

BURLINGTON FIRE COMMISSION
Minutes of the Meeting
December 13, 2022

Minutes of December 13, 2022 Meeting of the Burlington Fire Commission. The meeting of the Burlington Fire Commission convened at 08:30 hours via Zoom and in person with Commissioners Bond, McLaughlin, Sheehey, Perkinson, and Chapman. Acting Chief Libby, Deputy Chief Lachance (remote), and Administrative Assistant Meghan Sweeney were also present. Members of the public included Timothy Burns and Thomas Critchlow both by Zoom, and Kyle Blake in person.

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

Timothy Burns, Thomas Critchlow and Kyle Blake were members of the public present. Timothy Burns, who is a Lieutenant at the Fire Department, wanted to make the commissioners aware that there is a schedule change that will be starting on a 48 hour on and 96 hour off rotation. He asked commissioners to do research on what that schedule will look like and mean. He stated that members were hired under the 24 hours on 48 hours off rotation, and feels like the new schedule is not focused on safety of the members who are working two consecutive shifts. The choice to go to this new schedule was decided by a vote from Union members that was very split with over 40% of members against the vote. He stated this schedule could be career ending for some members, and wants to know what the administration is going to do if a person who has had many years with the department says the schedule is not working for them and their family. He also is concerned with the wording in the new contract that states this can end based on “good business reason” and wants to know what that definition is.

Thomas Critchlow would like to echo that this is a huge change for families with young children. He is trying to keep an open mind.

Kyle Blake who is the BFFA Union President wanted to give history of the discussion. Conversation has been happening since 2017, and in 2020 a vote from the Union was in favor of moving forward with the trial of the shift rotation. It was held up at the time by administration. The rotation is a way to help the work life balance that is a challenge for many. The Union tried to recommend a four platoon shift, however there isn't enough money to support that kind of staffing. The intention with this rotation is that members will have four days at home with their families to rest and reset. Negotiations with the City allowed the Union to vote on a TRIAL which can end after six months. Out of a 96% membership turnout for a vote this was passed by majority in favor to try the rotation. In response to what a “good business reason” would be is if the monetary cost is too high for overtime staffing or if membership drops so drastically that they cannot fill the shifts. If this fails it was the membership that decided to try the rotation and they will deal with the consequences. Kyle offered the commissioners a copy of information that was presented to Union.

Commissioner Chapman asked what overtime will look like following a 48 hour shift. Kyle said that Labor and Management are still working together to come up with the plan when these situations arise. The start of the rotation was pushed to May 1st to allow some of these details to still get worked out. He's hoping that overtime will go down as members will have more time at home to rest.

Commissioner McLaughlin asked if this new rotation would impact the budget at all. This changes the 21 day for cycle for the extra cycle pay (cycle may be every 4 weeks now). There is no Kelly day.

Commissioner Sheehey asked about members that may be assigned to an ambulance for 48 hours straight. She cited clinical data that shows it's difficult to make clinical decisions after so many hours straight. Kyle Blake

responded that there is no current hard limit to amount of time assigned to an apparatus, but it could certainly be considered. Also, if you look at the call data, after 2:30/3:00 am the calls taper, and if a member was going into their next shift they wouldn't have to be up to get ready like to do currently around 6:00 am. He suggested crews could frontload the work and chores on day one of their shift so the second day can be more low key. It's also not uncommon now for a member to work 48 hours together between mutual exchanges and overtime. Tim Burns pointed out while that is an occurrence that happens now others on the apparatus have not had that double shift and can help do more work so that member on the 48 can rest.

Commissioner Perkinson asked if this was something that was in the contract negotiations. Since it was agreed upon by the union and city there isn't much the commissioners can do about it. He asked what the process is at six months. Kyle explained that there will be another online vote for members to terminate or continue. At nine months there will be more discussions to see how the members feel about it, and another vote at the completion of one year. If it is not continued labor and management will come together to decide on an exit date.

Commissioner Perkinson said the decision does affect the entire department and he can appreciate both sides of the argument. He thinks at the end of the day the Commission should do their research. Kyle does think it's important the Commission is aware of the change and what it means since it's very new locally and not many departments are currently practicing this schedule. Commissioner Perkins agreed it was important to be informed and suggested to Chair Commissioner Bond for a motion to get the presentation information from clerk Meghan Sweeney. Commissioner Bond made a motion for the information to be provided from Kyle to Meghan to distribute to commissioners. Commissioner Perkinson seconded the motion and it was moved.

Commissioner Bond asked what drove the change and vote at this point in time. Kyle answered that this discussion has been going on since 2017. Conversations about it after a department wide survey showed that burnout is a huge problem. Kyle said that while this vote was close and not unanimous, it is how the Union has always voted on different changes and will continue using the majority. What he has heard from other departments who have moved to this schedule that were closely divided is they are now having a very high approval from the members.

Tim Burns concludes with the point that at the end of the day this is a job and it does affect those with families. He would like to remind that this is not the job schedule that was presented or what was signed up for at the beginning of anyone's career here. This could still be career ending for some.

