

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

Fire Station 2
George Pierce Training Room
September 22, 2021

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 Todd Germain, Assistant Fire Chief William McQuillen, Deputy Fire Chief Patrick Howe, Administrative Manager Tracy Freeman, Captain Jason Gionet, Lt. Peter Gordon, Firefighters: Steven Smith, Jim O'Brien and Eric Carrier.

III. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting:

Motion, to approve the minutes of August 10, 2021, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

IV. Public Comment Session: None.

V. Presentations of Written Communications:

Chief Germain read thank you letter from Chief Lajoie from North Hampton Fire & Rescue and thank you letter from Chief Hoyt from Newington Fire & Rescue.

Commissioner Gamester made the motion to accept the thank you letters and place on file. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

VI. Recognition of Groups or Individuals: None.

VII. Reports:

A. Fire Chief's Reports:

Chairwoman Matthes motioned to discuss Chief's reports 21-079 through 21-082. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester.

Chief Germain reviewed reports with the Commission.
Report (079), 2021 Response Report for August 2021. The report shows the department responding to a total of 490 calls for the month: 144 Fire Calls and

346 Ambulance Calls. Tracking shows we are ahead on both ambulance and fire calls of where we were last year at this time. Total year to date shows the department responding to 3237 calls: 950 fire and related service calls and 2287 ambulance service calls. Chief spoke briefly about some of the activity for the month noting a structure fire in North Hampton with our crew responding mutual aid, several structure fires at Sig Arms, a transformer and outside fire at the John Paul Jones House, a technical rescue at Sprague Terminal in Newington and motor vehicle vs. bicyclist accident requiring a trauma alert stat at PRH. Report (080), Fire and EMS Call Summary Report, shows the department responded to 144 fire calls for the month of August. EMS activity was 346 with the top three responses being for abdominal pain/problems, psychiatric/behavioral problems and alcohol abuse and effects. There were 6 calls for drug overdose/abuse and 48 non-transports. Report (081), FY22 Budget, Chief Germain reviewed the budget which mostly represents up-front funding at this time. Report (082), Overtime Analysis, provided a breakdown of how overtime was used in the month of August along with a summary of what was charged to OT-Recall for the month.

Motion, to accept Chief's Reports 21-079 through 21-082, was made by Chairwoman Matthes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

B. Staff Reports:

Assistant Chief reported on our department assisting with dispatching due to a decrease in personnel in the dispatch center. An MOU has been created to allow our firefighters to work on their off days in dispatch and be paid their overtime rate for those hours that they work. There are currently 17 people signed up and are currently undergoing 40 hours of training with a lead dispatcher. They will need to complete this training prior to going on their own. They are considered employees of the police department and if they don't successfully complete the training or something just doesn't work out, it's a PD decision not fire. With that said, he noted that they would be dispatching for the fire related calls. Another issue that the PD is having is mold and will require the dispatch room to be vacated while HVAC work is done. They will be working out of the redundant dispatch center here at station 2 and the City's IT Department is working on getting things up and running. No timeline has been set yet.

Commissioner Hughes inquired about whether or not we could dispatch out of here, station 2, if all goes well at the end of all this. AC McQuillen noted it was unknown at this time but would be considered if needed. Chairwoman Matthes asked who would make that decision if it were to. Chief Germain noted you, the Commission, however we have miles to go before ever getting to that point.

Chairwoman Matthes inquired about what the 40-hours of training consists of. AC McQuillen noted they would be required to go through a background check and other security measures first then shadowing a lead dispatcher, operating IMC and understanding the phones and what to ask for and how to enter it into the system. Ultimately, there are more police calls than fire, so may have some overlapping calls coming in so may need to assist at times in picking up a police

Fire Commission Minutes of September 22, 2021 continued:

related call. Currently there are 6-shifts a day to operate 24-hours a day and currently they have 3 full-time dispatchers available so names will be plugged in to fill in the available shifts until additional dispatchers are hired. Anticipate this to go until the end of January 2023.

AC McQuillen brought the Commission up to date on the HVAC upgrades at both Station 1 and Station 2. ENE has been in and working on things and hope to have it completed by next week. Once completed, it will allow for both stations to be monitored and alarms to be sent when system issues arise so that we are notified when this occurs.

The overhead door project at station 1 is still ongoing. Currently attending meetings w/ Public Works and specialists to come up with ideas on how to rectify the issues we are having with the doors.

Personnel are currently trained on the loaner apparatus. We will have this unit until our new ladder arrives which is expected to be late November. Our new truck will have be of similar style to that of the loaner.

Department purchased a web-based program that will allow for EMS training to occur on a video platform to assist or members with continued educational hours along with tracking licensing and expiration dates. We are also looking into adding additional modules down that road that may be able to help us do more things like inventories, etc.

Commissioner Gamester inquired about COVID issues and whether we have seen an uptick in them as the State has seen. Chief Germain said we are getting weekly and biweekly updates from the State and keeping a close eye on it and have measures in place and ready if need be. As far as personnel, we have only seen one with a break-through positive test after being vaccinated but no other exposures.

Commissioner Hughes inquired about our firefighter vacancies and where they stood. AC McQuillen responded noting we currently have one vacancy and have made a conditional offer for that vacancy. Last June we interviewed twenty-two candidates and that list has dwindled down quite a bit with some having received jobs elsewhere, some being deployed and others that have not been able to pass the background check or physical. Plans are to post another ad soon to create another list so that we keep current. Advertising does take place out of state as well as in-state so we get a good pool of potential applicants. Fire Academy has seen a drop as well in number of people wishing to become firefighters. Commissioner Hughes inquired about challenges with pay. AC McQuillen stated yes, it is a challenge indeed and that our pay for a firefighter is low compared to other area departments. City of Berlin is even paying more for a firefighter than we are. We are one of the lowest in the State he relayed. Rye is about \$10K more than us right now. Commissioner Hughes said this should and needs to be addressed.

Deputy Chief Howe reported on Prevention noting and uptick in fires at Sig Arms. Determined the cause of three of them to be just human error. Talked with Sig Arms CEO and he noted that they lose over \$100K/hour when they have to shut down so they have put together an in-house task force to address the issues. Mistakes happen and just a coincidence that they have occurred in such a short period of time but they are on top of it. Many construction projects are happening within the City which includes a proposal to demolish the Cinemagic Movie Theatre and building a 5 story, 95 condo units, which will also include a plaza, pickle ball courts, a dog park etc. Proposals for the Burger King space on Lafayette road to turn it into a new deli market. Martingale Wharf deck expansion is still ongoing and micro units on Pleasant Street are back with a new plan, a new research lab being proposed on Heritage Ave and the list continues. Very busy in fire prevention.

Chief Germain also noted that Eversource has hired a contractor that will be removing trees along Little Harbor Road so that they can replace the power lines. Public information meeting is scheduled at City Hall tomorrow night. Our department will be providing a detail to ensure everyone is kept safe when the large cranes are brought in to take the trees down.

VIII. Old Business: None.

IX. New Business:

Chief Germain provided an FY21 Department Activity Report for the Commission to review. This report shows a compilation of activity that the department responded to from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

Dispatch was covered earlier in staff reports.

X. Adjournment:

Motion, to adjourn at 1855 hours, was made by Chairwoman Matthes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

Richard Gamester, Clerk