

001

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

Fire Station 2
George Pierce Training Room
December 12, 2023

Portsmouth, NH
1800 hours

I. Call to Order:

Chairwoman Matthes called the meeting to order at 1800 hours.

II. Pledge of Allegiance with Attendance:

Chairwoman Matthes led the pledge of allegiance.

Present were Commissioners: Jennifer Matthes, Richard Gamester and Michael Hughes; Fire Chief William McQuillen, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Gionet, Deputy Fire Chief Patrick Howe, Administrative Manager Tracy Freeman, Lieutenant Brian Wade, Acting Lieutenant Eric Detweiler and Firefighters: Paul McKendry, Steve Morse, Peter O'Sullivan and Shane Anderson.

III. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting:

Motion, to approve the minutes of November 14, 2023, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

IV. Public Comment Session: None.

V. Presentation of Written Communications:

Chairwoman Matthes read the thank you note received from Great Bay Community College for assistance provided to the students at GBCC Campus on November 13, 2023 during a power outage and subsequent fire alarm.

Motion, to accept and place on file, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

VI. Reports:

A. Fire Chief's Reports:

Commissioner Gamester motioned to discuss Chief's reports 23-101 through 23-105. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes.

Chief McQuillen reviewed reports with the Commission.

Report (101), 2023 Response Report for November 2023. The report shows the department responding to a total of 358 calls for the month: 76 Fire Calls and 285 Ambulance Calls. Calls for Fire and EMS were both down from last month. Chief spoke briefly about some of the activities for the month, noting a boat in distress at Memorial Bridge (USCG unavailable), a medical aid call on a barge in the Piscataqua (USCG unavailable), a mulch fire against a building on Woodbury Ave, minor building fire at 25 Piscataqua Drive in Newington, an

electrical fire at 145 Codfish Corner and a porch fire at 909 State Street. The safety message focused on the prevention of home fires from Christmas trees and holiday decorations. Report (102), Fire and EMS Call Summary Reports, shows the department responded to 76 fire calls for the month of November. EMS activity was 286 with the top three responses being for headache or migraine pain, abdominal pain/problems and cardiac conditions. There were 7 calls for suicidal or self-harm ideation or thoughts, 1 drug overdose/abuse and 70 non-transport. Report (103), Fire Prevention Activity, noting 44 permits issued in the month of November along with 76 inspections done and various meetings attended. Report (104), FY24 Budget, Chief reviewed the budget noting that with the recent approval of firefighter and officer bargaining agreements and funding supported the salary related accounts, however, not the overtime account. With an increase in salary comes an increase in overtime rate which is impacting the budget greatly. Chief McQuillen noted that in the 11 months of the year, overtime hours are 1,000 hours higher than they were in 2022 which equates to 40 employees all taking 1 additional shift of overtime. The average firefighter overtime rate was \$42.91/hr. and with the new contract, is now \$62.47/hr. For officers, the average overtime rate was \$49.10/hr. and with the new contract, is now \$72.57/hr. so we are paying out at a higher rate now.

Once contracts were settled and funds were transferred to cover contracts, OT accounts are left for management directive to keep under control. Chief went on to add that he met with City Manager Conard and Finance Director Belanger to see about requesting a change in funding overtime accounts when contracts are settled along with options for bringing this year's budget in line with projected shortfall of \$245K. Based on this projection, minimum staffing has been reduced to 13 and hope to begin a supplemental appropriation request. If we don't get approved, Chief stated we would need to look at a policy decision and closing a station. Commissioner Hughes noted that it shouldn't be a surprise to City Council to see this without funding overtime when contracts were done. Chairwoman Matthes inquired about the possibility of being able to make it up in other areas of the budget. Chief replied that based on projections, and seeing additional \$10K per pay period in overtime for shift coverage, it doesn't appear to be possible at this point. This projection is based on current staffing level with a minimum of 13 people. Chief noted that next year's budget will have to increase as well to cover 16 people who are eligible for a step increase come July 1.

