

TOWN OF SOUTHLINGTON
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

Chairperson Wilson called the regular meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners, held at Headquarters on November 21, 2019, to order at 6:00 p.m. Commissioners Wilson, Shanley-Buck, Robertson, Bunko and Moise were present. Also, in attendance were Chief Butler and Assistant Chief Paul.

Roll Call

Pledge of Allegiance

A moment of silence was held in memory of Lt. Jason Menard of the Worcester Massachusetts Fire Department who was killed in the line of duty on November 13, 2019

MOTION: by Bunko, seconded by Moise, to approve the September 19, 2019, regular meeting minutes as circulated. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: by Moise, seconded by Bunko, to approve payment of bills for September 2019, in the amount of \$53,781.27. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: by Moise, seconded by Bunko, to approve payment of bills for October 2019 in the amount of \$27,165.60. Motion carried unanimously.

Secretary's Report:

A memo from Chief Butler recommending the request of a \$1,000 special appropriation to the CRR Program Supplies account

A memo from Chief Butler recommending the request of a \$1,772 special appropriation to the Vehicle-Fire account

A memo from Chief Butler recommending the request of a \$13,600 transfer into the Building Maintenance account

A memo from Chief Butler recommending the denial of FF Desaulniers six-month leave of absence request

MOTION: by Bunko, seconded by Moise, to add item 11.D. to the agenda for action on FF Desaulniers six-month leave request. Motion carried unanimously.

CHIEF'S REPORT:

Chief Butler congratulated Commissioner Robertson for the four years that he has served on the Board of Fire Commissioners. Chief Butler told of it being a pleasure to work with Commissioner Robertson. Commissioner Robertson was presented with a

helmet in appreciation of his service to the department by Chief Butler and Assistant Chief Paul.

Chief Butler discussed the following:

Training:

- The new training program has begun, and the feedback has been positive
- Sexual harassment training for the officers was held October 16, and additional sessions will be held for the remaining members of the department
- Rope rescue training will be held; FF Comen was thanked for all his work on the project including the grant and planning out the training
- Training is being planned for all firefighters on being dementia friendly
- Recruit graduation for FF Jeremy Hiriak and FF Christopher Martin will be on December 6, 2019
- BC Eric Heath is at the National Fire Academy in Maryland completing his final year of the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) program; BC Glenn Dube will be going in May
- The department will be using BC Dube's EFO project on an active assailant for training

Administration:

- The OSHA report was received which noted three deficiencies; a plan has been developed to correct the problems
- The members of Company 3 were notified that applications were being accepted for the position of volunteer lieutenant and three applications were submitted; the next phase of interviews is being scheduled with a recommendation for appointment to be given to the board in January's meeting
- The amount of the tax abatement for volunteer firefighters, fire police, and eligible retired members has been increased to \$1,500 for a full share and \$750 for a half share
- A staff meeting is being planned for January
- The budget request for 2020-2021 is being put together
- The Capital Improvement Project requests for the 2020-2021 budget are due on December 13, 2019; a special meeting will need to be scheduled
- The operating budget request will be ready for the board at December's meeting

Apparatus:

- The new Squad is in service at station 5 and Squad 1 is now in service at Headquarters.
- E-51 has been sold to Meriden Fire Department
- A new rescue engine has been ordered
- Rescue 1 will be relocated to station 3 in the next couple of weeks
- Rescue 3 and the Decon Trailer are being removed from inventory
- BC Dube is in the process of designing the new ladder truck

Building Maintenance:

- The radio and PA system project for Company 3 is being completed
- Company 2's radio and PA system is expected to be completed next budget year

- The rekeying and fob system should be completed for all stations by the end of next year

Miscellaneous:

- Company 5 is holding their annual Valerie's Toy Drive at Company 5
- The union is holding a food drive and Amelia's Toy Drive at Headquarters coordinated by FF Daniel Comen
- Staffing numbers and the response reports were given to the board

Chairperson Wilson asked about when the new abatement amounts would be given. Chief Butler reported that the members will receive the higher amount in their next abatement around September 2020.

