

The Board of Fire Commissioners
Portsmouth Fire Department

023

Fire Station 2
George Pierce Training Room
February 8, 2022

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 Michael Hughes. Fire Chief Todd Germain, Assistant Fire Chief William McQuillen, Deputy Fire Chief Patrick Howe, Administrative Manager Tracy Freeman, Captain Mark Herrholz, Lieutenants: John Goodwin and Peter Gordon; and Firefighters: Eric Carrier, Cassie Chamberlain, Tim Griswold, Steve Morse, Jim O'Brien, Lucas Raymond, Steve Smith, Matt Stinson and Phil Sutton.

III. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting:

Motion, to approve the minutes of January 11, 2022, was made by Commissioner Hughes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

IV. Public Comment Session: None.

V. Public Hearings:

Chief Germain presented the department's FY2023 proposed budget outlining the department goals, position summary remaining the same as in FY22 with no new positions added, however removing the part-time Acct. Clerk position. Calls for service did slightly dip last year due to impacts of COVID however, they have started to climb again this year. He continued his presentation with the department's budget requests for FY23 which represents an increase in all non-administrative wages by 5%, split over the fiscal year. This is needed in order to be competitive in a specialized job market and will bring firefighters and officers closer to the average wage among comparable cities and towns and attract more qualified and experienced firefighters and lateral transfers from other departments. NH State average wage for a firefighter is \$51,342 and NH State Median is \$50,352. Portsmouth is currently at \$47,073. He also noted that the FY23 budget requests an increase in leave coverage accounts allowing for a gradual increase in minimum staffing from 13 to 14. The department's total budget request is for \$10,572,125 or 7.70% over FY22. Other impacts on the FY23 budget includes NH Retirement

contributions, approved Collective Bargaining Agreements with Cost of Living Adjustment through June 2023, and health insurance. The proposed budget maintains current level of service, stations and resources and incrementally increases minimum staffing from 13 to 14 and improves ability to hire and retain quality personnel. The 5-year strategic plan continues with strengthening and maintaining reliable delivery of essential emergency and non-emergency services with providing one staffed fire truck and one staffed ambulance in each of the three geographic response zones of the city and appropriately funding salary, benefits, shift coverage lines to ensure 15 on-duty firefighters and officers 24/7.

Commissioner Hughes asked about the number of openings we currently have. Chief answered that we have eight positions open and one anticipated retirement within the next fiscal year. Chairwoman Matthes asked about essential services and if we have seen any other increases in these areas or services? Chief noted that each category, Fire Suppression, ALS Emergency Response, Hazardous Materials, Marine and Waterfront, Fire Prevention and Inspection, Emergency Management and Community Services, has seen growth and increases of service needs. The Fire service has become a catch-all for many calls relating to non-emergency calls such as lock outs, water in the basement, lift assists, etc. We are essential services and we look at all services being important and every time we are called we respond. We don't turn away any calls. Chairwoman Matthes asked about the 5% increase in wages and being competitive and if this is something we have seen prior to COVID. Chief answered stating this has been ongoing prior to COVID and noted that in the last 3-years, four firefighters left to other departments for better pay and two conditional offers that were made, were turned down because the candidate received a higher offer. Chairwoman Matthes agreed with the Chief that we need to hire qualified firefighters and added she wasn't willing to put the teams or the public at risk. Chief noted that Concord Fire recently advertised for a firefighter and offer \$10K more for paramedics than we do. Not willing to reduce our requirements and lower standards to hire. Doing so would not be fair to the tax payer or to current personnel. Will not put the teams at risk. Each firefighter hired is required to have AEMT level of EMS certification within their first year. Commissioner Gamester asked if the eight vacancies brings us to 15 on duty and Chief answered yes, but still with a minimum of 13.

Motion, to approve the FY2023 proposed budget with the increases as presented and forward to City Manager, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

With no further questions, Chairwoman Matthes moved to close the Public Hearing. Seconded by Commissioner Gamester. On a unanimous roll call vote of 3-0, motion passed.

VI. Recognition of Groups or Individuals: None.

VII. Reports:

A. Fire Chief's Reports:

Chairwoman Matthes motioned to discuss Chief's reports 22-015 through 22-018. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester.

Chief Germain reviewed reports with the Commission. Report (015), 2022 Response Report for January 2022. The report shows the department responding to a total of 408 calls for the month: 119 Fire Calls and 289 Ambulance Calls. Chief spoke briefly about some of the activity for the month noting a chimney fire at Rand Court which revealed no active fire but a creosote build-up in the flue and a mutual aid call to Salisbury, Mass for a 10 alarm fire that had consumed multiple buildings along the ocean. The safety message focused on February being American Heart Month. Report (016), Fire and EMS Call Summary Report, shows the department responded to 119 fire calls for the month of January. EMS activity was 289 with the top three responses being for weakness, alcohol abuse and effect and respiratory distress. There were 6 calls for drug overdose/abuse and 57 non-transports. Report (017), FY22 Budget, Chief Germain reviewed the budget which is still tracking with a surplus due to the number of vacancies we still have not been able to fill. Report (018), 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 22-015 through 22-018, was made by Commissioner Hughes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

B. Staff Reports:

Assistant Chief reported on ACLS/PALS recertification and having them done by mid-February. Overhead door project bids are in and one door at a time will be done due to the weather. Working with DPW on facilities and the repairs needed and preventive maintenance checks. New hire oral boards were done with 5 conditional offers made and who are now going through the hiring process. Working with HR on recruitment and advertising. With new MOU agreement, we were able to extend an offer to a candidate from Texas who currently works for the Houston Fire Department and will be a lateral transfer. Commissioner Hughes inquired about the hiring of multiple candidates at a time and if it puts off other trainings that were planned. AC McQuillen answered stating at times it may but it becomes a balancing act but shift commanders focus on the deficiencies within their group and uses the time necessary to strengthen in the areas that may have short falls or need more attention.

Deputy Chief Howe reported on Prevention and the many construction projects happening within the City and working with the new Director of Inspection who is quite experienced in building inspections and the process.

VIII. Old Business:

Chief Germain spoke briefly about the new tower. New tower arrived at dealer and Chief and Truck Committee went to Massachusetts this past week and brought down some tools and charges for installation. Tower be there for another week and is expected to arrive here mid-February.

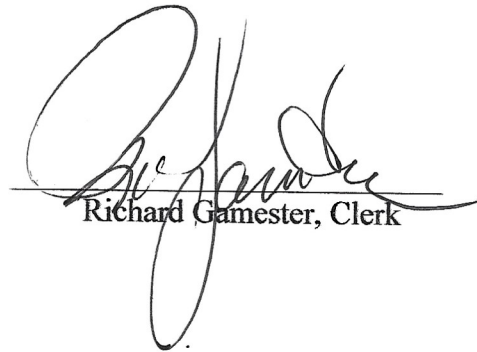
IX. New Business:

Chief Germain read each of the three letters of resignations he received.

Motion, to accept Firefighter Escamilla, Firefighter Gould and Firefighter Lyman's resignation letters, with regret, 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 Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously.



Richard Gamester, Clerk