Commissioner Gamester made the motion to have the Fire Chief prepare supplemental appropriation for FY24 budget and forward it to City Council for their approval. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

Fire Chief Reports continued with Report (105), Overtime Analysis, provided a breakdown of how overtime was used in the month of November along with a summary of what was charged to OT-Recall for the month.

Motion, to accept Chief's Reports 23-101 through 23-105, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

B. Staff Reports:

Assistant Chief reported on facilities and operations happening within the department. His report included work on station 1 HVAC system to help regulate temps in the building, ambulance 1 front end repairs were completed last week and new ambulance is on target for a September 2024 delivery and the engine on track for a July 2025 delivery. There are currently 4 open positions within the department with two conditional offers made. One candidate to start January 8th and the other is still going through the hiring process, continue working with probationary employees to get them through their requirements, and FPO Putney has been working with the officers to get them ready for the transition to the new fire reporting system which will begin in January as part of the dispatch software upgrades.

Deputy Chief Howe reported on Prevention and reviewed his activity report with the Commission. He noted that inspections were up for the month of November with 76 inspections and 44 permits issued. He noted their attendance at the Seacoast Inspectors Breakfast held in Greenland, FPO Wheeler speaking at the Lakes Region Community College about the Portsmouth Fire Department and careers in fire prevention, and both prevention officers meeting with PDA operations personnel on fueling operations, and himself meeting with Pro Portsmouth to review First Night fireworks plan and sign off on state permitting.

Commissioner Hughes inquired about talking to the local community colleges to see if they would be willing to take on a fire science program like Lakes Region has so that we may attract some local interest and perhaps when completed, keeping them within the seacoast area. Deputy Howe reported that he would look into this further.

VII. Old Business: None.

IX. New Business:

Chief McQuillen spoke briefly of the two donations made to the fire department.

Motion, to accept the donation of \$2500 from Paul Gormley and Kimi Iguchi and move to City Council for acceptance, was made by Commissioner Hughes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

Motion, to accept the donation of \$100 from Brian and Suzanne Engelhardt and move to City Council for acceptance, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

Chief McQuillen presented Lieutenant Miller's letter of resignation.

Fire Commission Minutes of December 12, 2023 continued:

Motion, to accept Lieutenant Miller's resignation with regret, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

Chief McQuillen spoke of the promotion of Firefighter Detweiler to the rank of Acting Lieutenant on December 11, 2023 with the recent resignation of Lt. Miller and is looking to have Commission move to promote him to the rank of Lieutenant tonight to fill the vacancy.

Motion, to promote Acting Lieutenant Detweiler to the rank of Lieutenant effective immediately was made by Commissioner Hughes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.


Chief McQuillen provided an update on Coast Guard operations as the Coast Guard begins to adjust their operations to mitigate their 2024 workforce shortage. With the Coast Guard adjusting their operations, reducing the workforce of the cutter fleet and the number of operating cutters, it will have an impact on our department as their missions will require someone else to be involved. Waiting to hear more from the Coast Guard on what their needs may be, in the meantime, we are preparing for this change. The replacement of the fireboat is in the 2030 Capital Improvement Plan and we have requested to move it up to 2026 instead. We will also look into other funding options to see if we may be able to replace it sooner.

Chief McQuillen spoke briefly of the NH Department of Safety, Division of FST and EMS providing grant funding for some training which includes overtime and backfill. Due to recent changes in the awarding of grant funds, we need to have the Fire Commission accept and approve the application along with City Council prior to funds being requested and distributed.

Motion, to accept the NH Department of Safety, Division of Fire Standards and Training and Emergency Medical Services Grant application for Trench Rescue Technician and Confined Space Rescue Technician trainings in the amount of \$16,575.00 and send to City Council for acceptance, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

X. Adjournment:

Motion, to adjourn at 1850 hours, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.


Michael Hughes, Clerk V. Chair
