

The Board of Fire Commissioners, Gloucester Township Fire District # 4 held a Regular Meeting on Wednesday May 16, 2018 in the office of the Board of Fire Commissioners, 14 W Central Avenue, Blackwood, NJ 08012. This meeting has been properly advertised according to the State of New Jersey Sunshine Laws.

ROLL CALL

Commissioner M. Jones (here) Commissioner R. Jones (here)
Commissioner McCann (here) Commissioner Stout (absent)
Commissioner Vannoni (here)

Attendees: Captain Reiss, Fire Official Urso, FAM Prendergast, FF Woods, FF Argenbright, Solicitor Carlamere

Motion by Commissioner M. Jones, second by Commissioner R. Jones to approve the Regular Meeting minutes of 3/21/2018. All in favor, motion carries.

Motion by Commissioner R. Jones, second by Commissioner McCann to approve the Workshop Meeting minutes of 4/4/2018. All in favor, motion carries.

Motion by Commissioner M. Jones, second by Commissioner R. Jones to approve the Regular Meeting minutes of 4/18/2018. All in favor, motion carries.

Motion by Commissioner R. Jones, second by Commissioner McCann to approve the Workshop meeting minutes of 5/1/2018. All in favor, motion carries.

COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioner M. Jones had noting to report.

Commissioner McCann had nothing to report.

Commissioner R. Jones reported that FF Coucoulas is now an associate member. Also, he has attended POSHA training. He is till waiting on the SCBA list from the Chief.

Commissioner Vannoni reported the new computers have been installed, and the old computers will be re-furbished and passed down. He also stated that the talks concerning the shared service with District # 2 are on going and they will be another meeting tomorrow night.

CORROSPONDENCE

None

CLERK'S REPORT

None

TREASURER'S REPORT

Motion by Commissioner McCann, second by Commissioner R. Jones to pay of the bills in the amount of \$45,101.69. All in favor, motion carries.

FIRE OFFICIAL'S REPORT

Attached

CHIEF'S REPORT

Attached

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

None

CAPTAIN'S REPORT

Captain Reiss said he recently sent an email to the President with no response, and he asks the Board to encourage everyone who is supposed to submit a report for the meeting to do so. He reported he has not seen an increase or decrease in staffing across the board for the month. Call volume for the month of May was about the same, however we have recently added Chews Landing to all of our responses. That was due to a lack of staffing on some of our calls. Effective today, we were added to all their calls.

Commissioner Vannoni asked why we are adding Chews Landing when they do not respond to calls and by adding them to our staffing aren't we doing what we have accused other districts of doing. And to follow, since the issues are predominately on Sundays, why didn't we add District # 5 who is actually working on Sundays.

Captain Reiss replied the issues are not just on Sundays, and he can not speak for the Chief about why Chews Landing was added to the calls. He will say in defense of the Chief, adding companies is the best solution at his disposal. He went on to say that in the month of May we

had a large number of fill ins and in part because of the number of times “C” Platoon appeared on the calendar. In each month, each platoon works 9 or 10 shifts. On top of that we had 2 firefighters who had approved training and one firefighter on vacation. These things are going to happen. However, we have had a number of fill ins cancel or call in sick on their shift. He said the issue is when they commit to a shift, and then call to say sorry I overbooked myself. He thinks the Board needs to put a policy in place.

Commissioner Vannoni asked him where O’Connor is on his apparatus training.

Captain Reiss replied he is one or two sessions away from being done. In his opinion he is cleared to drive on incidentals. He has not had any night or in climate weather driving and they may get to do that tomorrow. He would like to get him out one more time for pump training.

Commissioner Vannoni said with that being nearing completion, there has been some talk of some shift changes, since Pete has been consonantly working with the fill ins. What is your thoughts on that.

Captain Reiss replied that is up to the Personnel Director.

Motion by Commissioner McCann, second by Commissioner M. Jones to approve all reports as read. All in favor, motion carries.

OLD BUSINESS

There was a discussion by the Board about what to do when a fill in calls out or commits to a shift and then cancels. The discussion centered around suspension, or not, and it was decided to let the program remain as it is, they will see what happens when the Board meets with Chews tomorrow night.

