

FIRE DISTRICT #1 PRUDENTIAL COMMITTEE REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, November 21, 2019 – 6:30 PM

Meeting Minutes

Prudential Committee Meeting Room

144 Newton Street

South Hadley, MA 01075

In Attendance: PC Chair Bruce Perron, PC Clerk Kevin Taugher, PC member John Wojciechowski, Interim Clerk/Treasurer Ira Brezinsky, Chief Robert Authier, Captain Kurt Schenker, Assistant Treasurer Kari Scytowski, Chase St. Andre

CALL TO ORDER

Perron called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: Taugher moved and Perron seconded to approve the minutes of May 16 and May 30. Motion carried 2-0 (Wojciechowski abstained).

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to approve the minutes of August 1 Motion carried 3-0.

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to approve the minutes of October 07. Motion carried 3-0.

CLERK/TREASURER'S REPORT (Complete report on file)

- **FY19 Year End Reporting to Mass DOR:** The District's Balance Sheet has been submitted and approved by DOR. Free Cash has been certified at \$996,824 and Unreserved Retained Earnings (Water Surplus) for the Water Department are \$1,016,768.06. The next step will be to prepare District Tax Rate documents in consultation with the Town Assessor. This work should be completed in the next few weeks.
- **Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust Meeting:** Medex 2 rates will be changing on January 1, 2020 to \$337.00, a decrease of 5.1%. At the same time, prescription drug co-payments will be increasing \$10/\$20/\$35 based on the tier of the medication. This is the only change in benefits. Based on the current enrollment of 36 retirees in Medex 2, the savings to the District in calendar 2020 would be \$5,832. Note: Medex rates change on the calendar year, while changes in Blue Cross rates follow the fiscal year.
- **Hampshire County Retirement Board Annual Meeting:** The District aggregate salaries as of the annual reporting date of September 30, 2019 are \$2,068,649, a decrease of \$37,707 or 1.79%. At the same time, the total salaries for the HCR System went up 1.47%. As a result, the District's proportionate contribution to the HCRB for FY21 will decrease by 0.08% to 2.42%. The District's FY21 payment due next July will be \$618,931, an increase of \$25,605. The overall increase in District 1 retirement contribution is 4.32%, while the overall retirement system increase is almost double that amount. This due to no staffing increases in emergency services and a reduction of one FTE in the Water Department.

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- **Change to 2020 Election Date:** The Town and District annual election has been changed to March 3 as a result of the vote taken by Town Meeting on 11/20. Nomination papers will be available shortly and notices will be going to the local papers and posted on the District website.

CHIEF'S REPORT

Inspections: Chief Authier reported 46 fire calls and 184 EMS calls in October. In addition, he reported 16 business inspections, 25 smoke/CO inspections, and no Oil Burner inspections. There were no Certificates of Occupancy issued and there have been 160 lockboxes installed year to date.

Community Interactions:

- On November 2, Easter Seals, along with Bob Charland and the Pedal Thru Youth group, held a fundraiser which included a Bonfire, to benefit these organizations in providing adaptive bikes and an adaptive riding program for kids with disabilities. A fire detail was provided
- Members of the Dive Team completed a 2-day dive requirement for the Rescue Diver certification. The conditions were a surface water temperature of 53 degrees and a depth of 20-25 ft with minimal or no visibility.
- Members of the Fire Investigation Unit and the Chief attended a 2-day training held by No Fires. The topics included case studies and using technology to aide in investigations.
- The Chief attended a 2-day Line of Duty Death Training Preparing the Best for the Worst held by the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council.
- Lt Houle and Lt Walsh, along with members for the American Red Cross, installed 13 homes with new smoke and CO alarms
- Lt Houle and FF Blaney participated in a bingo fundraiser held for the new Senior Center.
- LT Walsh and FF Belliveau, along with members of TRIAD, participated in delivering sand/salt to the Seniors.

He also reported the new Chief's car is at the dealership and will be ready to pick up shortly.

AMBULANCE REPORT AND ADJUSTMENT OF RECEIPTS

PC Clerk Taugher presented some analysis he has done regarding ambulance intercepts, particularly involving District 2. Reports were provided by Captain Schenker. Year to date, District 1 has responded to 169 calls in District 2 and a large portion of those calls resulted in transport. He stated there is a significant amount of redundancy in service being provided between the two District ambulance services and there may be an opportunity for savings. Chief Authier and Captain Schenker were in agreement. Significant discussion ensued, including the District's interaction with neighboring communities, with a variety of scenarios presented. Further discussion of this topic will be scheduled in January or February.