Kyle Blake concluded saying that he is advocating for the majority of the Union voice. He doesn't want to lose any of the membership, however if this can improve morale and stress levels he thinks it's worth implementing the trial. Kyle will email the presentation to Clerk of the Board Meghan Sweeney to distribute to Commissioners.

Commissioner Chapman brought forth it will be important for any incoming chief to be aware of the new trial and other changes in the new contract.

Commissioner Bond thanked all for coming and sharing the information provided.

Public comment came to a close with Timothy Burns and Thomas Critchlow leaving the meeting. Kyle Blake stayed for the remainder of the meeting.

Review and Accept Minutes October Commission Meetings

Movement to accept minutes as written by Commissioner Perkinson and seconded by Commissioners Sheehey and Chapman.

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 continues in the recruit academy and continues to be doing well. This academy is scheduled to be completed at the end of December. Upon successful completion of the Academy, this class will receive their assignments and begin counting toward minimum staffing.

Retirements/Resignations: Since our last meeting, there have been no retirements or resignations.

Collective Bargaining Agreement: The City and Union both ratified and have signed a new three-year CBA. The agreement brings together items that were previously discussed with the Commission, including an increase in compensation (19.5 %), annual education bonuses, creates the position of Cover Officer, allowing trial of a 48/96 hour schedule, mandatory AEMT for new employees within one year of probation and the union had the option to apply this requirement to existing employees with less than 5 years of experience. The agreement also established an ambulance rotation in that we now have three members assigned to each ambulance on every shift who will be rotating on and off the ambulances.

Hiring/Promotions – In the first week of November we conducted the Lieutenant promotional process. We had 10 members participate in the process and all ten successfully made the promotional list. The following members have been promoted:

Kyle Blake	Effective November 14, 2022
Michael Jordan	Effective November 23, 2022
Josh Kirtlink	Effective November 23, 2022
Thomas Critchlow	Effective November 23, 2022

On November 9th and 10th the department conducted new hire interviews for hybrid positions, which were discussed in our last meeting. Because of that process, we have hired four new members to serve in the dispatch roll until the next recruit academy begins.

Deputy Chief LaChance has been invited to participate in Southern Maine Community College Fire Service Leadership and Peer Mentoring program. Involvement in this program will allow us to reach students who may be considering their employment options within the fire service and potentially recruit new members.

The Fire Chief position was posted on the Cities job opportunities page on October 17, 2022. At this time, I am not aware of any progress being made in the search.

COVID/Injuries – Last year we averaged 254.48 hours of COVID Emergency Leave per month. Since July 1, 2022, we are averaging 189.4 hrs. Sick leave has dropped by roughly 76 hours per month however, Worker's Compensation leave saw an increase of about 43 hours per month. Currently, we do not have anyone out on workers comp and we hope not to.

EMS Chief –There has been no change in filling this position since our last meeting.

Overtime –. Overtime to cover minimum staffing remains relatively consistent averaging 239.9 hours per week (As of December 04, 2022) In the last four weeks we have only had to rely on mandatory overtime to cover 9 hours.

Fleet – Fleet maintenance continues to be a moving target. As we start to catch up, we run into new challenges. On a positive note, DPW Fleet Maintenance has reached full staffing, which will increase its capacity.

New Apparatus –There is no updated timeline on Fire Apparatus build timelines and on December 05, 2022, I received word from our ambulance dealer that our ambulance is scheduled to be completed by the end of June 2023. In communicating with the Braun dealer, he advised a new truck ordered today would be anywhere from 2 ½ - 3 years for delivery. They currently have roughly 450 ambulances on order. Prices have increased substantially as aluminum has gone up nearly 45%.

Radio System The bond purchase for the new radio system is ready to go to the Board of Finance and City Council, concurrently on December 12th. This will allow us to sign a contract with Motorola and keep this project moving forward. This is at least a year-long process to completion.

Station Alerting – The RFP for station alerting has been written and reviewed by City Attorney’s office. After we make a few minor adjustments that will get posted.

Burlington Dispatch – As of the writing of this update, we have two new employees training in dispatch and two additional employees starting their training on December 12, 2022. Additionally, we have nine current employees trained and three others in training.

Regional Dispatch – We are very much awaiting the stability that regional dispatch is anticipated to provide. At this time, it is very unclear as to the stability of Regional as some communities are experiencing challenges with their FY24 budget process.

Acting Chief Libby updated that the Radio System did not go to Board of Finance. Commissioner Perkinson asked what the objection was, and more information was requested as it was currently set as a sole source vendor. The reason we want sole source is Motorola currently does our radio systems for all of DPW, Police, and Fire. There has been times where other vendors were used and they were bad experiences.

Also, since the email was sent, Acting Chief Libby updated that another community has pulled out of the Regional Dispatch group. Commissioner Sheehey asked how invested we are into the regional dispatch plan. Everything that we have put in is recoupable in some way.

Old Business/New Business

- Dates that were presented for 2023 meeting schedule is tentatively going to work for commissioners at this point. Meeting dates are subject to change.

Executive Session

- Commissioner Bond: Made a motion to go into Executive to discuss matters where general public knowledge would place the Department at a substantial disadvantage at 09:22. No action was taken.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn meeting made by Commission Perkinson and seconded by Commissioner Chapman. Meeting adjourned at 09:34 am.