cancer related cases that have plagued our members in the recent years. We hope that this exposure is not related however there is no empirical data that supports this family of chemicals is not responsible". The state has set up a phone number for people who were exposed to the contaminated water to sign up for blood testing. Osgood is also requesting that the commission set up a system to "report the exposures and monitor for any adverse health effects that are potentially caused by this toxin both now and in the future".

Chief Achilles followed up in stating that the unions have been approached along with the City Manager and staff and are currently waiting for direction from the

CDC on their plans on how to approach this. The State Department of Health and Human Services will be holding a public form on March 31, 2015 to discuss its upcoming blood testing protocol and to answer any questions the public might have. The Chief will reach out to Human Resources to see what he can do to get the testing done. Senator Shaheen is looking at funding options for this testing. Commissioner Hughes inquired about any evidence of this being spread to family members. Osgood replied that it is unknown however, previous testing done in Virginia shows employee only and no impact of family exposure. He also noted that there is limited information about this and what treatments are available. From a City's standpoint, we protect and advocate for the health of our employees stated Commissioner Hughes.

Commissioner Matthes asked that this item be added to the monthly agenda to continue to monitor the progress on testing and address any concerns.

**IX. Public Hearings: None**

**X. Non-public Session:**

Motion, to enter into Non-public Session at 2005 hours for reason identified in RSA 91-A:3, II (a), made by Chairman Gamester, seconded by Commissioner Hughes, unanimous.

Motion, to come out of Non-public Session and return to public meeting at 2050 hours was made by Commissioner Hughes, seconded by Commissioner Matthes, unanimous.

Regular public meeting reconvened at 2051 hours.

Commissioner Hughes motioned for a vote to be taken on the grievance, seconded by Commissioner Matthes, unanimous.

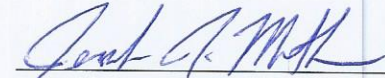
Vote: to approve the grievance. Vote taken: 1 yes - 2 no. Grievance is denied.

Chief Achilles quickly updated the Commission on the status of Rye and the request he received from the Town Manager to what it would cost if Portsmouth provided a Fire Chief and administrative support to them. The Chief noted he is working on this and hopes to provide them with a cost by early next week.

**XI. Adjournment:**

Motion, to adjourn at 2105 hours, made by Chairman Gamester, seconded by Commissioner Hughes, unanimous.

*Fire Commission Minutes of March 24, 2015 continued:*

  
Jennifer Matthes, Clerk