

**The Board of Fire Commissioners  
Portsmouth Fire Department**

Fire Station 1, Training Room  
January 10, 2017

Portsmouth, NH  
1900 hours

**I. Call to Order:**

Chairwoman Matthes called the meeting to order at 1900 hours with Commissioner Gamester leading the pledge of allegiance. Along with Chairwoman Matthes and Commissioner Richard Gamester, present were: Commissioner Michael Hughes, Fire Chief Steven Achilles, Deputy Fire Chief Carl Roediger; Executive Assistant Tracy Freeman, Captains: Richard Murphy, Todd Germain and William McQuillen; and Firefighters: Paul Trivigno, Timothy Dame, Steven Morse, Eric Detweiler and Thomas Osborn.

**II. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting:**

Motion, to approve the minutes of December 13, 2016, was made by Chairwoman Matthes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

**III. Public Comment Session: None.**

**IV. Recognition of Groups or Individuals:**

Chief Achilles introduced new hire, Firefighter Thomas Osborn, to the Commission with Deputy Heinz providing a brief background. Firefighter Osborn worked for the Town of Brewster, MA as a Firefighter/Paramedic and holds a degree in Nursing and in Paramedic Emergency Medicine. He is currently on his 2-week orientation which finishes up on Thursday and will be assigned to "D" shift.

**V. Reports:**

**A. Fire Chief's Reports:**

Commissioner Gamester motioned to discuss Chief's reports 17-003 through 17-006. Motion seconded by Commissioner Hughes.

Chief Achilles reviewed reports with the Commission.

Report (003), 2016 Response Report with Service Activity and Safety message for December. The report shows the department responding to 124 Fire Calls and 279 Ambulance Calls for the month. Totals for the year shows the department responded to 4,899 calls: 1,403 fire and related service calls and 3,496 ambulance service calls. Chief noted that the total incident activity

was 5.6% higher than last year and up almost 12% over 2014. He went on to outline some of the activity for the month with a fire at 64 Market Street, motor vehicle crash on Islington Street and Greenland Road, vehicle fire in the area of 870 Elwyn Road and a dumpster fire on 23 Holiday Drive. The Safety Message section provided some safety measures on how to keep safe when heating one's home. The Service Activity and Safety Message report was submitted to the Portsmouth Herald for publication in local newspapers. Report (004), Fire and EMS Calls by Category, noted that there were 35 medical assist calls, 51 EMS calls with injury excluding vehicle accidents. Report shows 11 motor vehicle accidents with no injuries and 5 with injuries, 12 calls relating to alcohol abuse and effects, 23 calls for cardiac conditions and 15 calls for trauma or injury to the head/scalp and 27 no apparent illness or injury requiring transport. There were 3 Heroin drug overdoses for the month. Report (005), FY17 Budget, Chief noted that we are tracking positively with continued monitoring and prioritizing of expenditures in place. Currently have two long term vacancies, one officer injured off duty and one firefighter injured on duty. Report (006), Overtime Analysis, provided a breakdown of how overtime was used in the month of December along with a summary of what was charged to OT-Recall for the month.

Motion, to accept Chief's Reports 17-003 through 17-006, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

**B. Staff Reports:**

Deputy Roediger reported on inspections for the month and provided an update on the Button Factory. He stated the Fire Protection Engineer had completed his walkthrough to evaluate and identify the deficiencies and will be working on his report based on his findings. Report is due back to the fire department on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February. Through the hard work of Inspector Howe with the dumpster fire noted above on Holiday Drive, he was able to do some research and find surveillance footage that provided us with a suspect. After calling in this juvenile along with his father, the boy admitted to starting the fire. Inspector Howe put in a lot of time on this and did a great job. Inspector Howe will be in Orlando next week attending the Fire Department Safety Officers Association Annual Safety Forum. Our department is working with the State's Fire Marshal's office on inspections of apartment buildings and those having outstanding safety violations. Deputy Roediger noted that the department has citation authority and can summons the owners who do not comply to fixing the problems and they can explain it to a judge. He also stated that we are able to administer a warrant to enter the building when refused entry by the owner. In working with Chief Achilles on the Hazard Mitigation Plan, some interesting statics shows 2.6 million square feet of commercial and residential space has been added to the City from 2011 to now with no change in the number of fire personnel. Commissioner Hughes commented about the dumpster fire and that he has had six incidents in the past month where he is seeing waste being thrown into dumpsters that shouldn't be to include a war grenade. He stated people are inheriting homes

and cleaning them out and disposing of all kinds of things into dumpsters so please be careful when approaching dumpster fires.