ASSISTANT CHIEF'S REPORT:

Activities of the Southington Fire Department for the month of September 2019:

1. Fire Marshal's Inspections – 55
2. CRRS – 0
3. Reports to the State Fire Marshal – 184
4. Damage to property involved in fire - \$5,000.00
5. Damage to motor vehicles involved in fire - \$1,950.00
6. Other losses - \$1,050.00
7. Total -\$8,000.00

Activities of the Southington Fire Department for the month of October 2019:

1. Fire Marshal's Inspections – 79
2. CRRS – 10
3. Reports to the State Fire Marshal – 256
4. Damage to property involved in fire – \$60,000.00
5. Damage to motor vehicles involved in fire - \$19,775.00
6. Other losses - \$4,000.00
7. Total - \$83,775.00

General Information

- Chief Butler and Assistant Chief Paul visited the two recruits last Friday during a live burn
- Inspection Bureau is very busy with plans, inspections and school fire drills
- Tanker 2's mid-inspection trip is tentatively expected in January 2020
- The rescue engine contract is signed, and the pre-construction trip may be in January 2020
- Squad 1 is operating out of Headquarters and Squad 5 is operating out of Station 5
- Lt. Molleur is the Fleet Committee chair for the rescue-engine; his team has worked hard on the specification
- PPE is being put together for the new volunteer firefighters for the class beginning in January 2020.

- PPE will be ordered in December for firefighters who were not able to be sized in with the current inventory
- Task Force 55 about to be active in the state
- The new C-3 is currently at Fleet Auto for the upfit, in service in a few weeks; BC Donnelly went to check on its progress

Building Maintenance

- BC Eric D'Arcy has been working with Assistant Chief Paul putting together a building maintenance plan
- Station 3 generator upgrade completed this week by Kinsley Power

COMMITTEE REPORT:

Recruitment and Retention Committee – Commissioner Moise reported that the committee did not meet in October. The following is a list of committee activities that occurred since the last meeting and items that are planned for the near future:

- A recruitment booth was manned during the Apple Harvest Festival that drew a lot of attention
- Halloween in the Village at Company 2
- Company 2's Christmas Tree Sale
- White Christmas in Southington and Plantsville centers

The committee held their November meeting Wednesday night and the following was discussed:

- Exploring getting an electric sign for the front of Headquarters to advertise volunteer recruitment
- The committee requested a breakdown of call time frames
- Website work
- Exit interviews
- A proposed meeting schedule of every third Wednesday of the month

Chairperson Wilson told of appreciation for all those involved and encouraged the committee to find new avenues to advertise. Chairperson Wilson discussed the need for the committee to develop a plan for next year that would include a monthly event with commissioners and volunteers. Chairperson Wilson would like the plan to be presented at the January meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners to be voted on. Chief Butler reported that new applicants are asked during their interview of how they found out about the recruitment and 70% answered that it was by the signs or through acquaintances.

COMMISSIONS COMMENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS:

Chairperson Wilson thanked Commissioner Robertson for his service on the board and thanked him for his insight and commitment to the department. Vice Chairperson Shanley-Buck, Commissioner Bunko and Commissioner Moise all thanked Commissioner Robertson for his service. Commissioner Robertson thanked the board and discussed his years in politics and how he enjoyed working together with this board.

Commissioner Moise discussed his concerns with the Board of Finance's direction they are taking for the next budget request, and he hopes that they consider the different issues that impact the department's budget request.

Commissioner Moise also discussed his concern with money handling at the volunteer companies.

Commissioner Bunko discussed participating in the following events:

- Marching in the Apple Harvest Parade and the community support of the department that was expressed
- Attended the annual awards ceremony
- Attended Company 2's Old Timers night
- Attended the Recruitment and Retention meeting

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC:

FP Richard Brodeur requested that the Board of Fire Commissioners keep the fire police as active members of the department. He discussed a recent call when the fire police were activated and how useful they were at the scene. FP Brodeur told of how the police department is being called in place of what the fire police did. He discussed that the fire police were not a huge cost but helped keep the department safe.

Al Urso, Sr. told of how the battalion chief was directing traffic for an accident on Queen St.

FF Daniel Comen discussed Valerie's Toy Drive that will be held on December 8, 2019, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Santa will be there from 1:00 p.m. until 2:00 p.m.

BC Dube congratulated Commissioner Robertson on his service to the board and wished him good luck.

BC Dube also discussed a conference he attended that focused on firefighter deaths and the safety risks that manpower shortages cause. BC Dube asked that the board have an honest conversation on the department's needs and support a budget that reflects that.

Commissioner Robertson thanked the members for their work on the food and toy drives and discussed how many residents need assistance. Vice Chairperson Shanley-Buck discussed the work that Community Services does and encouraged members to volunteer to help deliver baskets on December 21, 2019.

Board of Finance member Kevin Beaudoin discussed the budget process and how the town manager must first approve a request for the Board of Finance to consider it.

Nelson DeAngelo of 151 Rosalyn Drive discussed the recent article in the Southington Observer and suggested that future articles include a positive message such as how many members were recruited instead of how many resigned. Chairperson Wilson discussed that he hopes to have a follow up article that will include those numbers.

