

The Board of Fire Commissioners
Portsmouth Fire Department

012

Fire Station 2
George Pierce Training Room
January 9, 2024

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 and Richard Gamester; Fire Chief William McQuillen, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Gionet, Deputy Fire Chief Patrick Howe, Administrative Manager Tracy Freeman, City Manager Karen Conard, City Finance Director Judie Belanger, Lieutenant Detweiler with members of his family, members of the department and Portsmouth resident Jackie Cali-Pitts.

Absent: Commissioner Michael Hughes due to illness.

III. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting:

Motion, to approve the minutes of December 12, 2023, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.

Commissioner Gamester moved to suspend the rules and move to New Business, item 24-008, Swearing in of Lieutenant Detweiler. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.

Commissioner Gamester made the motion for a 5-minute recess for pictures at 1806 hours. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.

Commissioner Gamester made the motion to reconvene the meeting at 1811 hour and moved to continue with New Business beginning with item 24-007, FY25 Budget Guidelines & Schedule. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.

IV. Public Comment Session: None.

V. Reports:

A. Fire Chief's Reports:

Commissioner Gamester motioned to discuss Chief's reports 24-002 through 24-006. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes.

Chief McQuillen reviewed reports with the Commission.

Report (002), 2023 Response Report for December 2023. The report shows the department responding to a total of 387 calls for the month and 5040 for the

year: 88 Fire Calls and 299 Ambulance Calls. Calls for Fire and EMS were both up from last month and up for the year. Chief spoke briefly about some of the activities for the month, noting a 2 car MVA at Route 1 Bypass and Borthwick Ave with 5 patients transported, a 3 car MVA on Sarah Long Bridge with one person entrapped requiring extrication, another MVA on Spaulding I95 South split with vehicle rolled over into the woods requiring crews to cut their way into brush with saws, and mutual aid response to Old Dennett Road in Kittery for a building fire. The safety message focused on Lithium-ion battery safety. Report (003), Fire and EMS Call Summary Reports, shows the department responded to 88 fire calls for the month of December, and 1342 for the year. EMS activity was 299 for the month with the top three responses being for syncope/fainting, abdominal pain/problems and stroke/cva. There were 4 calls for suicidal or self-harm ideation or thoughts, 2 drug overdose/abuse and 67 non-transport. EMS Call Summary Report for the year is 3,741. Report (004), Fire Prevention Activity, noting 27 permits issued in the month of December along with 76 inspections done and various meetings attended. Report (005), 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 continues to impact the budget greatly. Chief McQuillen noted that 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. Current staffing is at minimum of 13 but the goal is to be back at 15 and have the 3rd ambulance back in service 24/7. Meeting with Finance on January 31st to discuss supplemental. Fire Chief Reports continued with Report (006), Overtime Analysis, provided a breakdown of how overtime was used in the month of December along with a summary of what was charged to OT-Recall for the month.

Motion, to accept Chief's Reports 24-002 through 24-006, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.

B. Staff Reports:

Assistant Chief reported on facilities and operations happening within the department noting the parts for the HVAC repairs at Station 1 are still on order, Station 2 undergoing IT upgrades in the server room with a new rack system to separate IT and communication equipment, ambulance 1 has been out for repairs to a rear wheel and is anticipated to be back this week, new ambulance expected to arrive in September, 1 new firefighter started yesterday and we have another starting January 22nd. We still have 2 vacancies to fill. The department has started utilizing the new fire reporting software which will allow us better access to the data we collect on a daily basis. It will also have a new scheduling component which we intend to roll out in early March. FPO Putney has been coordinating on-duty training for all personnel. Retired Portsmouth Fire Captain Val Pamboukes has been providing a review on shipboard firefighting with the department also this month.

Deputy Chief Howe reported on Prevention and reviewed his activity report with the Commission. He noted that permits were down for the month of December with 76 inspections and 27 permits issued. He noted FPO Wheeler attending fire investigation seminar at NHFA along with a class on inspecting commercial kitchens. FPO Putney, in conjunction with the NH State Fire Marshal, spoke at the NH Building Officials Association's annual convention and also taking classes for CEUs on fire alarm and sprinkler systems, and noted that he, Howe, appeared in Superior Court regarding on-going fire and life safety deficiencies at 909 Isling Street.

VI. Old Business: None.

IX. New Business:

Chief McQuillen swore in Lieutenant Eric Detweiler.

Commissioner Gamester made the motion for a 5-minute recess for pictures at 1806 hours. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.

Commissioner Gamester made the motion to reconvene the meeting at 1811 hour and moved to continue with New Business beginning with item 24-007, FY25 Budget Guidelines & Schedule. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.

City Manager Karen Conard first provided a special thank you to Deputy Howe along with Chief McQuillen and his team regarding outdoor dining and helping the City Council establish an ordinance for future continuance of the program.

City Manager went on to speak about the FY25 Budget process and to convey what they are seeing and asking all departments to stick as close to the CPI which, taking into consideration the 10-year rolling COLA average is 2.69%. Last two budgets reflected a rebuilding process after COVID with much needed salary adjustments for recruitment and retention purposes however, this year we need to pull back with anticipated cost increases coming in on items that our out of the City's control. CPI index in November 2023 saw a drop from 7% to 2.4%. She went on to add that this year's budget will see an impact from the City's re-evaluation process for which we know the fair market values have increased over the past 5 years. Finance Director Judie Belanger noted that Health insurance also increased by 9.3% this year and the Health Insurance Stabilization Fund will be reviewed but are asking departments to plan on budgeting 9.3% for FY25.

Chairwoman Matthes took a moment to thank the City Manager and Finance Director for coming out and taking the time to provide this update. This has not been done before and is truly appreciated.

Fire Commission Minutes of January 9, 2024 continued:

Commissioner Gamester made the motion to draw name from a hat for the Commission representative to serve on the City's Ethics Committee. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.

Chief McQuillen put three names into a hat and had Portsmouth resident Jackie Cali-Pitts select name from the hat. Commissioner Matthes' name was drawn. Commissioner Jennifer Mosher- Matthes will serve on the City's Ethics Committee this year.

Chairwoman Matthes made the following nominations for Board of Fire Commission Officers for 2024: Commissioner Gamester as Chairman, herself as Vice-Chair and Commissioner Hughes as Clerk. Commissioner Gamester accepted the nomination.


Commission Gamester made the motion, Portsmouth Board of Fire Commission Officers for 2024 to be: Commissioner Gamester to serve as Chair, Commissioner Matthes to serve as Vice-Chair and Commissioner Hughes to serve as Clerk. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes. On a Vote of 2-0, the motion passed unanimously.

Chief McQuillen spoke briefly of the Fee Schedule & Emergency Services Rates for the calendar year 2024.

Motion, to accept the recommended 2024 Portsmouth Fire Department Fee Schedule and Emergency Service rates as outlined in the memo from the City Manager, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.

X. Adjournment:

Motion, to adjourn at 1900 hours, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.



Michael Hughes, Clerk