

EVESHAM TOWNSHIP FIRE DISTRICT NO.1
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
Special Meeting
November 6, 2023
MINUTES

Vice President John Behnke called the special meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners of Evesham Township Fire District No. 1 to order at 3:35 PM. Vice President Behnke opened the meeting with a flag salute and Pledge of Allegiance. The following statement of compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act was given by Business Manager Maureen Mitchell: "This meeting is being held in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act. Notice of this meeting was transmitted to the Burlington County Times and Central Record on November 1, 2023, filed with the Township Clerk of the Township of Evesham, posted on the bulletin board in the Fire Administration Office that is customarily used for the posting of such notices and mailed to all persons requesting that they receive such."

ROLL CALL - The following individuals were present at the roll call, Commissioners: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe and Smith. Also present were: Chief Carl Bittenbender, Deputy Chief Ryan Donnelly, Deputy Chief Scott Freedman, and Business Manager Maureen Mitchell. ABSENT: Guerrini

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

Vice President Behnke opened the Public Comment section for the agenda items only.

Clayton Brunges, resident since 1988 and member of the Fire Department for 30+ years as an EMT, had a couple of questions. He asked:

1. Why did we sell the ladder?
2. Why do we need to hire 4 more Firefighters?
3. The new piece of equipment as much as 2 other ladders, is it still going to be ladder/tiller? Thought we were looking at a Quint?

Vice President Behnke asked the Chief to address.

The Chief stated that the ladder was sold in 2023 to capitalize on the present value. We purchased 2215 to add a ladder with water & pump capability. The current ladder sold was underutilized with poor rotation due to the lack of water on it. Although the Quint provides water it has limited ground ladder compliment due to the space taken to provide the water. The new ladder will be designed with increased ladder storage, a pump to provide water and a ladder. The current Quint operates as an engine with a ladder but there are tradeoffs.

The Chief addressed the question about the type of replacement apparatus by indicating that he recommended a tractor drawn aerial as it is the most capable piece of apparatus to address the density of new buildings and provides increased compartment storage. It would provide close to 300 feet of ground ladders and also provide water.

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As for the hiring of the additional 4 Firefighter/EMTs, this will allow for the promotion of additional Captains and begin the succession planning as we have 6 eligible retirements in the command staff over the next four years or so.

The Chief addressed the District's ISO rating which he indicated is a strong 2 and we have not been set back any by the selling of any apparatus as we have not had any service reduction attributed to the sales. The District checked prior to listing the apparatus to verify that it would not have a negative impact on the District.

The Chief addressed the question of the expected cost of the replacement apparatus. He indicated that any apparatus would be higher than in the past with the 8% inflation rate and the range of apparatus under consideration ranged from \$2.0 to 2.5 million all inclusive.

2024 Budget Work Session:

Commissioner Behnke thanked the Business Manager for setting up this special meeting. He stated that since the Budget was uploaded a few hours before the introduction on October 12th he didn't have sufficient time to ask questions so he along with other commissioners asked for a work session meeting to publicly discuss the budget. Commissioner Behnke asked about the amount of Capital Reserves used in the 2024 Budget.

Manager Mitchell indicated that there is \$1,418,000 of Reserves for Future Capital Outlay available on page F-8 of the introduced budget of which none was utilized in the 2024 budget presently.

Commissioner Rowe indicated that if there was anything that could be done to lessen the impact on the taxpayers, he would like to see the options.

Commissioner Behnke asked when the additional Firefighter/EMTs and the associated costs come into the budget.

Chief Bittenbender indicated that it was after a conversation the Chief had with Commissioner Behnke at the business trip so the Monday or Tuesday prior to the October 12th meeting. It was transmitted to the Business Manager on Wednesday October 11th.

Much debate occurred regarding what would happen if the requirements didn't occur and if service delivery could be expanded if that didn't happen. The Chief said that the number of four was tough to expand coverage while dealing with recurring shifts but we would never not use the uniform staff in some capacity to provide service.

More debate ensued and Commissioner Behnke requested Manager Mitchell provide the Board with three budget scenarios for Thursday's public hearing:

1. Original as introduced.
2. Utilize \$706,000 of Reserve for Future Capital Outlay to provide a zero impact of the Capital Budget

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3. Utilize \$706,000 of Reserve for Future Capital Outlay and add 4 more Firefighter/EMTs to provide a complimentary shift to the originally proposed 4 new positions.

Vice President Behnke opened the Public Comment portion of the meeting.

1. Kevin McGuigan noted that the Board had 4 days to approve the budget. He questioned if the District looked at expanding Per Diem or volunteer stipend. He indicated that the bunk space is not bad but the beds are not comfortable. He asked if the Board thought about the SAFER grant. Do you consider leasing an apparatus like Voorhees? He stated that a tiller can't get into certain courts in Kings Grant. He said that at the July 18th meeting the Chief mentioned the option to purchase a used tiller.

Chief Bittenbender indicated that as soon as the SAFER grant opens for the next round the District will apply as we have done every year since we received the initial grant award.

Deputy Chief Freedman indicated that we look at all options of funding apparatus purchases, but leasing is not the way to go and in fact Voorhees is in the process of getting out of that practice do to the exorbitant costs.

2. Bruce Albright commented that the Board should not kick the can down the road by dividing the increases to save the taxpayers.

There being no further business to come before the Board, Commissioner Rowe made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Baugh seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a unanimous roll call vote.

Vice President Behnke adjourned the meeting at 5:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Mitchell
Business Manager