NEW BUSINESS

None

GOOD & WELFARE

COMMENTS FROM THE FLOOR

Captain Reiss said he is not speaking as the Captain or the Union VP but just as himself. He has been through the roller coaster with Chews, good news bad news. He believes their Board as well as their members are not thrilled about this, a few of them are. He said he feels as though

they want to do the right thing, but on the same note he thinks there are a lot of personal agendas being played and he does not think they have the best interest of the department or the town in mind. They have had 2 working fires and he feels as though they have underperformed. He said he takes criticism for this but it is not only Chews Landing. He said we have taken steps in the right direction, but we too are not functioning at our highest level. Then there are the other districts and he cannot figure out what they were thinking. He said one of the things that came out of the meeting with the mayor was assigned duty crews. As of today, our District and Chews Landing have not established set duty crew nights. District # 1 and District # 3 have. But it was stated that Monday and Tuesday night were off the board because there are drill nights through out the township on those nights. Well District # 3 set up a duty crew for Monday nights, and they are jumping calls all over the township. But it was stated to one of their officers, they are jumping calls on Monday night, when a crew was not needed because of it being Chews drill night, but for the next 4 days, they do not respond to any calls in their District. The Chews thing is not moving fast enough, the employees here are being taxed. He does not want to go backwards, but pressure needs to be applied. The email that came out yesterday, where they want to charge us for use of their apparatus is crazy.

Commissioner Vannoni stated that he received an email from Administrator Robb yesterday that stated because of the way the platoons are laid out, 1 being Chews, 2 being us, 3 being split, they were charging us \$157.00 for the use of their truck on the 3rd platoon, at a rate of \$93.75 per hour per FEMA. It flies in the face of being nitpicky. He wanted to bring Commissioner McCann up to speed.

Captain Reiss continued, stating there is a committee and the committee has made progress. He totally disagrees with the way Chews Landing is going about this. He thinks untimely that we will come out at the end of all this and say it was for the best. Personally, he wants to go into the meeting with the Mayor and say its either consolidation or nothing, because the dynamic of the 6 Fire Districts, they will not come together for the common goal. He stated we are 6 months into meeting an objective that was clear. At the last meeting we gave the Mayor a deadline, April 15 was the soft start, and May 6th was the deadline and we failed to meet the deadline. He residents of this town pay top dollar to have the burglars caught, the trash picked up and fires put out, and they are not getting that to service from the fire department.

Commissioner Vannoni said to answer tour concerns about why this is moving so slowly, he has been told it is the Unions fault. Yesterday, Administrator Robb was here and said they are dragging their feet on the contract negotiations.

Captain Reiss asked Solicitor Carlamere can the Mayor, by Executive Order change the face of the fire service.

Solicitor Carlamere replied that in order for the Mayor to consolidate, dissolve a Fire District he has to prove that District has serious deficiencies.

Captain Reiss asked Solicitor Carlamere if the council has the ability to withhold the tax money from the Fire Districts.

Solicitor Carlamere said no.

Commissioner McCann said in simple terms you have District # 2 and District # 4 with a common problem, and neither side has bugged on once to get to a solution

Commissioner Vannoni stated they have bent over backwards for them. They have attended their meetings, tried speaking to Commissioners directly, to no avail.

Captain Reiss said it is 80 /20.

Commissioner McCann said so it is not a true negotiation.

Captain Reiss said they have a certain way that they manage, and it is not on the fly. He said they should solve the blue-collar problem first, get the guys on the truck, and get the truck on the street, then solve the administrative problems next. Set the policies, fix the financials we will get to that, but we need to put the fires out and put the truck on the street. He feels it isn't that they don't want to do, they are finding ways to slow the process down.

Commissioner McCann said it has been stated that some of them are hard-nosed, has it ever been thought to bring all 10 Commissioners in a room and hearing what all 10 have to say.

Captain Reiss said he does not think you could pull that off. He said we have an Operations Committee that we can not get in a room at the same time. He said he is sure Warren has a good reason for not being here tonight, but we can't even get all 5 Commissioners, he said Warren is normally here, and he isn't making light of that, but not everyone attends all the upcoming meetings. To get all 10 in a room....

