

Board of Fire Commissioners Regular Meeting

72 New Haven Avenue, Milford, CT
Tuesday, September 21, 2021

- I. **Call to Order:** Chairman McGrath called the meeting to order at 18:10 hours. A quorum was present.

Roll Call: In addition to the Chairman, Commissioners Stein, Brennan and Riso were present. Also, present were Chief Edo, Assistant Chief Begley, Assistant Chief Fabrizi, Battalion Chief Christopher Zak and Captain Halprin.

Absent: Commissioners Weber, Smith, and Stanford.

II. **Public Statements limited to the function of the Board of Fire Commissioners:**

David Heenan 26 Lilac Ave.

David Heenan read from a submitted statement regarding the current number of paramedics the department has. He feels the department needs to do more to hire paramedics. He also spoke on current vacancies and retaining workers with a DROP plan or deferred retirement option that the Police Chief currently utilizes. The plan as laid out would allow the department to fill current vacancies reducing force backs and improve the budget. Mr. Heenan spoke of his opposition of a Milford Recruit Academy and hopes the board rejects the proposal.

Firefighter Paul Buda 72 New Haven Ave.

Firefighter Buda stated he agreed with D. Heenan regarding the financial benefit of a DROP plan for the department. He spoke on the savings in insurance savings of hiring a new firefighter versus retaining a retired firefighter. Firefighter Buda also spoke in favor of sending recruits to the CT Fire Academy, stating his time spent there formed him into a highly trained firefighter. He stated with more funding and time it may be possible to have a recruit training program here, but at this time it is not possible.

III. **Consideration of Minutes:**

Regular Meeting – August 17, 2021

Commissioner Riso and Stein made and second a motion to except the minutes of August 17, 2021. Motion carries unanimously.

IV. **Communications:**

Commissioner Stein summarized a letter from John Plofkin of Pre Plan Promotional Prep & Training regarding the entry level candidate's oral process. He spoke of Lieutenant McGee and Lieutenant Vitale's high moral character and how they took their job of evaluating future firefighters very seriously. He applauded the fire department for the high standard it sets at the entry level and in its daily delivery.

V. **Chairman's Report:**

Chairman McGrath congratulated Battalion Chief Ronald Wetmore on his retirement as his last day worked was today. He also congratulated Firefighter Brett Corris who retired in August.

VI. **Committees Report:**

- a) **Personnel Committee:** Commissioner Stein stated the Personnel Committee would become active in the next month conducting interviews for entry level firefighters and for Assistant Chief, as Assistant Chief Bernard L. Begley announced his retirement. Commissioner Stein also informed the board that Commissioner Riso would be out of town and a substitute would be needed. The current Personnel Committee consists of himself, Commissioner Riso and Chairman McGrath.
Commissioner Stein and Riso made and second a motion to have Commissioner Brennan as substitute for the Personnel Committee screening process for Entry Level Firefighter and Assistant Chief. Motion carries unanimously.
- b) **Maintenance & Equipment:** Commissioner Brennan expressed his and the board's gratitude to Assistant Chief Begley on a job well done with the maintenance of apparatus. Commissioner Brennan stated his background with a large fleet allows him to understand the problems that come with that responsibility. He expressed to the department the boards understanding of the frustration with apparatus that have technology that is not easy to acquire due to back orders and/or low stock.
- c) **Safety Committee Liaison:** Commissioner Brennan stated being on the Safety Committee has allowed him to view issues that he may not have otherwise noted. He also stated how city department's work together for resolutions.

VII. **Chief's Report:**

Engine 4 -The new Engine 4 is currently in service.

New Ambulance -The new Medic 3 is local and will be getting a power load stretcher installed.

Loss of use check - Chief Edo stated he called another department regarding loss of use with no response. The city's Acting Risk Manager received a response regarding how the value was determined. Commissioner Stein stated in the last meeting the Board authorized the Chief to deposit the check once his due diligence was completed.

Testing Presentation - Chief Edo indicated Battalion Chief Christopher Zak and Captain Martin Halprin were going to present to the board the outline of a proposed Milford Recruit Training Academy during agenda item IX. Unfinished Business. Commissioner Stein indicated he was in favor of the breakdown of bundle billing on the finance report from EMS/Finance Battalion Chief Wassmer. He stated this being a new report he welcomed its transparency. Commissioner Riso commented on distressful calls and what the department does to help members. Chief Edo indicated that the department has an employee assistance program if help is needed.

