

## PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

July 11, 2022

Commissioner K. Thompson called the public Hearing to order on July 11, 2022 at 7pm.

All commissioners present; K. Thompson, J. Patterson, M. Chura, D. Rafkis, and M. Malone. District Secretary A. Speach and Treasurer W. Dwyer. There were 37 residents present and PacB. Sign in sheet on file.

## PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

## PUBLIC HEARING

K. Thompson read the following notice

The Board of Fire Commissioners of the Belgium Cold Springs Fire District will hold a public hearing on Monday, July 11, 2022 at 7:00 P.M. at Belgium Cold Springs Fire Department Station #1 at 7920 River Road Baldwinsville, NY, to bring before and listen to the public comments of the residents of the said Fire District on the proposal to hire a paid Fire Chief and any necessary staff as it becomes necessary to meet the needs of the community.

This hearing is held in accordance with Section 176 (11-c) of Town Law.

By order of the Board of Fire Commissioners.

Amy Speach,

Fire District Secretary

A.Speach, the Secretary of the fire district has filed with this district an affidavit stating that the notice of this public hearing was at published or posted at least once at least 5 days before the date specified for the hearing in

- a. *The official newspaper of the fire district,*
- b. *The official signboard of the Town or Towns where the district is located,*
- c. *On the fire district's website, and*
- d. *On the Town or Town website where the district is located.*

*The notice of public hearing specified the time and date when and the place where this public hearing would be held.*

- The purpose of this public hearing is to allow members of the public to make comments on the proposal.
- Any person may be heard in favor of, or against, the proposal, or wish to make comments about the proposal.
- Please note that this proposal is subject to the approval of the Board of Fire Commissioners.

- Prior to the public comment portion of this public hearing, we will hear from Fire Commissioner Jeremy Patterson, who will make a presentation about the proposal to the Board of Fire Commissioners and members of the public who are present.

Commissioner J. Patterson started the presentation on the proposal at 7:06PM. The presentation outlined the reasons for the need of paid staff including the change in demographics of the fire district in both growing residential population and industrial, the aging population of our membership, the growing trend of communities not having the time to volunteer and time requirements to being a volunteer fire chief, firefighter and/or EMT.

The floor was opened to the public to make comments on the proposal. The sign in list asked who would like to speak and those people were given the first opportunity to speak.

Linda Pienka of 8112 Lincoln Ave. stated that most of the questions were answered she will continue to listen.

Barbara Raymond-LaPrease of 3409 Patchett Road asked the following questions: Who were these conversations with? Did you talk to the membership? Did you express these concerns to the membership? The chief reports an average number responding and it's about 9, is that information incorrect? Will the paid staff respond and will they come at night? Will the paid staff and paid chief need to live in the district?

Carol Curtis 8110 Lincoln Ave. stated she has been a member for 40 years. She questioned if a paid chief and 2 paid firefighters is enough to respond. J. Patterson responded that we don't know yet all the logistics at this time but the paid firefighters will supplement the volunteers. Carol Curtis asked if the board has looked into other departments and what they are doing? J. Patterson responded that yes, the board spoke with Fayetteville FD Chief Hildreth for information and what they are doing. We are not doing this tomorrow; we still need to figure some of these things out. Carol asked if the residents of the district don't want this, will it still move forward? J. Patterson responded that the board needs to do what is best for the district in the long term.

Charlie LaPrease 3409 Patchett Road and a member stated that you brought up age of members but what has been done about recruitment and retention? You mentioned walking around with the welcome packets and the high school program but no mention of succession planning; has there been succession planning? No there has not. As of today there have been 297 alarms and 50 were made during working hours when John and Jerry were here; 3 people are not enough.

Tom Perkins opted to wait until the end.

Joe Corcoran 326 Reston Drive stated his questions were answered.

Brant Messer 3404 Patchett Road stated that he thinks the figures are willfully short and should be around \$125,000 for each firefighter and then funds will be needed for pension when they retire. This might be for the 1<sup>st</sup> year but it will increase dramatically over the years.

Rita Messer 3404 Patchett Road did not wish to speak.

Dan Graham 3018 Camerondale Road did not wish to speak.

Steve Darcangelo 3391 Patchett Road stated that he thinks you have a daunting task. The numbers are somewhat misleading as some time spent overlaps and some of those obligations are met during weekly training. He like to see the dollar value of property lost over a 10 year period and injuries and loss of life. If paid staff would reduce that figure then that would be what I would want to see and that would mean something. As you bring on paid firefighters on it will also be more difficult to get more volunteers or if that is what the case has been in other areas. If that is where it is headed then make a presentation on entire paid staff

Kim Branagan 3260 Patchett Road stated on one of these plaques my name is there for firefighter of the year. I have been part of the process and time involved and it is time consuming. If we aren't talking about this now what will happen when it's too late. We need to consider the value of protecting your own house and family. The volunteers deserve the vacation but what if they don't show up. I served as department secretary and it is also a big commitment. Recruitment was a part of that then. It is not something that we are just thinking about, we have been doing it. It is a nationwide concern. Congratulations to the board for doing something and not sticking their head in the sand.