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to approve adjustment of ambulance receipts in the amount of \$265,090.42 for the month of October. Motion carried 3-0.

MASS DOT REQUEST FOR LAND AGREEMENT AND RIGHT OF ENTRY

As part of the Newton Street road project being planned, MASS DOT will be installing emergency traffic signals at the fire station. They have requested a Land Agreement and Right of Entry in order to install the signals.

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to approve the land agreement with Mass DOT. Motion carried 3-0.

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to approve the Right of Entry agreement with Mass DOT. Motion carried 3-0.

CHIEF'S COMPENSATION

An updated compensation study of Chief's salaries in western Mass fire departments was provided by Authier and Brezinsky. Taugher would like to see a plan to update the Chief's role and responsibilities. Perron agreed, however at the present time he believes the Chief is doing a good job and moving the department in the right direction. Taugher would like to see improvement in the District's financial condition as it relates to ambulance service and would like the Chief to take a more active role as Ambulance Director. Chief Authier and Ambulance Coordinator Schenker stated that the bulk of the District's ability to generate ambulance revenue is controlled by limits that are placed on payments by insurance companies and the federal government via Medicare. The District uses a third-party billing and collection service that does a good job.

Taugher reiterated his desire to update the Chief's job description and detail goals that would be tied to future raises. Included should be some strategic planning goals. Authier stated that he works under the "Strong Chief" statute as outlined in Mass General Law and that there has not been clear agreement between the Chief and PC as to exactly what his roles and responsibilities are. Taugher believes that MGL is clear regarding the role of Fire Chief, but that some of the Chief's additional responsibilities, including Ambulance Director, fall outside of State regulation. Authier believes the department has done a good job in handling both fire and EMS calls with a minimum amount of staffing and without having to regularly call for mutual aid. Perron stated no action has been taken regarding salary increase (other than the recent 1.5% COLA) since the Chief's 2017 evaluation. He proposed a 1% increase now and an additional 1% increase at such time when revised goals are put in place and those goals are satisfactorily met. The additional increase should be addressed in the next 6 months. Wojciechowski encouraged the Chief to keep the PC better informed about all of his achievements and issues within the department. The PC needs a more solid base of information in order to make decisions, including regarding the Chief's compensation. He continued that, in today's financial climate, everyone is expected to do more and achieve more. He stated that the job description and conditions under which he was hired has changed significantly over time and an updated job description and expectations are in order. It is incumbent on the Chief to continue to take more responsibility and lead the effort to move the department forward. Taugher agreed and, provided this would be the approach going forward, agreed with a 1% raise now and the possibility of an additional 1% increase in a few months, subject to satisfactory future work product. The timeframe for future consideration will be governed by the Chief's progress with the next reporting period targeted to be in approximately 90 days.

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Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to provide the Chief a 1% raise effective November 1. Motion carried 3-0.

UPDATE FROM BYLAW & POLICY ADHOC ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BPAAC):

Perron stated that the BPAAC would like guidance from the PC regarding direction related to MGL Chapter 48, section 42 and 42a (Strong Chief/Weak Chief).

Regarding the Clerk/Treasurer position, Perron asked for the PC member's view on whether the Clerk/Treasurer position should be elected or appointed. The PC is unanimous in support of making the position appointed and would like to see an article on this year's District Meeting warrant. The discussion at the meeting was to make the position appointed at the end of the elected Clerk Treasurer's term of office, or when the elected Clerk/Treasurer leaves office. The language, as written, for the bylaw change that was offered at the last annual election should be reviewed and if appropriate, included in the warrant for the next annual meeting.

PRELIMINARY FY21 BUDGET DISCUSSION

The preliminary budget will be presented at the December PC meeting. Authier anticipates requesting additional staff.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is planned for December 19 at 6:30 PM.

OTHER BUSINESS

Chase St. Andre asked for clarification about a recent communication he had with the Firefighter's Union representative regarding the uniform allowance. Taugher requested that Perron and Brezinsky discuss this with St. Andre after the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to adjourn at 8:15 PM. Motion carried 3-0.

Respectfully submitted,

A true copy, attest:

Ira Brezinsky
District #1, Interim Clerk Treasurer


Kevin Taugher, Prudential Committee Clerk