

EVESHAM TOWNSHIP FIRE DISTRICT NO.1
BOARD OF FIRE COMISSIONERS
Regular Meeting
November 9, 2023
MINUTES

Vice President Behnke called the regular meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners of Evesham Township Fire District No. 1 to order at 6:30 PM at Station 221. Vice President Behnke welcomed all in attendance. He opened the meeting with a flag salute and Pledge of Allegiance and a traditional moment of silence for those that have gone before us. 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 December 12, 2022, 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 notice."

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

August 10, 2023 Executive Session
September 14, 2023 Regular Meeting and Executive Session
September 28, 2023 Regular Meeting and Executive Session
October 12, 2023 Regular Meeting

Commissioner Baugh made a motion that the minutes of the August 10, 2023 Executive Session, the September 14, 2023 Regular Meeting and Executive Session, the September 28, 2023 Regular Meeting and Executive Session, and the October 12, 2023 Regular Meeting be approved. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

TREASURER'S REPORT

The following report for the month of October 2023 was submitted by the Treasurer for approval:

Treasurer's Report for the period ended:
October 31, 2023

Beginning Cash Balance	\$8,480,967.76
Cash Receipts	2,776,329.63
Cash Disbursements	<u>(673,787.58)</u>
Ending Cash Balance	<u><u>\$10,583,509.81</u></u>

Evesham Township Fire District No. 1
Minutes – November 9, 2023

Commissioner Smith made a motion accepting the Treasurer’s Report as presented. Commissioner Rowe seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a unanimous roll call vote of the members present.

APPROVAL OF PAYMENT OF BILLS

BILL LIST

November 9, 2023

ELAN (P-CARD)	\$ 5,990.30
Heartland	\$ 983.21
Payroll #21 & #22	\$ 482,209.89
Payroll Deductions Payable	\$ 40,534.80
NJ Pension & Benefits-Pension Deductions	\$ 47,565.80
NJ Pension & Benefits - SHBP	\$ 73,047.23
Bill List Dated: 11/9/23	\$ 145,385.41

TOTAL PAYMENTS THIS PERIOD

\$795,716.64

Commissioner Baugh made a motion to approve the payment of bills as contained on the Bill List Report. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a unanimous roll call vote of the members present.

CHIEF’S REPORT – Chief Bittenbender gave a brief verbal summary of the Chief’s report in the agenda packet and stated that he will be presenting the Budget PowerPoint this evening.

SOLICITOR’S REPORT – Solicitor Saginario commented that he has reviewed the policies on today’s agenda for adoption, and they are consistent with the requirements of the JIF. He indicated that he is prepared to recommend adoption when the board is ready to accept the policies.

BUSINESS MANAGER’S REPORT – Manager Mitchell gave a brief recap of her Board report which was previously provided in the agenda packet. She discussed the Adoption of the 2024 Budget in tonight’s meeting. She informed the board that we have received the Audit for 2022 and we, once again, have a clean audit with no findings or recommendations. She also stated that the DCA has announced the American Rescue Plan Firefighter Grant application will be coming out soon and we will apply to take care of the next phase in our PPE equipment replacement program.

2024 BUDGET PRESENTATION – Chief Bittenbender presented the PowerPoint presentation detailing the proposed 2024 Budget up for adoption this evening.

Vice President Behnke asked if the Board went with option three (3) of hiring 8 Firefighter/EMTs how long would it take to spool them up.

The Chief indicated that he thought he could accomplish that in a six (6) month window assuming there was an appropriate number of eligible candidates in the pool.

Evesham Township Fire District No. 1
Minutes – November 9, 2023

Commissioner Rowe asked why fire incidents are rising.

The Chief indicated that we are a growing township with high density buildings which increase the incidents of fire.

Commissioner Rowe asked the Chief what it would take to reach the goal of 9 minutes 90% of the time.

The Chief stated that if all three stations were staffed 24/7 we could overcome the travel distance issue which puts some calls outside this window; however he cautioned that would not address the issue of call concurrency which negatively impacts response times. If we have additional staffing and possibly a fourth (4) station or a second staff out of Station 221 we may be able to deal with that. The Chief stated that the goal of 9 minutes 90% of the time is a benchmark to set and measure against a consensus standard of similar community makeup. It is a standard that has proven to be effective.

Commissioner Smith asked if we switch to option 3 and hire 8 Firefighter/EMTs to staff Station 225 what does that do to the promotional process.

