

The Board of Fire Commissioners, Gloucester Township Fire District # 4 held a Regular Meeting on 9/20/2023. The meeting was held at Blackwood Fire Company, 14 W. Central Avenue, Blackwood, NJ 08012. This meeting has been properly advertised according to the State of New Jersey Sunshine Laws.

COMMISSIONERS: M. Cristella, D. Vannoni, M. Jones, J. McCann

ATTENDEES: Solicitor Carlamere, Chief Cipriano, Captain Reiss, President Stott, Treasurer Miller

Motion by Commissioner J. Vannoni, second by Commissioner Jones to approve the Regular meeting minutes of 8/16/2023. All in favor, motion carries.

Motion by Commissioner J. Vannoni, second by Commissioner Jones to approve the Workshop meeting minutes of 9/6/2023. All in favor, motion carries.

COMMISSIONER REPORTS:

Commissioner Jones congratulated Blackwood Fire Company on the 2 trophies they received for 842 Utility at the Wildwood Firemen's Parade. He thanked Lutenanit Anderson and Chief Cipriano. Hose testing will be conducted on 11/13/2023. He hopes the 2023 gear order will be completed shortly after the meeting on Saturday.

Commissioner McCann said the Board has put him in charge of keeping an eye on Blackwood Fire Company's finances. For August and September, we have received the bill list with 2 signatures. He received the quarterly bank statements. We were supposed to receive all full accounting of all missing funds, but as of today, he only has January 1, 2022 thru December 31, 2022. He said they gave him an amount for January 1, 2023 thru March 2023, but does not have that in writing. He has the bank balances for September, and he thinks the Fire Company is following their spending plan.

Commissioner J. Vannoni thanked the Chief for taking charge of the PPE Donation and the hold harmless letter. He will need to request closed session, to discuss disciplinary actions on personnel. He thanked whomever cleaned up the back room, and he put a request in to have the door in the back room close and latch, since there are flammable liquids stored back there. He thanked the Chief, and Mike Simone Jr. and Nick Martin for representing the Fire Company at the Grand Wawa opening. It is events like this that are a integral part of recruitment and retention, which we desperately need. FF Woods has been assigned to assist the Chief and his designee with the PPE and equipment, and he should be copied on all aspects of PPE and the Conex box. Please consider his schedule, when scheduling all meetings.

He copies Commissioner Jones on his congratulations to BFC for the Wildwood Parade.

Commissioner Cristella said he has 2 quotes for the refinishing of the epoxy floor at Blackwood Clementon Road, and he is working on getting a 3rd quote prior to the Budget. He is working on a secondary issue with the epoxy floor at Central Avenue, where the utility sits.

CLERK'S REPORT: Attached

TREASURER'S REPORT: Motion by Commissioner McCann, second by Commissioner Jones to approve paying September bills in the amount of \$43,495.85. All in favor, motion carries.

FIRE OFFICIAL REPORT: Attached

Commissioner Vannoni said he had a opportunity to speak to the Fire Official in the absence of the Captain, and he spoke to the Captain concerning this. They will be working on a plan to give the Fire Official some assistance from trained personnel on other platoons.

CHIEFS REPORT: Attached

Chief Cipriano said Air Power is coming out at the end of the month to do service on the air system. Dennis Shark contacted him, and they have an interested party in the tower ladder. They requested additional information, and he is waiting on a call back from him. A quote was received from Acerbo's for the re-lettering of the Utility, for \$2700.00. Commissioner Cristella gave him permission to have it done. He will schedule it. The Christmas Parade is set for December 2, 2023, and he is asking the Board to come out and help with the festivities that night. We will touch on the personnel issue during closed session. Fire Rescue One is on the web site, and he has not gotten a chance to see how many people have logged in, and accessed the site. He will check with Rich Derr. On Saturday October 7, 2023 at 10:00 AM Bob Sambucco will receive the Citizens Appreciation Award, for volunteers.

