

The Board of Fire Commissioners
Portsmouth Fire Department

022

Fire Station 2
George Pierce Training Room
February 13, 2024

Portsmouth, NH
1800 hours

I. Call to Order:

Chairman Gamester called the meeting to order at 1800 hours.

II. Pledge of Allegiance with Attendance:

Chairman Gamester led the pledge of allegiance.

Present were Commissioners: Richard Gamester, Jennifer Matthes and Michael Hughes; Fire Chief William McQuillen, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Gionet, Deputy Fire Chief Patrick Howe, Administrative Manager Tracy Freeman, Lieutenant Eric Detweiler, Lieutenant Duncan Regonini and Firefighters: Scott D. Young, Tim Dame, Tim Cole, and Greg Tufts.

III. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting:

Motion, to approve the minutes of January 9, 2024, was made by Commissioner Hughes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Matthes and passed unanimously.

IV. Public Comment Session: None.

V. Public Hearings:

Chief McQuillen presented the department's FY2025 proposed budget request of \$12,492,159 which represents a \$1,248,852 or 11.11% increase over FY24 which returns level of service, stations and resources from 2023. Chief identified the impacts affecting the budget, the department's goals, no new positions, efficiencies assigned to line officers, the administrative manager and the in-house part-time mechanic who will be retiring in the fiscal year along with calls for service trends which has been increasing and ambulance collections which have increased 47% since FY14. The Department's FY25 requests are to return service levels, cover increases in operating and contractual costs and increase leave coverage accounts recognizing new contract rates and leave trends. Chief McQuillen also spoke of what is not being requested such as training position for Fire and EMS, position for IT management/radio and planning, fulltime mechanic, dispatch, and additional firefighters per shift which are areas the department will need to address and focus on in the future.

Commissioner Matthes inquired about the cost to staff the 3rd ambulance which the Chief answered \$576,331. Commissioner Hughes confirmed that increases in retirement, workers comp and health insurance are all areas where we have no control over and with the increase in service, having the 3rd ambulance operational is key. Commission thanked the Chief for his presentation.

VI. Presentation of Written Communications:

Chief McQuillen spoke of the note received from Rye Fire where our department provided support and assistance with the Funeral of Lt. Gallant and the thank you letter received from Dover Fire with our department providing station coverage during their city-wide department meeting.

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

VII. Reports:

A. Fire Chief's Reports:

Commissioner Hughes motioned to discuss Chief's reports 24-016 through 24-020. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Matthes.

Report (016), 2024 Response Report for January 2024. The report shows the department responding to a total of 431 calls for the month: 135 Fire Calls and 296 Ambulance Calls. Calls for Fire and EMS. Chief spoke briefly about some of the activities for the month, noting mutual aid call to North Hampton, a vehicle into a building on Prospect Street, mutual aid to Rye for building fire on Ocean Blvd, and mutual aid to Epping for a HazMat incident at fuel facility. The safety message focused on home heating fires. Report (017), Fire and EMS Call Summary Reports, shows the department responded to 113 fire calls for the month of January and EMS activity was 296 for the month with the top three responses being for abdominal pain/problems, weakness, and trauma or injury to head/scalp. There were 4 calls for suicidal or self-harm ideation or thoughts, 2 drug overdose/abuse and 71 non-transports. Report (018), Fire Prevention Activity, with Deputy Howe noting 38 permits issued in the month of January along with 63 inspections done and various meetings attended. Report (019), 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. With the budget being extremely tight, we have implemented a spending freeze with only necessary expenses to be approved. Report (020), Overtime Analysis, provided a breakdown of how overtime was used in the month of January along with a summary of what was charged to OT-Recall for the month.

Motion, to accept Chief's Reports 24-016 through 24-020, was made by Commissioner Hughes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Matthes and passed unanimously.

B. Staff Reports:

Assistant Chief reported on facilities and operations happening within the department noting station 1 HVAC repairs have been completed. Ambulance 1 has been repaired and is back in service. Firefighter Brian Foster has successfully completed paramedic school and is now licensed and functioning as a paramedic. One candidate is in the hiring process with two vacancies remaining to fill. Will be conducting interviews over the next two weeks in an effort to fill those slots. Will be participating in dispatcher interviews at the PD on Thursday and Friday as they continue to try and fill their current vacancies. Probationary training is ongoing for our new personnel.

VIII. Old Business: None.

IX. New Business:

Chief McQuillen updated the Commission on the resignation of Firefighter Bedell.

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

Commissioner Hughes made the motion to approve the FY25 proposed budget as presented in whole and forward to City Manager and City Council.

Commissioner Matthes felt that staffing the 3rd ambulance may need to be looked at but will present it to council for their review understanding that our budget is much higher than council was requesting. Commissioner Hughes added that calls for service shows we need the 3rd ambulance operational.

Motion, to approve the FY25 proposed budget as presented and forward to City Manager, was made by Commissioner Hughes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Matthes and passed unanimously.

X. Adjournment:

Motion, to adjourn at 1844 hours, was made by Commissioner Hughes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Matthes and passed unanimously.



Michael Hughes, Clerk