The Chief stated that it is an either-or scenario – you either hire 4 and make promotions or you hire 8 and forgo promotions to the future but you can't do both. If we go with the original budget, we hope to be able to open 225 in 2025 with the promotions that would be in place. Currently our volunteer Deputy Battalion Chiefs do a great job but they are not expected to be at our beck and call 24/7. Battalion Chiefs are mobile.

Vice President Behnke asked why we can't run the hiring and the promotional process concurrently.

Deputy Chief Donnelly indicated that you have a ninety-day notification process.

The Chief also indicated that by staging the hiring you can permit a wider pool of candidates since you need 3 years of service to be eligible for promotion.

Vice President Benke asked what will the proposed budget do to expand coverage and how do we staff Station 225 in early 2025?

Chief Bittenbender stated that if you are talking about adding an additional piece of apparatus in hours not currently covered – it won't but we will utilize the staff. Station 225 is not situated to staff 24/7 coverage so that will have to be addressed.

Vice President Benke asked if we would have funds available in 2025 for Station 225.

Business Manager Mitchell indicated that if the Board went with Option 1 this year and by using CAP bank and restricted deferred funds in 2025 she believed it would be possible.

Vice President Benke asked if the Budget allows for expansion of Volunteer coverage.

Evesham Township Fire District No. 1
Minutes – November 9, 2023

Chief Bittenbender indicated that it was already allotted for.

Commissioner Smith asked the Chief what his minimum staff for station 225 looked like.

Chief Bittenbender indicated that it would come down to an engine or an ambulance or both but is all based on money. In my opinion an engine is the most capable piece as that would allow for the Firefighter/EMTs to provide EMS care until an ambulance arrives.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS ONLY – None

Seeing no comments, Vice President Behnke closed the Public Comment on the Agenda Items only portion of the meeting and moved to the Resolutions.

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 2023 - 65 Authorizing Budget to be Read by Title Only

Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve Resolution Number 2023 – 65. Commissioner Baugh seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

Resolution No. 2023 - 66 2024 Adopted Budget Resolution

Manager Mitchell stated that the Annual Budget as presented for adoption reflects Total Revenues of \$15,501,109.14 which includes amount to be raised by taxation of \$12,007,261.14, and Total Appropriations of \$15,501,109.14.

Vice President Behnke stated that this is the adoption and the Public Hearing on the 2024 Fire District Budget which he opened the Public Comment on the proposed budget.

1. Rosemary Bernardi asked the Board which budget version the Board would be voting on.

Manager Mitchell indicated that the Public Hearing was on Option 1.

Commissioner Baugh made a motion to approve Resolution Number 2023 – 66. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

Resolution No. 2023 - 67 Resolution Authorizing the Renewal of a Shared Service Agreement with the Mount Holly Township Fire District No. 1

Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve Resolution Number 2023 – 67. Commissioner Baugh seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion

Evesham Township Fire District No. 1
Minutes – November 9, 2023

produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

Resolution No. 2023 - 68 Resolution Authorizing Certain Budgetary Transfers

Commissioner Baugh made a motion to approve Resolution Number 2023 – 68. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

Resolution No. 2023 - 69 Resolution Authorizing the Hiring of Per Diem EMTs

Commissioner Baugh made a motion to approve Resolution Number 2023 – 69. Commissioner Rowe seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

Resolution No. 2023 - 70 Resolution Ratifying EMT's Rate of Pay

Commissioner Rowe made a motion to approve Resolution Number 2023 – 70. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

Resolution No. 2023 - 71 Resolution Authorizing Memorandum of Understanding with Evesham Township

Chief Bittenbender indicated that the UTV was a Township asset for the Office of Emergency Management that the Township acquired through a grant and the IAFF graciously donated a Skid for it. Vice President Behnke asked Solicitor Saginario if he reviewed the agreement and he advised that he had.

With that, Commissioner Baugh made a motion to approve Resolution Number 2023 – 71. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

Resolution No. 2023 - 72 Acknowledging Receipt and Review of the Annual Audit for the Year Ended December 31, 2022

Manager Mitchell indicated that the Board were provided an electronic copy of the audit report and she had hard copies for anyone who wanted one. The audit was clean, with no findings or recommendations and the District is in a healthy financial position.

Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve Resolution Number 2023 – 72. Commissioner Baugh seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

CONSENT AGENDA (2023-73 through 2023-75)

Evesham Township Fire District No. 1
Minutes – November 9, 2023

Resolution No. 2023 - 73	Resolution Authorizing Disposal of Surplus Property
Resolution No. 2023 - 74	Resolution Canceling Certain Purchase Orders
Resolution No. 2023 - 75	Resolution Authorizing the Cancellation of Charges Determined to be Uncollectable

Commissioner Rowe asked about \$39,000 close out on a purchase order for Multi Temp. Business Manager Mitchell informed him that they didn't use all that was encumbered, it wasn't needed to finalize the project.