Commissioner McCann asked the Chief when the 90-day period began for the Tower Ladder to be on the Adirondack web site.

The Chief replied he believes it started when it was posted on the web site, he said the 90-days began when it hit their web site.

Commissioner McCann said we still do not have a date.

The Chief said he will find that out tomorrow.

Commissioner Jones said he was going to make a motion that the truck be listed on Gove Deals on the last 30 days of the agreement with Adirondack, so the Board is not waiting until Christmas to see the truck.

Commissioner McCann said the issue with that is if the interested party is going to offer \$100,000.00 and then they see it on Gov Deals for \$18,000.00, obviously, they would not purchase it from Adirondack. The Board agreed.

The Chief stated the FAM needs to remove the plaque from the Tower Ladder.

Commissioner McCann asked if the Tower Ladder is still around on December 2, 2023, will it be used in the Christmas Parade.

The Chief said it will be used, if the Board agrees. It will be used as a sled.

Commissioner Jones said he only concern, it has no makings.

The Chief stated it doesn't matter, as people are only looking for Santa Claus. He would suggest that one of the Aerial signs be hung in the firehouse, the numbers that were on the bucket.

Motion by Commissioner Vannoni, second by Commissioner McCann that the sign off the Tower Ladder be given to Blackwood Fire Company, to be hung in the station. All in favor, motion carries.

Commissioner McCann stated at the last meeting, we passed a motion to not renew Power DMS, and then we found out the contract runs through 2024.

Commissioner Cristella said it is under Old Business.

FAM REPORT: Attached

CAPTAIN'S REPORT: Attached

Commissioner Vannoni congratulated Captain Reiss and his family.

Motion by Commissioner McCann, second by Commissioner J. Vannoni to accept all reports as read. All in favor, motion carries.

OLD BUSINESS:

Motion by Commissioner J. Vannoni, second by Commissioner Jones to rescind the motion made at the August 16, 2023 meeting to cancel Power DMS, for the reason being, the contract is for 3-year, and will not expire until December 31, 2024. All in favor, motion carries.

Commissioner McCann asked if that means we are paying for 2 training platforms?

Commissioner J. Vannoni said no, E-Safety will not be renewed, so we will not pay for that next year.

Commissioner McCann asked that all Board members be given an agenda.

Commissioner J. Vannoni said there have been several things going on, and we are all aware of the issues with Blackwood Fire Company. With the last critical incident that occurred, it brought to light the issues that need to be addressed. The Board contracts with Blackwood Fire Company to provide fire protection to Fire District # 4. It is the Board's responsibility to see that is being done. We talked about having Blackwood Fire Company sign a contract, and it was just what Title 40 states, and what the Board is expecting from Blackwood Fire Company. Unfortunately, in his mind, it has gone well past that. He wants to read something he wanted sent out prior to the meeting. He said when the Board was thinking about implementing a COVID vaccine program, this room was filled with members who opposed the plan. That was why he wanted his email sent out, so the members could rush the building, and we could try to sort this out.

Commissioner J. Vannoni said the following concerning Blackwood Fire Company:

"It is no longer something that is going to happen in the future, but is happening right now. I am referring to the catastrophic collapse of our organization. Like many others across the country, we are facing a reality check on whether or not to keep the Blackwood Fire Company a viable entity.

My concern is that we may no longer have the ability to provide assistance to those who are in need of a competent fire service. I am asking ALL PERSONNEL to participate in the many aspects of our company. We have to do this as ONE PEOPLE and not to separate active and associates. Whether taking on an administrative desk position, moving up the chain of command as an active firefighter, etc. our survival depends on you. I am reaching out and beseeching all members: active, associates, and life to help fill some vacant positions.

In discussions with the Chief, and some members of the Board of Fire Commissioners, we believe immediate action is required with a plan being developed within 90 days being critical.

This subject is listed to be discussed at the Board of Commissioners meeting scheduled for Wednesday, September 20, 2023 at 1900 hours.