Former FP Nicholas Cutler discussed his support on volunteering time with Community Services and the food pantry. Mr. Cutler also discussed his feeling on the use of fire police and their value to the department.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

MOTION: by Bunko, seconded by Robertson, to approve requesting the CRR Program Supplies appropriation. Motion was approved unanimously.

MOTION: by Bunko, seconded by Moise, to approve requesting the Vehicle Maintenance –Fire appropriation. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: by Bunko, seconded by Moise, to approve requesting a transfer into the Building Maintenance account. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: by Bunko, seconded by Shanley-Buck to deny FF Desaulniers six-month leave request. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Bunko discussed that the denial was appropriate based on the number of calls he had responded to and the skills gap it creates. Commissioner Bunko told of his ability to reapply when he has the time to commit.

MOTION: by Bunko, seconded by Robertson, to adjourn to Executive Session, excluding the public and the press with the exception of Chief Butler and Assistant Chief Paul, to discuss personnel and contractual matters at 7:10 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Personnel matters were discussed. No action was taken.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Christopher Robertson, Secretary
Board of Fire Commissioners

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Sounding The Alarm: Volunteer Theft in NY State

 Posted by: Curt Varone  March 21, 2017  0 Comments

In the aftermath of 140 arrests for insider theft from volunteer fire departments in New York state in the past six years, State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli wants fire departments to tighten their financial controls.

The comptroller's office has been auditing fire companies and is seeking to educate firefighters on what they need to do to safeguard their funds.

WBFO quoted DiNapoli as saying:

- "Many of the fire companies, even if they are covering a small area, may spend an awful lot of money these days."
- "Fire equipment is not cheap. Maintaining a fire house is not inexpensive. So you're talking about some big dollars and we need to treat the fire districts, the fire companies, the fire boards as an extension of government, cause that's what they are."
- "We've had more requests for training by the fire associations that are out there, on a regional and a statewide basis. We've let them know that we've stepped up our audits in this area, as well. So there's more oversight that there had been a number of years ago."
- "But one of the challenges is that there's always a turnover. So, you may train a group of commissioners or heads of the fire company one year but that doesn't mean they are going to be the folks in charge two or three years down the road."

As for the 140 arrests, DiNapoli said:

- "Sometimes it's very tempting. If you're paying the bills for the fire company, then you pay your American Express bill as well"
- "But we're seeing it happen time and again. People are getting caught. They are paying big penalties. Some people are going to jail. We're going to continue to be vigilant until the message gets out there. You should not be stealing from public resources. You should not be stealing taxpayer money. If you do, you're going to get caught."

ABOUT CURT VARONE

Curt Varone has over 40 years of fire service experience and 30 as a practicing attorney licensed in both Rhode Island and Maine. His background includes 29 years as a career firefighter in Providence (retiring as a Deputy Assistant Chief), as well as volunteer and paid on call experience. He is the author of two books: *Legal Considerations for Fire and Emergency Services*, (2006, 2nd ed. 2011, 3rd ed. 2014) and *Fire Officer's Legal Handbook* (2007), and is a contributing editor for *Firehouse Magazine* writing the Fire Law column.



More on the story.

For those concerned about insider theft in their department, what can you do? Here are a few easy steps:

1. Ensure all bank and financial statements are mailed to someone other than a person with check signing authority.
2. Ensure credit card statements are mailed to someone other than an authorized card holder.
3. All bank, credit card, and financial statements should be audited each month by someone who does not have check signing/card authority (an audit committee made up of board members who do not have check signing/card authority is preferable). Every expenditure/withdrawal should be reconciled to ensure it was properly authorized and for a legitimate expense/purpose.
4. Prohibit anyone from writing a check to him/herself and/or a family member.
5. Require 2 signatures on all checks over \$500.
6. Have all books subject to an external audit annually, biennially, or at most triennially.

Incidentally, we see an analogous theft problem in the career service coming from cases of embezzlement from unions. One big difference is that union theft is usually caught before it reaches \$50k, whereas volunteer theft often reaches into the hundreds of thousands before it is caught. At the heart of the problem is the trust firefighters have for each other. It makes us easy marks for those who would steal. Remember President Reagan's famous quote – "Trust but verify"... these guidelines would serve unions equally as well as volunteer fire companies.

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Curt Varone has over 40 years of fire service experience and 30 as a practicing attorney licensed in both Rhode Island and Maine. His background includes 29 years as a career firefighter in Providence (retiring as a Deputy Assistant Chief), as well as volunteer and paid on call experience. He is the author of two books: *Legal Considerations for Fire and Emergency Services*, (2006, 2nd ed. 2011, 3rd ed. 2014) and *Fire Officer's Legal Handbook* (2007), and is a contributing editor for Firehouse Magazine writing the Fire Law column.



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