VIII. New Business:

None

IX. Unfinished Business:

- a) Recruit Training – Chairman McGrath stated that the recruit training aspect was an investigational discussion that only began about a month and a half ago. Some ideas were put together, but the board has made no decision. The presentation tonight is just for informational purposes open for discussion. Commissioner Stein asked for affirmation that no vote would take place. Chairman McGrath confirmed. Battalion Chief Zak thanked the Board for allowing the Training Division to present and he and Captain Halprin would be happy to answer any questions. Battalion Chief Zak continued with the presentation that consisted of a 480 hour twelve-week recruit academy based on NFPA standards that would bring the new firefighter to the current atmosphere and needs of the fire service. It would consist of a five-day planned course divided into four sections which would include the three domains of learning and include confined space, hazmat, and CORE rescue training. Subject matter experts would come in as needed. Battalion Chief Zak was confident with the available staff the department would be able to accomplish the goal. Commissioner McGrath thanked the training division for the information and asked the board if they had questions. Commissioner Riso asked about the number of students and would it be worth the effort to train smaller classes. Battalion Chief Zak stated the ideal class size would be 8-12 with the goal being to run an academy class now to fill the current vacancies. Commissioner Brennan asked if the department would be training other recruits for other departments as well. Battalion Chief Zak stated the goal is not to deny other training facilities of their services but to fill current vacancies quickly. The department would be able to help a recruit or two from other towns but an entire class for another town would not be possible as the training would be Milford based. Commissioner Brennan inquired about training on apparatus and their service status. Battalion Chief Zak stated that apparatus used during training would be put on third due status or spare apparatus would be used. Chairman McGrath asked about the high number of recruits attending other instructional facilities. Battalion Chief Zak stated enrollment is high and instructor challenges are an issue, having a Milford Recruit Academy would have individuals ready to go with a better knowledge of Milford EMS Fire. Chairman McGrath acknowledged the call back and overtime situation being a concern. He stated this is a unique situation and all avenues are being investigated, as the goal is to have the best fire department in the land. Chairman McGrath then inquired on the cost savings. Battalion Chief Zak stated the cost savings would be over \$12,000 in addition to overtime costs. Chairman McGrath mentioned the merit of recruits going home as opposed to living together while training, he also questioned night training. Battalion Chief Zak stated there would be night training and extra time would be given during weekends and after class. Chairman McGrath then asked the training division of one positive and one negative from having a Milford Recruit class in town. Captain Halprin stated the availability to see and assess an individual daily would be a benefit to equip an individual to be Milford ready. He also affirmed recruits would bond with each other during training. Battalion Chief Zak noted how an individualized Milford based training would allow for a stronger Milford Firefighter. His main concern

would be liability. Commissioner Brennan questioned the training of current employees. Battalion Chief Zak stated a master training plan has been published on the calendar and the department has 31 instructors and would follow the lesson plan. Other training with the division would continue as four individuals are not needed for recruits daily. Assistant Chief Fabrizi addressed the board stating as this is an information meeting, he has spoken to several other instructional institutes that might be options as well as reserving several spots at the CT Fire Academy. Commissioner Stein stated he has been doing research as well and wanted to inform the board. He then stated he reached out to the CT Fire Academy and their goal is to fix any issues and pride themselves on having dedicated facility of different skill sets. Another benefit addressed was the residential experience and benefits of a controlled Covid environment. Commissioner Stein also was told that the classes at the academy are broken down into A and B with additional weeks of training to allow for more individualized instruction. He stated he does not indorse or clam to agree or disagree with the information he was provided with, that it is all for informational purposes. Commissioner Stein noted the department has 31 instructors, his concern is about compensation and bargaining agreements. Commissioner Stein also mentioned certification concerns, succession planning, liability policies and costs. The process of having a training academy is not unique but other departments need to be contacting for information before a decision is made. He stated the entire board agrees the department has talent to provide instruction and recognizes that EMS is playing a larger part in fire services daily activity. Commissioner Stein stated how Covid has changed everything in life and rash decisions should not be made. He also mentioned the lateral hiring that was brought up by David Heenan about paramedics and merits further discussion. Ideals and recommendations are always welcome and ideally the union would have a slot on the agenda every month. Commissioner McGrath asks if there are any questions.

Commissioner Stein and Riso make and seconded a motion to amend the agenda to reflect that the floor is open to any members of the collective bargaining agreement that are present for the purpose of the discussion of any topics that were presented. Motion carries unanimously.

- X. **CBA Comments:** Local 944 Vice President Ryan LaGuardia stated the members were on boards or executive boards and were present for information regarding the proposed Milford Recruit Academy. He appreciated the good points that were presented but his concerns were based on incomplete information and would like a copy of the presentation that was submitted. The union would like to come back with their views and mentioned the invitation to the CT Fire Academy that has been extended. One major concern that presented itself was the apparatus being third due on calls. Vice President LaGuardia stated intermixed training would take away from regular training and the possibility of changes in the collective bargaining agreement might be an issue. He would also appreciate an open invitation on the agenda of the Board of Fire Commission.
- Antonio Ramos spoke on a delayed timetable as all building materials were delayed due to Covid and questioned if the time difference was worth the effort.
- Justin Sansone spoke on his personal experience at the CT Fire Academy as being superior to other training facilities he has been to. He stated that the CT Fire Academy has always delivered the best quality candidates, he was taught brotherhood and discipline while attending, he also received the hard charger award. Firefighter Sansone felt the training he received personally was unparalleled and still is in touch with his fellow training recruits of

class #56. He is grateful to be a Firefighter at Milford Fire Department and credits the academy and its instructors. As a certified instructor he questioned compensation if there was a Milford Recruit Academy.

Commissioner Stein noted that a new decontamination shower is being installed at the Training & Regional Distribution Facility on Seeman's Lane and the cross contamination that may occur with the respiratory virus. Battalion Chief Zak stated the new shower will be in a separate area at the facility.

XI. New Equipment:

None.

XII. Comments and Concerns of the Commissioners:

Commissioner Stein extended the offer for the union to express any concerns or questions, as the decisions made by the board effect the department members directly. He also reiterated that the Fire Commission is a public meeting, and anyone can attend.

XIII. Adjournment:

Commissioners Riso and Brennan made and seconded a motion to adjourn at 20:00 Motion carried unanimously.