

**BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
MILFORD, CONNECTICUT
APRIL 17, 2007**

A meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners was held on April 17, 2007 at Fire Headquarters. Chairman Riso called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

1. Roll Call

Present at the meeting were Commissioners Thomas Riso, Carmen Corvino, Karen Craig, Richard Smith, Jr., John Healy, William Brennan and Howard Stein. Also present was Chief Louis LaVecchia and Assistant Chief Lee Cooke and James P. Wilkinson. Present for Local 944 was Secretary Michael Dunn.

2. Public Statements limited to the function of the Board of Fire Commissioners.

Commissioner Stein thanked the Chief and the other members of the Milford Fire Service for the Open House, which he stated he found to be informative and very professional from the top administrators to the newest probationary officers. He commented everyone went out of his or her way to provide as much information and he was very impressed.

Chairman Riso mentioned that a member of the Board of Aldermen commented on the EOC and some of the things they do.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the March 20, 2007 meeting

Deferred to the May meeting along with the minutes of the April 17, 2007.

4. Communications.

1. A letter from the Bridgeport Fire Department dated March 28, 2007 to Chief LaVecchia regarding a call on Connecticut Avenue thanking the dispatcher on duty in coordinating the response of Lt. McNelis and providing his department with assistance with Milford's Special Services Unit.
2. A letter from the Governor of the State of Connecticut dated March 20, 2007 extending warm greetings and congratulations on the Open House. Governor Rell extended her appreciation to the dedicated members of the department.
3. A letter from Mr. and Mrs. John Harris for the assistance the department provided on March 31, 2007 during a recent storm. Enclosed with the letter was a check in the amount of \$25.00 thanking the men for their response.

Commissioner Corvino stated this check was forwarded to the Local and therefore should go toward that fund.

Commissioners' Corvino and Healy moved to approve depositing the funds to the account held for the firefighters. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Stein stated he received a letter at his home from Local 944 dated March 21, 2007. He read the letter to the Board. He referred to the language "sit down with the Executive Board and discuss various issues". He stated as a relatively new Commissioner he wished to make the Board aware of this letter. He stated he respected the spirit the letter was authored and noted they are trying to extend dialogue to this Board. He also referenced words contained in the letter such as "general differences" and "common ground". He expressed his willingness to have a conversation with anyone. Commissioner Stein also noted he received Grievance #07-003 but received only the cover sheet and nothing else. He also spoke of the ability to be educated and be able to make informed decisions within the scope of this Board's power. He thanked the Local for the letter and the spirit of the letter.

Commissioner Corvino stated she too received the same letter and commented if Mr. Dunn and the Local if they wished to put something on the agenda that would be the way to go, to make it an agenda item.

Commissioner Stein interjected stating he would have appreciated receiving the attachments.

Firefighter Dunn stated this was something that was discussed about 1-½ years ago and that the concern was whether it would be considered a meeting. A brief discussion ensued.

Chairman Riso commented the Board meets in open session and that this Board has always allowed the Local the time to bring a grievance as far forward as they like. He stated he was not interested in a one on one meeting.

Commissioner Healy commented although he is newer on this Board he believed there is a protocol. He commented the way they have been doing things seems to be working and also suggested they stop dealing with the past. He stated he feels this Board is astute and he is confident this Board is able to do the best they can. He also stated he shares the enthusiasm of Commissioner Stein to communicate.

Mr. Dunn stated they were not looking to muster up the past and that they did not wish to bring up bad feelings. He stated they are looking to move forward and work productively on a level playing field.

Commissioner Brennan commented it was his understanding negotiations were not this Board's forte and further if it is an operational matter than there are people in charge of operations. He stated this is a commission and they have a function and they should not be meeting individually.

Commissioner Stein stated he did not take the letter as personal but recognized the intent. He asked for clarification from the Chairman regarding Executive Session. A brief discussion ensued.

Chief LaVecchia explained the Safety Recognition Program and commented there was no lost time for work related injuries from the crew at Station 7 (Manginelli, Phelan, Slyman) and that this was the only station.

5. Committee Reports

Chief Wilkinson reported the fleet is in good shape.

6. Chief's Report

Grievance #07-003

Chairman Riso asked if the Local would like to present this Grievance, #07-003.

Mr. Dunn stated the Local met with and that they have been doing this every year. He stated there had been some issues with dispatchers. He stated they were concerned with having a single dispatcher on duty and noted that one person has to answer every call whether it be police, fire, routine calls, etc. He stated they have documented several times when the firefighters have been out in the field when one of the firefighters has called as many as four times before the call is picked. He cited a recent structure fire call where there were two Signal 400 calls and only one was heard. He stated the reason for this grievance stems not only for concern for their own guys but for the people in town. He stated how the Chief has gone to extremes to keep the men of this department safe, i.e. new radios, emergency calls, etc., and added that this grievance in no way reflects on the Chief. He stated the concern is they need two dispatchers on at all times. He reiterated he does not want to see anyone get hurt. He also commented this is not contractual, but that it is a safety issue. He stated they wished to bring this to the attention of the Board. He also noted it is his understanding that the dispatchers are in contract negotiations at this time.

