

BURLINGTON FIRE COMMISSION
Minutes of the Meeting
October 4, 2022

Minutes of October 4, 2022 Meeting of the Burlington Fire Commission. The meeting of the Burlington Fire Commission convened at 08:37 hours via Zoom and in person with Commissioners Bond (remote), McLaughlin, Sheehey, Perkinson, and Chapman. Acting Chief Libby, Deputy Chief Lachance, and Administrative Assistant Meghan Sweeney were also present.

Establish Meeting End Time

Commissioner Bond asked for a motion to establish a meeting end time. Moved by Commissioner Perkinson as 09:30 and seconded by Commissioner Sheehey.

Public Comment

No members of public to comment.

Review and Accept Minutes August Commission Meetings

Movement to accept minutes as written by Commissioner Sheehey and seconded by Commissioner Chapman. Commissioner Perkinson asked that “no action taken” be added at the end of the executive session. Minutes will be updated and submitted.

Chief’s Oral Report

The following was an update sent by Acting Chief Libby, to the Commission prior to the meeting:

Personnel – Recruit Class 22-2 began upon their journey with the Burlington Fire Department on September 26, 2022. This class of seven candidates will spend 14 weeks in our fire academy then upon successful completion they will count towards minimum staffing. Recruit Class 21-2 completed their years’ probation on September 27, 2022. All eight members of this class completed their required skills and tests. They will be receiving their commissions at our next banquet with the date to be determined.

Retirements/Resignations: Effective September 18, 2022 Patrick Crowley ended his service with the Fire Department. Pat joined us on March 15, 2021 but has chosen to pursue journalism.

Hiring/Promotions – On September 27, we posted a hiring notice which is a non-traditional style of hiring. This posting will attempt to augment the challenges within the Emergency Communications Center by allowing the Fire Department to hire early, assign new hires to dispatch for up to six months, then transition into our next recruit academy.

In addition to the current posting, DC LaChance is leading an effort to enhance our recruitment efforts through greater visibility at career fairs. Currently we are scheduled to appear at the following job fairs:

University of Vermont Career Fair	October 6
Northern VT University – Johnson	October 20
Vermont Technical College	October 26

We are aware that we have a need to reach more of the community and work to make our staff reflect the community as a whole. We are working on ways to create opportunities for interested community members to be able to obtain the minimum certifications, which would allow them to apply.

Recently, we have promoted Michael Curtin and Jamie Valyou to the rank of Battalion Chief. Jeremy Raymond has been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant while Bill Lyons and Nick Carson have completed all requirements for promotion to Senior Firefighter.

Over the past couple of months, the Training Division has been offering a promotional preparation class for members interested in testing for LT and Capt. ranks. Participation is not mandatory to test, however we have identified a need to better prepare our future leaders.

COVID/Injuries – Last year we averaged 254.48 hours of COVID Emergency Leave per month. Since July 1st we have seen 798 hours of COVID related leave. It still has a real impact on meeting staffing needs.

EMS Chief – Currently we have not made any movement on this position. As I stated in my last report to the Commission, my intent was to look at this after we stabilized the Administrative Assistant Position. Talks have occurred at the command level to determine what that position should look like though I have been reluctant to move forward with great speed out of respect for an incoming Chief Engineer.

Overtime – Overtime has taken a slight downturn from an average of 298.4 hours last report to an average of 242.04 hours over the last 13 weeks. I have also received approval for Chiefs to be compensated to work extra in the event there is a vacancy on Battalion One AND there are members who will be ordered in to cover staffing.

Fleet – In the past month, we had ladder testing on all the ground and aerial ladders and annual pump testing conducted by outside vendors. Any issues that were found are being dealt with currently. It should be noted that there were not any significant issues identified.

New Apparatus – The new fire truck design specs have been reviewed and our three new trucks are in line for production. The timeline has not changed from last report.