My hope is for a group to be formed to generate and design a structure for all to provide their constructive thoughts, concerns and suggestions, etc. to be designing a plan of action targeted at Blackwood Fire Company continuing to provide competent emergency services for Gloucester Township Fire District # 4 & to those who require assistance. “

He went on to say in plain English, we have a problem. He stated he has suspended talks with District # 6 on consolidation, because this problem has come to the forefront, and he does not want to see Blackwood Fire Company fall apart, we need Blackwood Fire Company. Other people have been saying get rid of them, sign a contract with another fire company, the Board will take over Blackwood Fire Company. His question is, how are we going to do that? He does not know how to do that. He said they need to have open communications with Blackwood Fire Company # 1. He was told if this came up in a meeting, and the Board was deciding on contracting another fire company, it may pass. Something has to be done, and we need to start doing it right now, and it can't be done by Chief Cipriano who is doing too much right now.

Chief Cipriano said there is a plan of action to try to bolster the membership. He is set to meet with Lieutenant Derr to formulate a plan. Due to his new work schedule, things have been crazy. Hopefully by next month, he can present a plan, to see how we may want to move forward. Commissioner J. Vannoni will be involved, as well as Commissioner Jones, and President Stott as well. It will involve every facet of what they have going on. He will hopefully present a plan by next months meeting.

Motion by Commissioner J. Vannoni, second by Commissioner McCann that the Board takes the position that at this point we accept the Chiefs representation, and at this point we will take no actions, for a minimum of 90 days, to allow the Fire Company, along with the Board. All in favor, motion carries.

Commissioner Cristella said he agrees, but at the same time, Blackwood Fire Company needs to draw the line on being a member in good standing, and not being a member in good standing. He is totally offended to think that a member of Blackwood Fire Company is calling the Board a bunch of communists. There are people standing up at Blackwood Fire Company meeting and calling us names, but yet doesn't have the decency to come to the meeting tonight and confront us. He said he has a problem supporting this plan for Blackwood Fire Company, when its defamation of character, and its conduct unbecoming, and it sheds a poor light on Blackwood Fire Company. He would suggest Blackwood Fire Company cleans up their act with their membership, before you come to the Board of Fire Commissioners to straighten out your problems.

Commissioner Vannoni said that is a minimal amount of people, and he is sure this will come up during the plan, because it has been discussed.

Commissioner Cristella said the Board in this building right now, have gone above and beyond for Blackwood Fire Company.

Commissioner J. Vannoni said there was representation of that at the previous Blackwood Fire Company meeting, when the Chief and the former President stood up and supported the Board, and explained to the membership that none of this would be possible without the Board. It was also stated that this negativity must stop. To take it one step further, there has been some discrepancy with documentation of the meeting, and FF Klingberg has subpoenaed him. It is the attitude and perspective that some of the members have, all needs to be a part of the solution.

Commissioner McCann stated the relationship between Blackwood Fire Company, and the Board of Fire Commissioners is defiantly strained. It is at the breaking point and is heading for divorce. So, what do you do when you are heading for divorce? You go to a marriage counselor. He does not see either side trying to work with each other. We have made our mistakes, the fire department has made their mistakes, and we need to stop pointing fingers. Setting a 90-day plan, maybe that is what a marriage counselor does, and that is fine. Each side has to be careful in what they say, and how they present themselves, or this divorce will happen.

Commissioner J. Vannoni said it has gotten to the point where meetings will have to be conducted, along with minutes taken of the meetings. The purpose of the 90-days, is to ensure we get something. We have to have certain expectations, and that is why I gave him 90 days. It does not mean that after 90 days, we are going to say that's it. He just wanted to prevent something happening prior to that.

The email John Vannoni sent to the Chief and President of Blackwood Fire Company on September 9, 2023, inviting Blackwood Fire Company to attend the meeting to discuss the future of Blackwood Fire Company, was never sent out, through the all-mail, by the Chief or the President. The Chief stated he just sent it.

