



CITY OF FRANKLIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
Fire Department
"The Three Rivers City"

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Michael J Foss, Fire Chief/EMD

David J Hall, Deputy Chief

Fire Committee Meeting

Monday, October 17, 2022

Held at the Franklin Fire Department

All Present:

- *Chairmen Ted Starkweather*
- *Councilor Olivia Zink*
- *Mayor Jo Brown*
- *Councilor George Dzjuna*
- *City Manager Judie Milner*
- *Chief Michael Foss*
- *Deputy David Hall*
- *Administrative Assistant Nicole Havey*
- *Franklin Professional Firefighters President Roberts*

Absent:

- *Councilor Paul Trudel*
- *Councilor April Bunker*

The Meeting:

Chairman Starkweather called the meeting to order at 1732 pm.

Chief Foss thanks everyone for coming and for supporting the department.

Agenda Item I

Previous meeting minutes from April 6, 2022 were reviewed by committee members. The committee moves to accept minutes as presented. Councilor Zink made a motion to accept, Chairmen Starkweather Seconds Motion, and motion is carried.

Agenda Item II

Chief Foss discussed the current Fire department statics.

The current statics that Chief Foss discusses are from Quarter one for the Fiscal Year 2023, they recap all the incidents that occur in the City of Franklin.

Chief Foss discussed the incidents by time of day, highlighting that between the hours of 1900-2300 (7pm-11pm) is considered the time of Greatest Vulnerability because we go down to a 3 man shift at 1900 (7pm) and we still stay busy and staff doesn't come back to cover station. He also discussed the incidents by days of the week and showed that it wouldn't benefit the City to have additional personnel on during the weekdays because it is busy evenly throughout Sunday through Saturday.

Concurrent incidents are still up percentage wise at almost 21.4%, out of 584 calls, 125 of those incidents are concurrent incidents occurring simultaneously within the City. This means that the City is either calling mutual aid, requesting off duty staff or stacking calls to help cover the incidents. A letter was presented to the City Manager addressing multiple concerns due to staffing needs at the Fire Department. The letter, given on August 12, 2022, discussed the difficulty to get staff back, and that the Fire Department was requesting to lower staffing standards to a minimum of 3 Career Firefighters on duty for a 24-hour shift. This means that residents could wait up to 30 minutes or more for help. In order to support multiple calls, the City really needs 5 Career Firefighters on duty for a 24-hour shift.

Chief Foss also discussed the incidents per ward and the type of incidents that occur in the City. The busiest ward tends to stay consistent with Ward 2 being the highest for call volume. The Fire department covers the 3 Wards in the City of Franklin, but also covers all of Andover EMS calls as well as any mutual aid needed outside of the City. We also receive mutual aid within the City. Rescue/EMS calls are our busiest at 72% (418 calls) and Fire is 12% (71 Calls) and Service and Misc. are at 7% (39) and 9% (56).

The Chief discussed a big focus on the statics for the "off Duty" assistance that is required when concurrent incidents or additional assistance is needed in the City. Out of 584 calls, 139 incidents may need 1, 2, 3 or more than 3 members to come into the station for coverage. For these requests 55 times we requested 1 member, 56 times we requested 2 members, 18 times we requested 3 members and 10 times we requested 3 or more members. Because of overtime, burnout and working other jobs the Fire Dept is only getting adequate coverage 6% of the time. The Fire Dept could potentially save money by having appropriate staffing because right now workers comp and overtime is high. For example, one employee had 70+ hours in one week of overtime on top of his normal 48-hour shifts. Not all shifts are being filled, as the Deputy and Chief are working calls during the days and their prospective on call week after hours.

Mayor Brown, asked if the job core or other mutual aid, or any other services could help when we are short?

Chief replied that other mutual aid services have been helping but its not enough and any other help you receive from others would need to have all the requirements for AEMT and fire certs.

