

015

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

Fire Station 2, George Pierce Training Room  
February 4, 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; Mayor Robert Lister; and Firefighters Mark Herrholz and Russ Osgood.

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

Motion, to approve the minutes of January 20, 2015, was made by Commissioner Hughes, seconded by Commissioner Matthes, unanimous.

Commissioner Hughes made the motion, to move to the Public Hearings section of this agenda so the Chief could present his FY2016 Proposed budget. Motion seconded by Commissioner Gamester, unanimous.

**III. Public Comment Session: None.**

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

Chief Achilles recognized the department and off-duty staff that committed to coming in to assist with the clearing of hydrants during the recent snow storms.

**V. Reports:**

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

Chief Achilles reviewed reports with the Commission. Report (009), 2015 Response Report with Service Activity and Safety message for January. The report shows the department responding to 108 Fire Calls in January and 283 Ambulance Calls for the month. To date the department has responded to 391 Fire and EMS related calls. The Safety Message for the month reminded all home owners to clear and keep clear their main entrance and sidewalks of snow. Businesses should also clear all doorways that exit to the outside. These steps will ensure that everyone can exit the building safely in the event of an emergency. The Service Activity and Safety Message report was submitted to the Portsmouth Herald for

publication in local newspapers. Report (010), Fire and EMS Calls by District, identifies the number of calls broken down by districts for the month and year-to-date. Falls and breathing problems were the highest reasons for ambulance dispatch during January. Report (011), FY15 Budget, currently shows department with a very minimal surplus. Projections have been made through the end of June and are a part of this report. Report (012), 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 approve Chief's Reports 15-009 through 15-012, was made by Commissioner Hughes, seconded by Commissioner Matthes, unanimous.

**B. Staff Reports:**

Deputy Roediger reported on fire prevention and projects that are still continuing within the city, like Vaughn Street and the Connie Bean Center. Harbor Corp project and the retro-fitting of some existing plazas are in the works. Looking at office complexes that have changed in their uses and whether or not they require an upgrade on their sprinkler systems. Inspector Howe attended a sprinkler design class at the National Fire Academy and will be starting the Executive Fire Officer program in a couple of weeks.

Deputy Heinz provided an update on operations within the department which included snow removal and the shoveling of hydrants due the recent snow storms. Met with contractors and construction crew regarding the 3-year long project on the Sara Mildred Long Bridge, and some department members will be assisting the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard with a drill tomorrow.

**VI. Old Business:**

Chief Achilles reported that he is continuing to work on gathering data and establishing a baseline to work from for the internal, self-assessment/audit that was asked of him by the City Council. He met with labor and collective bargaining members along with Commissioner Matthes and hopes to vet this out in the next couple of weeks. Key areas will address staffing, budgets, policy & procedures, equipment, etc. Chairman Gamester inquired about the timeline in getting this to City Council? Chief Achilles replied that he hoped to be vetted out in March and presented to City Council in April.

Chief Achilles provided the Commission with an update on the progress of the emergency communications project having met with the Supervisor of Dispatch and 2-Way Communications. Goal is to move forward and purchase equipment so there isn't a disruption in service. Looking at including law enforcement and working with the same system so there isn't a conflict in frequencies.

**VII. Presentations of Written Communications:** None.

**VIII. New Business:**

Chief Achilles provided a brief review of the City Manager's established Emergency Service Rates for Calendar Year 2015. Rates are aligned with the City's Ambulance Billing company and Medicare. Rates are based on the level of care provided plus mileage. Commissioner Hughes inquired about the level of service provided and whether or not it was based on these rates. Chief Achilles stated that the level of service provided by our personnel is based on the medical need at the time of service and NOT on medical rates. Chief Achilles noted that each provider covers a different percentage of the cost however, Medicare has a certain rate and the department has to accept 80% of that with the patient being responsible for the remainder. Every service call he said, is billed at the same rate for the level of care provided. Chief Achilles identified the differences of ALS1 Emergency (advanced life support, invasive in nature) and ALS2 Emergency (critically injured patients requiring advanced airways, defibrillation and medications). Abatements are done on a case by case basis should people not be able to afford to pay their bill or have a financial hardship.

Motion, to accept the Emergency Service Rates for Calendar Year 2015 as established by the City Manager, made by Commissioner Hughes, seconded by Commissioner Matthes, unanimous.

Chief Achilles recommended supporting the Police Commission and Police Chief in their efforts to improve dispatch services with the hiring of an additional dispatcher. Being a combined dispatch center, we utilize the service. Without the appropriate number of staff members, dispatchers are being held over and working longer hours. Budgetary wise, we don't pay for staff or benefits in dispatch.

Motion, to write a letter of support to the Police Commission with the hiring of an additional dispatcher, made by Chairman Gamester, seconded by Commissioner Hughes, unanimous.

**IX. Public Hearings:**

Chief Achilles presented the FY2016 Proposed Budget which shows a 3.0% increase over FY15 due to step increases and increases in retirement, health and energy. Position summary showed the department continuing with 61 fulltime positions and no new positions added. He identified the largest revenue source for the department being from ambulance billing with the collection rate up 76% over the past 5-years. Budget trends, goals and objectives were reviewed. Chairman Gamester thanked Mayor Lister for coming.

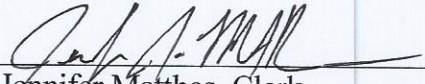
*Fire Commission Minutes of February 4, 2015 continued:*

The public hearing closed at 1906 hours and the regular meeting of the Fire Commission convened.

**X. Non-public Session:** None.

**XI. Adjournment:**

Motion, to adjourn at 1945 hours, made by Chairman Gamester, seconded by Commissioner Hughes, unanimous.

  
Jennifer Matthes, Clerk