Commissioner Vannoni said it has been a very painful process.

FAM Prendergast asked how long the Board is willing to go with the current situation. It was supposed to be a very short-lived program. Here we are 6 months later, and being added to more Districts for service, with still only 2 guys on the rig. Money situation is what it is, and now with the call volume going up, and no end in sight. He said we can't go back, but what we are doing now is not working either.

Commissioner Vannoni said he knows your frustration and your concern, and he does not entirely disagree with you, and one of his big concerns was when other companies know we have 24-hour staffing who is going to add us to their box. We tried to get it under control with District # 3, and now we are being added to District # 2. Any suggestions?

FAM Prendergast said he has handled District # 3, he will work on District # 2.

Commissioner Vannoni said he understands and if anyone has a suggestion on how to do this better, he will listen to them. He said short of an influx of volunteer's you guys are providing the service right now.

Both Captain Reiss and FAM Prendergast said Saturdays are the worst.

Captain Reiss said this just happened recently, he was privy to a conversation, that District # 6 needed help because they had a handful of members at the training academy, and they were adding us to all their calls for an 8-hour period, because we are staffed. On that day, we were the only on duty firefighters for the entire Township. Primary response for District # 2, # 4 and # 6 with 2 on staff. District # 5 was not added, only calls in District # 6.

Commissioner Vannoni asked what do you suggest.

Captain Reiss said he knows we have to wait until tomorrow, and the meeting on May 21st with the Mayor, but he thinks a lot of this is going to fall in the Mayors lap and is he willing to make firm decisions on the fact it has been 6 months we have made promises we have not kept, we have failed to meet his objectives, what do we do now. We have yet to have one unified plan as a fire service. There were 2 plans, and the Mayor took A from this plan, and B from this plan and said make it work. He knows the Union would not support him on this but maybe we should have gone with the Chiefs plan. All the Chiefs agreed, and most of the Commissioners in the room agreed, so at least we would have had a 2/3rds majority.

Commissioner Vannoni asked if he thought we would have moved faster than we are moving now.

Captain Reiss said he does not know. He can't answer that, but any plan we all get behind is better than what we have now.

Commissioner Vannoni said he heard that District # 5 was opposed to any plan that took firefighters out of their station, so they would not have supported that. District # 2 will still have drag their feet.

Captain Reiss said yes, District # 2 would drag their feet, and the only District that was willing to play ball and do this on the fly was District # 6. But again, they have their issue with District # 5. What District # 5 gets out of their firehouse 3 or 4 days a week, they will not take anything less than that. He said he is willing to go into the Mayor and tell him he needs to rip the band aid off. He does not see these 6 groups of individuals every agreeing on one goal.

Commissioner Vannoni said he will say after private meetings he has had with the Mayor and other members of Council, it does not seem as though there is much support on the Township level to support touching the fire departments, managing, touching or forcing an issue with fire districts at this point.

Captain Reiss said he believes this is something the taxpayers would be willing to hear. He is not criticizing Chews Landing, it just happened to be the fire was in their local. We can control the way the boxes are set up. He was on duty, and he is being paid to be a firefighter in this Township, and there was a fire in this Township 2 Saturdays ago. He was not sent to that fire. Do you think the taxpayers want to hear that an on-duty firefighter, who gets paid a handsome salary is not being asked to fight a fire within the Township borders?

Commissioner Vannoni said he has been kept on a leash for a while now concerning this, but do you think publicizing this would be helpful. Putting these issues out there and saying this is what is going on.

Solicitor Carlamere asked when they meet are they meeting with full Boards.

Commissioner Vannoni replied no, 2 Commissioners, the Chiefs. From District # 2 it has been Ray Evans and George Genzel from @ and he and Commissioner R. Jones from here, both Chiefs, Administrator Robb, Captain Reiss from 4, and Al the Shop Steward from 2.

Solicitor Carlamere said he is surprised they can not get it together, when the process began 2 months ago, he thought that District 2 and District # 4 would have the most success. It is out of his reach because he has not been at the table, but the plan that you put together seemed to be the best for both 2 and 4. He gets the feeling there are too many individual agendas to accomplish anything.