Agenda Item III

Chief Foss discusses the payrate scale for the City compared to the FY23 Pay study done by City Hall. On average the City of Franklin's firefighters are handling more calls per person than other comparable departments in the State. They are being paid an average of \$5.59 less than the pay study determined. Currently every dept in the State is struggling to maintain their staff. Per the exit interviews with the City Manager and Finance Director the City employees are leaving due to being overworked, and burnout. Once they leave the City is struggling to hire people because of the pay, and then leave within the year due to other job availability. In the last few months the City has lost 6 people and there is at least 1 more leaving within the month which totals about 120K worth of the City money from past expenses and training for employees walking out the door. None of the Firefighters that have resigned left due to retirement, however one had over 15 years of service. Discussion was had about the potential for per diem firefighters in the City? Chief Foss explained that it has been talked about, but it is a competition with their other full-time jobs to get them to come in for help, when we are already struggling to have Call Firefighters come in. Currently we have hired 5 new Firefighters that aren't fully qualified, but they have a year to get all requirements needed, it will cost roughly 7K to fully equip them. Due to this the standard of care within the City is not adequate, normally we only have 1 new hire and we can work through that but with 5 new hires it is harder to provide a greater standard of quality care.

The City's qualifications for Firefighters is that they need their CDL license, this is not something the City pays for and it does cost the individual \$4,500 for class. The Fire Department does allow the firefighter to take the class and provides shift coverage. Further discussion was had about if there are available programs to assist them with funding for the class. Justin, MSD Director is working on a contract that would payback employees for CDL License, and there is possibility that the City could eventually have an employee on staff that can train others and then the City could also outsource training as a new source of income.

Other departments in the state are currently providing hiring bonuses, however it doesn't reward those on staff that have stuck it out for long term. The Chief has discussed with the City Manager and Finance Director, the option to provide retention bonuses after the conclusion of an employee being here for a year. The Chief is suggesting a 4K bonus for all Career Firefighters and the Fire Administration staff (Inspector, Inspection Captain, Deputy and Chief) at the conclusion of a year of being here. The committee would have to discuss when the year would start and end for current member of the Fire Dept. The payout would be done in FY24 fiscal year, but the approval could happen now by council this would be for 18 staff members at the Fire Dept. Currently no other department in the City has a retention bonus. The Department is looking for the support for the committee to bring this forward before City Council. The bonus' for some would potentially include a percentage to retirement for those employees that are vested, which would potentially be about half the current staff, however research would need to be done to verify.

Union President Roberts spoke as a representative for the Franklin Professional Firefighters Local 4711 about building a relationship with the committee. Please see the attached letter at the end of these minutes, that recap the speech he gave. Further discussion was had about bringing this letter/speech forward to the City of Franklin Council as an agenda item at the next meeting on November 14th.

Agenda Item IV

Chief Foss discussed the SAFER grant application that was submitted requesting two additional personnel for the Fire Department. The City needs to think about adding the staff whether we receive the grant or not. At this time, they have started awarding departments within the state. The only department that has received it is the Belmont Fire Dept which received 6 individuals. Currently we are not out of the running however we did not receive it on the first and second round, however if any committee member would like to reach out to senate it may help. Whether or not we get the grant next year the chief is proposing that the department needs 6 firefighters. More staff would mean less overtime less burnout and potentially better retention. If the City doesn't receive SAFER grant this year we may continue to keep applying, but no matter what the dept still needs the staff.

Agenda Item V

Chief Foss thanked the committee for supporting the purchases of the new Fire Prevention vehicles and reminded them that the purchases were approved in the FY22 budget. The next item that would need to be a major purchase is the ambulance that is due for replacement in September 2023. Most ambulance replacement is a 5-year cycle, Franklin has always done a 10-year cycle. Currently we have only had to put \$1,500.00 into its last year, however to order an ambulance it is currently on a two year wait time. The City would need commit now to ordering and wouldn't need to pay right away. The chief estimated a budget of \$290,000 needed to purchase the ambulance two years ago when the CIP was complete, now the estimate is about \$340,000 for an ambulance. The fire committee needs to begin thinking about ordering one soon as ambulance 1 would be 12 years old, by the time it is replaced. Ambulance 2, the newest was purchased roughly in the summer of 2019, with a 7-year payment. Could the City afford to handle 2-year overlap debt, which it could potentially be pushed out one more year but it is a chance the city would have to take and could run the risk of only having one working ambulance. Some money would have to be put into the body of the current ambulance to get it to last 3 years, and traditionally most departments wouldn't do that with a 10-year-old ambulance, especially with the amount of calls the City does daily compared to the other surrounding departments.