Chief LaVecchia stated they currently have two dispatchers assigned to every shift but due to vacations, sick, etc., they can drop to one dispatcher and possibly hire a part time or per diem dispatcher.

Commissioner Stein asked how many times they have dropped to one dispatcher.

Chief LaVecchia responded approximately 25%. He explained the dispatchers' contract expired June 2005 and that they have reached a tentative agreement that does call for two full-time dispatchers at all times. He stated the contract has not gone to the Board of Aldermen for approval. He spoke of the department's Safety Committee that is comprised of three members from the union and 3 members appointed by the Mayor. He stated there have been no safety issues presented to him. He also stated the grievance does not suggest adequate manning. He stated although he fully supports the concept he cannot support this grievance.

Commissioner Stein asked if there is one dispatcher on duty and there is a major accident how other calls are handled.

Chief LaVecchia stated they are instructed and taught to handle one call. He explained if they don't get to another call the system records it and they can call it back, however this has never happened. He also noted for most fire ground calls there are an Incident Commander on scene and that it is common for the dispatcher to repeat calls.

Commissioner Stein asked if there was any protocol or procedure that a senior officer respond to headquarters and respond from there.

Chief LaVecchia explained each officer position and coverage

Commissioner Stein asked if there is an incident commander in the EOC that is a safety check.

Chief LaVecchia responded yes and explained the two assistant chiefs and he are on call. He explained the practice is that the Assistant chief not on call comes into EOC. A brief discussion ensued.

Commissioner Healy asked what could be done to move this.

Chief LaVecchia suggested a motion by the Board with the withdrawal of this grievance.

Commissioner Brennan commented he would agree with going that route.

Commissioner Stein asked who they would be informing with this motion.

Chief LaVecchia stated he would start with the mayor regarding the concept of a call not being answered which could also happen with two dispatchers on.

Commissioner Stein asked about the letter to the Chief.

Chairman Riso interjected and stated there is a grievance they needed to act on.

Mr. Dunn stated the grievance is not meant to specify and that this is the form that has always been used. He also noted the Chief is aware of what they want which is two dispatchers.

Chairman Riso commented no one was disagreeing the union was seeking two dispatchers at all times.

Mr. Dunn stated it was his understanding the Chief was asking this Board to deny this grievance because they did not specify on the grievance that it does not state two dispatchers.

Commissioner Stein commented regarding the heart of this issue and stated it was being denied because there is no imminent jeopardy. He stated based upon the information brought forward by the Chief and Mr. Dunn this is based upon two incidents recently when the officers called dispatch four times and it was busy each time and a recent structure fire where a signal 400 was called and missed by the dispatcher. He stated that although the two events are discerning to this Board neither was life threatening.

Commissioners Stein and Healy moved to uphold the Chief's denial of Grievance #07-003. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Stein stated this has been identified as 25% or less when only one dispatcher is on duty. He stated from what he had heard and with a city this size it was his feeling this should be examined and looked at with further recommendations made to the Chief and brought to a conclusion.

Commissioners Healy and Brennan moved that this Board direct the emphasis of having two full time dispatchers on duty.

Commissioner Stein asked if this would be done by way of a letter.

Chief LaVecchia stated the minutes would be fine.

Commissioner Healy added there needs to be a backup that could be explained to this Board.

Chief LaVecchia stated he would do some evaluation and noted with two dispatchers they would be fine. He stated he would get some data. He also spoke of various scenarios when transferring calls to the police department. A brief discussion followed.

Chief LaVecchia reported regarding the recent Nor'easter. He stated they were given a worst-case scenario and they were able to handle it. He also reported they have three recruits at the Fire Academy and that he visited them today and they are doing well. He also reported regarding the budget and noted it was going to be very difficult with the Board of Aldermen. He stated there has been much discussion with the department heads with what they could do if 10% were cut from their budget. He noted 98% of the department's budget is contractual and that the 1.2% remaining is for electricity, heating, hoses, nozzles, air packs, etc. He also spoke of the fuel account which they go out to bid for and that they are paying more than they would at the pump. He stated there was a \$30,000 increase.

Commissioner Brennan asked about capital items and if they are different.

Chief LaVecchia replied yes and explained there is a capital side such as major repairs, i.e. transmission, etc.

Chairman Riso spoke regarding communications and stated they should come through the Chief's Office. He also explained the process of grievances and timing and the police of handling them.

Commissioners Stein and Smith moved that the official policy for notifying this Board is through the Chief's Office and anything sent to the home address of a Commissioner would not constitute an official notice. Motion carried unanimously.

Being no further business, Commissioners' Smith and Corvino moved to adjourn. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen K. Huber
Board Secretary