Deputy Heinz reported on operations and trainings happening within the department noting training at the National Gypsum plant, working with National Wrecker on air bags, NH Boater safety class, working with the Emergency Response Guide and training on radiation detection. The department is also hosting a certified plans examiner course at station 2 this week. The department will be working with the water department on training on the city's water system and we sent five department members to an O2X class in Portland Maine this week. O2X is a human performance program that takes a complete approach to wellness by integrating physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. The five individuals who are attending this four day program are learning how to tackle all aspects of physical and mental fitness which is built around nutrition, sleep, stress management, resilience, and physical conditioning. They will then in-turn teach what they learned to department members wishing to participate in this O2X program which is administered through a web-based app. Boston Fire Department already participates in this program and has seen significant results. Deputy Heinz went on to report that interviews of firefighter candidates for anticipated vacancies will be taking place shortly and the new ambulance has been ordered.

**VI. Old Business:**

Chief Achilles spoke briefly about the microwave links for the City's Communication System with things still moving forward.

**VII. Presentations of Written Communications:**

Chief Achilles read the thank you letter from CHAD Community Relations Manager Natalie Martinez-Harrison, for allowing Firefighter Sylvester to participate in the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Battle of the Badges Hockey Championship game which takes place on March 19, 2017. Chief Achilles also read thank you email sent from Grant Turpin, Director of Emergency Management and EMS with Portsmouth Regional Hospital, for going above and beyond the call of duty in assisting the emergency staff with two working codes at the same time. It greatly impacted the quality of care they were able to provide to those patients he stated. Chief Achilles did note that hospitals communicate with other hospitals when one is on diversion and when we arrive and see that there is a need for assistance, we often decide to stay and provide a helping hand until another call comes in needing our services.

Chairwoman Matthes made the motion to accept the thank you notes and place them on file. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

**VIII. New Business:**

Chief updated the Commission on the Joint Budget Committee and their recommendation of a 4% increase as a guideline when working on FY18 budgets. Chief noted he has worked on some preliminary numbers and staying at status quo with all fixed and known costs and keeping the same level of service that we provide today, is about a 5.49% increase. Of that 5.49%, 4.45% is made up of salaries, health insurance, retirement costs, and workers compensation so we would need at least 4.45% to cover those increases. He went on to say that we would have to cut current services that we provide today in order to reach the JBC's recommendation. More work to be done on budget preparations but reducing overtime for recalls and training, reducing education / tuition accounts and part time salaries would still be projecting a 4.67% increase and that would provide us with no flexibility to absorb any negative impacts that may be created by long term vacancies, etc. This also does not include increases in utilities, phones and water / sewer. Chief recommends that we don't submit a 4% budget as it will impact current services provided. Commissioner Gamester commented on being a part of the budget processes for some time now and have accommodated City Council's recommended number by cutting our budget back. He too agrees with Chief Achilles in that we need to present what we need and public needs to know this. He recommends presenting a budget at 5.49%. Chairwoman Matthes asked about the goal of adding more firefighters. Chief Achilles said he is working on a plan but is thinking to perhaps add 1 firefighter per shift over the course of 3-4 years. He stated the budget would need enough funds in overtime to cover that person and one plan may be to have 15 on shift with a minimum staffing of 13. Chairwoman Matthes asked about the driving force on increased call volume. Chief answered stating calls are becoming more complex and overlapping calls where there is not enough personnel on scene to mitigate a problem when 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> due are committed to another call. Demands for services are going to continue with the increase in square footage of occupancies on recently completed and new building projects.

After a brief discussion on emergency services rates and not having an increase in our rates for the past couple of years, Chief worked with Deputy Finance Director Andrew Purgiel to establish a fee schedule which closely reflects the going rates as identified by Comstar. Commissioner Gamester made the motion to accept the recommended Emergency Service Rates as outlined in a memo from the Deputy City Manager. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

Chief Achilles presented a letter from President & CEO Janice Morse of Newburyport Five Cents Savings Bank presenting our department with a \$500.00 donation in support of the work that we do. Chairwoman Matthes made the motion to accept Newburyport Five Cents Savings Bank donation of \$500.00 with much gratitude. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

After putting names into a hat, Commissioner Gamester's name was drawn and will represent the Fire Commission on the Board of Ethics.

**IX. Public Hearings: None.**

**X. Non-public Session:**


Commissioner Gamester made the motion to enter into Non-public Session at 2015 hours for reason identified under RSA 91-A:3, II (d), Geraldine Webber's Estate and disbursements to the City. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.

Motion, to come out of Non-public Session and return to public meeting at 2035 hours was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Chairwoman Matthes and passed unanimously. No votes taken.

Regular public meeting reconvened at 2035 hours.

**XI. Adjournment:**

Motion, to adjourn at 2035 hours, was made by Chairwoman Matthes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Hughes', written over a horizontal line.

Michael Hughes, Clerk