Doug Sandbrook 3211 Patchett Road stated: Thank you for bringing this up and it is time to bring this up. We are struggling in ambulance, health care, etc. He asked to also look at standards, it should be a staffed engine in 4 minutes; can we meet that? How do we get that with volunteers? He asked to consider looking at the staffing plan and hire firefighter paramedics and not EMTs. Is hiring a paid chief and 2 firefighters enough. He stated he has 27 years in the fire service and need to consider staffing 3-4 firefighters. I think it's a hard discussion.

Dror Rafkis 8798 River Road did not wish to comment.

Joe Rotelli 3583 Patchett Road stated: I understand that you won't have all the answers but do you have a timeline in mind? J. Patterson responded that the board has to work with civil service and that would determine the timeline. J. Rotelli asked about the union? J. Patterson responded that we don't know. J. Rotelli asked if we would need to have another public hearing. J. Patterson responded that we do not per the legal requirement and do not know at this time if we will. J. Rotelli asked what the \$50,000 set aside for outside work; what will that include? He then gave examples of some of the work that is completed now by the paid staff. J. Patterson responded that some work will fall to the paid firefighters but we don't know all the logistics at this time. J. Rotelli stated he is disappointed that the answers may not come back to public. Also asked about mutual aid considerations.

Kevin Rhode 1405 Greymore Way stated he is also a Lysander Town Counsellor. He asked about mutual aid and paid staff and how that would work? I know GBAC is having issues, this is not just a Belgium issue, this is an issue statewide. This conversation needs to be had in every fire department. People just do not have time. I had family members that served as fire chiefs. I would like you to also talk to other fire districts and see where they are at with this. The study that was done years ago needs to be looked at; maybe we need a town wide department. That money could be pooled if we

could get everyone on the same page. He asked about insurance and does scratching effect homeowners insurance. I commend you for your work

Lynn Tanner 8782 W. River Road stated that her comments are her own and are not her husbands who is a district employee. Thank you for the time that you have put into this. This is a sad day for the volunteer service and I don't feel that it has been handled well and should have had more public input. More research needs to be done and a second public hearing needs to be held. There is an underlying problem in the department the last few years which has been affecting the numbers and why the number is going down. Do surveys, bring a counsellor in to talk to small groups, address the morale issues. This is a band aid and not a fix. Is there a labor pool? Today you can't get supplies and can't get people. I am not sure how easy it is to get paid chiefs. The department election is December for chief so doesn't that need to be figured before then. Thank you for your time.

Jerry Tanner 8782 W. River Road did not wish to speak.

Mark Harrison 3111 Gerald Lane did not wish to speak

Vince Kearney 7608 Merritt Drive stated he has been a member for 30 some years and has a unique perspective as he served as chief for 6 years and assistant chief for 18 years. As long as I can remember as chiefs we make a lot of sacrifices. What is on that list in the presentation is the tip of the iceberg of the responsibilities; it is like having another fulltime job. I have said to K. Thompson a few times about getting a paid chief and having someone that can dedicate their time to the department. I would suggest to hire the paid chief first and they can pick the paid firefighters and hopefully they will pick the people that will work with volunteers.

Frank Anastas 3150 Patchett Road asked what is the difference between paid staff and volunteers? Who is the paid chief going to be and where will they come from. I don't like the idea that this is the only forum and the board should not be able to make the decision without coming back.

Tom Perkins 3 Macarthur Road and not a resident in our district. I wanted to say what Vince Kearney said. I am here to represent Lysander Public Safety and the Onondaga County Fire Advisory Board. Thank you to the board for doing something. We have been talking about recruitment for 20 years. I just came back on the Fire Advisory Board; and was looking at the agenda and we are still talking about the same thing we were 20 years. I applaud you for talking a bold step.

Doug Sanbrook 3211 Patchett Road asked if with additional staffing there would be a reduction in redundant equipment. J. Patterson stated is something to be considered.

J. Patterson asked if anyone else would like to speak.

District Secretary will read any written public comments, which have been submitted.

- A statement submitted by Paul Kulba of 3465 Cold Springs Road was read in support of the proposal.

- Current fire Chief Matt Speach of 7796 Vicki Lane submitted a letter in support of the proposal.

(siren alerted for a fire call 8:32pm)

K. Thompson asked again if anyone wanted to speak who did not have the opportunity.

K. Thompson stated that the public comments period regarding this proposition has now concluded. This public hearing regarding the proposal is declared closed. Can I receive a motion from a member of the Board of Fire Commissioners?

M. Chura made the motion to close the public hearing and M. Malone seconded the motion Carried. Hearing closed at 8:36pm