Commissioner Behnke made a motion to approve Resolution Numbers 2023 – 73-75. Commissioner Baugh seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

NEW BUSINESS –

1. Policies

Commissioners Behnke and Rowe requested to table the motion to adopt these policies as they had yet to review them.

2. DCA American Rescue Plan Firefighter 2023 Grant application

Manager Mitchell indicated that The 2023 DCA Firefighter Grant was just announced, and the applications are due electronically by December 8th so she is recommending applying for the next phase of our PPE.

Commissioner Smith made a motion to apply for the DCA Grant. Commissioner Baugh seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

OLD BUSINESS

1. RFP for employee engagement survey.

Manager Mitchell suggested that the Board vote to reject the bid and look to put out a more specific bid in the future. She informed the Board that the only company to bid was over budget, and we were unable to obtain valid references. When asked twice, the company that bid provided 10 references, where we were able to get responses from 2.

Commissioners Behnke and Rowe both stated that the employee engagement survey is something they really want, and think is important, and they said that we should definitely put something out to bid early to mid-2024 at the latest.

Commissioner Baugh made a motion to reject the current RFP for employee engagement survey. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the foregoing motion produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini

MEMBERSHIP – Terminate: Evan Ryan

Evesham Township Fire District No. 1
Minutes – November 9, 2023

Commissioner Baugh made a motion to terminate; Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote on the termination produced the following result: AYES: Baugh, Behnke, Rowe, and Smith; NAYS: None; ABSTAINED: None; ABSENT: Guerrini.

GOOD AND WELFARE

Commissioner Baugh stated that if the election results go the way they are looking then this could possibly be his last meeting, so she wanted to thank Christian. She stated that it has been her pleasure to work with him over his three-year term. She stated that she connected with him as she also has no background in fire service and is a taxpayer who came with no agenda other than to expand coverage in the Township. She congratulated Michael Powers who was in the audience and stated she looked forward to working with him again.

Commissioner Baugh also asked the Chief to speak to the decision not to drive Santa around this year as it was not a Board decision.

Chief Bittenbender indicated that it was his decision based on talking with many members and evaluating the logistical issues. There are annual challenges that go unnoticed like trees and liability issues for instance. This was a great tradition while it lasted but with the Township asking the District to take the lead on their new lighted parade which will take place on December 15th. I decided to escort Santa in that.

Commissioner Baugh thanked all of the District members present, who participated in this tradition in the past.

Commissioner Rowe spoke about the budget and stated that he understands raising taxes and not “expanding coverage” per se as he is for service preservation and not for denigration. He stated he was a volunteer with the District from 2001 thru 2007 and there was no succession planning for support infrastructure. Commissioner Rowe stated he hoped for several work session meetings on 2024 to hear about succession planning.

Vice President Behnke asked when the SAFER grant window would open again.

Deputy Chief Donnelly indicated that the SAFER grant had variable timing based on the Federal Government’s Budget status.

Vice President Behnke asked if we can have staffing 225 a priority in the next grant application but indicated that it can’t be our only option.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Bruce Albright stated that he has had to utilize the District’s EMS services twice this year and he had excellent service. I come to these meetings because one time I was lying on my floor waiting for help and I understand that the south end may not have as many calls for service, we still deserve service. That also may soon change as that area will see substantial growth over the next five years.
2. Mike Powers addressed the Board to provide a correction to Commissioner

Evesham Township Fire District No. 1
Minutes – November 9, 2023

Rowe's statement about succession planning, he stated that the District made an Assistant Chief but the Chief at that time refused to leave when expected. I disagree with the Chief's comment regarding Santa as I managed that for years and the volunteers did not say no to doing it.

Chief Bittenbender asked the Vice President if he could address Mr. Powers and the VP Agreed. The Chief asked if Mr. Powers had enough resources to do Santa this year?

Mr. Powers stated that without his information he was not going to debate the Chief. He stated that he would sit down with the Chief, but we don't need to waste time now.

Seeing no other members wishing to speak Vice President Behnke closed the Public Comment and brought the floor back to the Board.

Vice President Behnke asked Deputy Chief Olt whom he saw in the back of the room to stand to be recognized for her 50 plus years of volunteer service to the District.

She stood and was recognized.

ADJORNMENT

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

Vice President Behnke adjourned the meeting at 8:23 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Mitchell
Business Manager