Engine 4 would be next on the list to replace which is about 1 Million to purchase currently.

Other potential major purchases, would be the need for upgrades to the station, with the potential increase in staff. There would have to be moves made within the building to accommodate bunk space. All in all the City needs a new station, however currently the department makes do with the budget given to them.

Agenda Item VI

Chief Foss discussed the Fire Alarm system (Master Boxes) that the City currently has used this system for the last 50 plus years. Although it has served the City well, the department no longer has the staff to continue to maintain the system. The system will be ending in July 1 2022. The City currently receive about \$16,000 in revenue for these boxes and \$4,500 will need to be spent by the city to a third party to monitor the City buildings. This will be reflected in the FY24 budget as a decrease in revenue and an increase to the budget. All businesses within the City have been notified that they will need to find another solution by July 1, 2023, if they don't currently already have another monitoring system.

Agenda Item VII

Chief Discussed the new Property Maintenance Code update, currently we have a 2018 edition, which has to be updated to the 2021 edition. The only change that he is aware of is that they don't allow space heaters as a primary source of heat. He asked the City to adopt the change and make the one minor change. With the support of the committee he would like to move forward with an ordinance change for the December meeting to get the property maintenance code updated.

Agenda Item VIII

Chief Foss asked if there were any additional items that needed to be discussed. At that time no one had any questions.

Agenda Item IX

Chairman Starkweather and committee members agree to set the next for Monday January 30, 2022 at 6:00pm pending it works for any new council members.

Adjournment

Councilor Zink made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 18:51 (6:51pm), Chairmen Starkweather seconds and motion was carried.

Anthony Roberts

10/17/22

Fire Committee Meeting

Good evening everyone, thank you for allowing me to speak at this meeting. My name is Tony Roberts and I'm the Union President of the Franklin Professional Firefighters Local 4711 and a Master FF/Paramedic here at the City of Franklin Fire Dept.

Firstly, I'd like to thank all of you for your hard work. My intention here tonight is to start a relationship between the Franklin Professional FF's and the members of the fire committee and to put a face to the name for those I don't know personally. I'm going to keep this short and sweet: I'm not here tonight to talk about statistics or data. Chief Foss has already done an excellent job of displaying some of the data reflecting our current situation. I'm here tonight to talk about people. After all, the most important part of any business or service is the people in which it's comprised of. It's my responsibility as Union President to be the voice of the members that constitute our fire department. We have lost 6 out of 14 of our operational "floor" members in the last 6 months and 2 days. 5 of those being within the last three months and one a Captain. Some reasons I can pass on that I've heard directly from these resigned members are that they felt: Undercompensated, understaffed, undervalued, and burnt out leading to mental health struggles. Many of the resigned members stated they felt working for the City of Franklin Fire Department was unsustainable. Many of our current members also feel this way which I believe means that the bleeding of employees has not stopped yet.

I understand this may all be information you've already heard, but I believe in the power of a face to face conversation. I don't pretend to believe we're the only department with challenges or the only town or city for that matter. But a firehouse is just that-a house. The members that live in it are a family and to lose so many members is to lose years of experience, shared memories, trust, and cohesion. The firehouse is team oriented and a successful team can't be made with rapid turnover.

First, I hope we can work together to retain the members we still have left, and second to hire quality candidates to become the new members of our family.

In summary, if there's one message I hope to sincerely convey: it's that we are in desperate need of your help. Many of us are still striving to persevere in hopes that our conditions can improve.

Thank you.