NEW BUSINESS:

Commissioner McCann stated it is budget time, and considering it is going to be October, we need to set some budget meetings.

October 4, after the Workshop Meeting

10.11.2023, 10.25.2023,

November 1, after the Workshop Meeting

11.8.2023, 11.22.2023, 11.29.2023

Motion by Commissioner McCann, second by Commissioner Jones for the Clerk to advertise the budget meeting dates. All in favor, motion carries.

Commissioner J. Vannoni brought up the topic of quarterly career staff meetings. Fire District # 2 approved the meetings.

He stated the following from Chairman D. Vannoni, "Are we paying them to hold a Union Meeting?" and "why can't the captains take the information to the career staff?"

Commissioner J. Vannoni said there are several reasons this has come up. He had to compliment Captain Reiss for this. He came up with a survey, several months ago, and it went to the employees. As shown in the survey, morale is an issue, and the lack of communication seems to be at the root of the issue. This is also on a national level. The pay would be approximately 6 hours comp time for 3 guys. He said the captains may be able to accomplish this, but it always makes the employees feel better to think they are a part of something, and may be accepted knowing they were a part of it. The consistency of operations, and the career staff being a part of it will be paramount. He believes it is important.

Commissioner McCann asked who would be heading up the meeting.

Commissioner J. Vannoni said that is up to them. It would be the same as the captains, they would be required to prepare an agenda, and would have to provide a report.

Commissioner McCann asked if this was going to be an opportunity for appointing a Chief to run the meetings?

Commissioner J. Vannoni said no. It is a clearing house of information. It is a chance for the career staff to say what they feel like saying, and having some answers or solutions to the issue.

The topic came up, as far as who will attend the meeting, and Captain Reiss said it will be all staff, including the captains.

Commissioner McCann recommended which ever Captain is working the night of the meeting, he should be able to name where the meeting will be held, as well as prepare the report and the agenda.

Commissioner J. Vannoni agreed that was a good idea, but is not for the Board to decide.

Motion made by Commissioner J. Vannoni, second by Commissioner Jones to approve the career staff meetings, quarterly, with an agenda and report to be provided. The compensation will be comp time. All in favor, motion carries.

There was a discussion on using the Cascade System at District # 2, considering we now have our own system at Station # 1.

Motion by Commissioner J. Vannoni, second by Commissioner McCann to contract with District # 2 for the use of their Cascade System. All in favor, motion carries.

COMMENTS FROM THE FLOOR:

President Stott stated the insurance information has ben sent to the insurance adjuster, and within the next 7 to 10 days, he would have his report, to submit for the actual claim.

The county prosecutor has been sending information to Blackwood Fire Company, they keep delaying the court date for the pre-indictment conference for the charges. He said they are reluctant to return his calls. So, outside of him actually going up to the prosecutor's office, he can not get a reply from them. He has numerous phone calls, emails that have gone unanswered over the last 60 days. The GTPD told him they sent the charges up to the County Prosecutors Office, and they are out of it at this point. He has the 2022 audit for them, and he has told them he has information for them, but has received no

communication from them. He started t talk about the suspension of the 3 members, and Commissioner J. Vannoni interrupted, and told him that was going to discussed in closed session. Pumpkin Festival October 1st, and they are in the process of planning the Christmas Parade.

It was stated the State is prosecuting the Treasurer of BFC, and Blackwood Fire Company is the victim. Blackwood Fire Company is not suing the defendant, they are only the victim.

Motion by Commissioner J. Vannoni, second by Commissioner McCann to pass a resolution to go into closed session to discuss Personnel. All in favor, motion carries.

ROLL CALL: M. Cristella-yes, J. Vannoni-yes, M. Jones-yes, J. McCann-yes.

The Clerk left when the Board went into Closed Session. Unfortunately, the Board never turned the tape recorder on after Closed Session, so there is no record on what was discussed.

DATED: September 20, 2023

BY: _____
Micheal Jones, Secretary