Commissioner Vannoni said they sit down as a Committee, and they take it back to their Board and suddenly they have new ideas, new plans and proposals. We met with them starting in November, and we came up with a plan 24/6 like District # 5 and # 6 do right now. They did not like it because they did not want to dedicate all their firefighters to it. They went back to their Board and came back and we said OK, do it with 3 of your firefighters and leave 3 back, we all agreed. They took it back to their Board and then they said no, they wanted 24/7, and we are going to add our other guys. We started fresh again, and then we went to their Board meeting and George Genzel comes in and says why don't we discuss 24/5 and that is when we stormed out. Every time we seem to be getting close to something they throw another hand grenade in the situation.

Solicitor Carlamere said it seems you as a Committee, should have the authority to come up with a plan and lock into it for 6 months, for a trial period, because every time it goes back to the Commissioners someone has a different idea and it changes the dynamics.

Commissioner Vannoni said even if it isn't that, they are coming up with well what about some minute detail, and then it's well we can't make a decision without that. He latest as of yesterday we get an email saying what truck we are going to use and they are billing us the FEMA rate of \$93.75 per hour, because of this and that. So, we are getting into such minute

details, instead of getting the ball rolling hashing out the big things and figuring out the details as we go along.

Solicitor Carlamere stated this is a unique concept and you have to work on it for a least 6 months, and then you iron out the differences.

Commissioner Vannoni said it is not a unique concept the south end has been doing this for 10 years. Yes, they have had tier ruffles and disagreements, but he thinks we can avoid this by putting into the agreement how this will be handled.

Solicitor Carlamere said you will not get to the perfect world quickly. It is a live document, so you work at it as you go along, and you modify it as a Committee as you need to. You will not come out of the gate with the perfect plan.

Commissioner McCann said part of the perfect world is economics. We can come up with the greatest plan, but if we can't afford it what happens. What if Chews can't afford it? So, the economics is the bottom line. You have to have a plan that can be supported economically. We jumped into 24/6 not knowing if we could afford it or not. We are taking the approach that if we have money we can spend it even if it is not in the correct line item. Since we will be nearing budget time, District # 2 and # 4 will have to budget for the new plan.

Solicitor Carlamere said you will not see it, once you get it rolling, you will get through this budget cycle, you will see where you need more dollars.

Commissioner McCann said what if we don't have enough money to get us through this year.

Commissioner Vannoni said he thinks it will save money not having to pay for all the fill ins, and overtime.

Commissioner McCann said what if next year we don't have the amount of fund balance we are used to, say \$100,000.00, then we have to raise taxes by \$100,000.00 just for staffing. Can that be legally done, where do we stand, are we still under the 2% cap law, or has that gone away.

Commissioner Vannoni said we could go before the Local Finance Board and explain to them why we need that money. It could be explained and we have the statistics to explain it.

Commissioner McCann said when you look down the road, next years budget may not be affordable in any of these plans. Hopefully it is. But using up the fund balance this year means we do not have the fund balance for next year as a safety net, and the following year may be worse. Responsible Districts are always looking to the next budget. We have always done that and he is not saying we are not a responsible District.

Solicitor Carlamere said you are right, but once that get son the table they will be working to solve that instead of getting this up and running. He suggested they get it started and have a

trial period and see where you are short funded even if you have to borrow it, and then next year, you fund to pay the loan off. The statute allows you to do those types of things. You get it off the ground and you work out the details later.

Commissioner Vannoni said that is why we sat down at the Workshop and looked at the line items to see where we could save some money. The Chief said he would give him back \$10,000.00 in the uniform line item, he would not buy as many Class A uniforms. We are not looking to deplete the fund balance, we are looking to see where we can save some money this year also, until we can adequately account for it. But again, if anyone has any other suggestions, he is open to them. He said his answer is not always the right answer.

With no further business to discuss.

Motion by Commissioner McCann, second by Commissioner R. Jones to adjourn. All in favor, motion carries.

DATED : MAY 16, 2018

BY: _____
Ernest R. Jones, Secretary.