The chassis for the ambulance, which we have on order, is scheduled (which means that it is in the “Que” at Ford). We still have no timeline when it is going to show up at Braun.

Radio System – Lieutenant Wilson has done site visits with the engineers from Motorola to map radio coverage for the city. Currently there is a meeting scheduled for next week to review the testing which has been conducted along with review of the coverage maps that have been generated.

Station Alerting – Design review came back from the stations and we have met with the vendor. We are awaiting final prices. As a reminder, this project is included in the Radio/Communications bond.

Burlington Dispatch – As I informed you last week, the Burlington Police Department is facing staffing challenges within the Emergency Communications Center. Currently they are at six full time equivalent dispatchers and they have expressed concern about their ability to staff the “Fire Desk”. On Friday September 23, we met with the Mayor and BPD leadership to navigate these challenges. Resulting from these discussions, we have offered our members an opportunity to be trained and voluntarily work extra duty within the Center. On top of that we had been directed to create a job posting for new BFD hires who would start their careers in the Communications Center and then, if eligible, would become members of the next recruit academy.

Regional Dispatch – We are very much awaiting the stability which regional dispatch is anticipated to provide.

Discussion continued regarding the dispatch crisis the department is facing. At this time there fifteen firefighters who have shown interest in becoming trained to cover the fire desk in dispatch. There are currently five applications for the new position created that would allow someone who is interested in becoming a firefighter to start as a dispatcher. There has been discussion with South Burlington to see if they can take on our dispatching temporarily as they still have backups to our system there. Unfortunately South Burlington is also struggling with their own dispatch staffing issues, so they are unable to take our department on as well. There is still equipment at Station 3 if the physical location needed to be changed, but it is not an ideal environment and would not work as a long-term solution. Commissioner Chapman asked if there was a hard date to have an answer from South Burlington to see if they could take us on, and there is not at this time. Commissioner Sheehey asked if these are all steps that are being taken until we can move to regional. Acting Chief Libby confirmed that is still the ultimate plan and the Mayor is still supportive of this decision. The hope is that Regional will be up and running by September of 2023 in the South Burlington Police Department.

Commissioner Perkinson asked any of our recruiting efforts have been made towards high school students. The chiefs explained the challenges of finding someone who would be able to have the EMT certification required as they have to be at least 18 years old and affiliated with a department. The department also likes to see applicants with some life experience. They are hoping some candidates from previous rounds will apply to the dispatch/firefighter position to get some of the emergency services experience.

Old Business/New Business

- Update on dispatch continued from the Chief's Oral Report.
- Due to the upcoming special election on December 6th Commissioner Sheehey will not be able to attend the originally scheduled Commission Meeting. New date will be Tuesday, December 13th.
- Commissioner Perkinson asked if there was any update on the selection for the Fire Chief position. Acting Chief Libby said there were no updates and the position has not been posted. Commissioner Perkinson asked to have it on record that he would like whoever is having these discussions with the Administration to start this process sooner rather than later and feels that it's very important and that there needs to be stability from the top down in the department. He is very disappointed this has not been handled in a more expedited fashion. Commissioners discussed how to support this process, and Commissioner Perkinson made a motion to discuss with Administration which was seconded by Commissioner McLaughlin.
- Commissioner Chapman asked if there was any discussion to support our members with the recent violent incidents and the cleanup that they are assisting with on scenes. She is concerned with their mental health after these responses. Acting Chief Libby said there are discussions, especially after the recent City Hall Park homicide, and they are looking into what other agencies are doing in other cities. Discussions are about different ways to handle these types of calls, and also the possibility of trying to see if other City departments can have some involvement as well.
- Acting Chief Libby mentioned that there was an appeal as a result of a Time of Sale Inspection from the Fire Marshal's Office, but there was a resolution made within the same day. Both parties have come to a solution and there is no need to elevate to Commission review.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn meeting made by Commission Perkinson and seconded by Commissioner Sheehey. Meeting adjourned at 09:30 am.