

**TOWN OF MOUNT PLEASANT, SOUTH CAROLINA
FIRE COMMITTEE
Monday, March 4, 2019
Municipal Complex, Committee Meeting Room, 3rd Floor
100 Ann Edwards Lane, Mount Pleasant, SC 29464**

MINUTES

Members Present: Bob Brimmer, Chair; Jim Owens, Kevin Cunnane, and Tom O'Rourke

Staff Present: Eric DeMoura, Town Administrator; and Mike Mixon, Fire Chief

Mr. Brimmer called the meeting to order at 3:45 p.m.

1. Approval of Minutes from the December 3, 2018 meeting

Mr. Owens moved for approval; seconded by Mr. Cunnane. All present voted in favor.

2. Public Comments

Mr. Brimmer opened the floor to public comments.

Mr. Kevin McNamara of 2484 Darts Cove Way provided data related to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) studies related to crew size and task completion in residential and high-rise fires. He noted that crew size affects the time in which fire ground tasks are completed and that crews of 4 can complete tasks faster than crews of 3. He stated that according to NFPA the Mount Pleasant Fire Department is around 10 personnel short each day to meet the recommendations for a high-rise fire. He stated that the minimum national standard of four personnel should be met in Mount Pleasant.

Steven Rosone of 2331 Skyler Drive stated he is a former firefighter and paramedic with over 25 years of experience. He noted that he responded to some major calls in his career, but the majority of his experience was at one- and two-family dwellings, businesses, and hotels. He stated we need to be familiar with mutual-aid agreements and the lessons learned from the Sofa Super Store fire. He stated that in his personal experience it was nearly impossible to have proper fire suppression without at least four firefighters on each unit.

Nathan Hammes 1700 Whipple Road. He provided an account of an incident that occurred in which he found a man in need on the side of the road and provided CPR. He stated it took EMS over nine minutes to reach the scene. He stated that response times and crew size could improve.

3. Consideration of a Firefighter Staffing Ordinance

Mr. DeMoura stated that this item came from Council with direction from Mr. Cunnane and he stated it would be best if Committee initiated that discussion.

Mr. Brimmer stated that this was also an agenda item on PJI and there was previous discussion in that committee. Mr. Brimmer recognized Mr. Cunnane to introduce the item.

Mr. Cunnane stated that Fire Committee had four months of hearings and covered the topics: engine readiness, ladder readiness, redundancy, and station placement in September, October, November, and December. Mr. Cunnane stated that the minutes are clear, the Chief explained the situation, and the situation is not good. He stated that the Chief is not saying that because it is his job to make it work with what they give him. He stated it is the job of the policy makers to make the Chiefs job as easy as possible by protecting the firefighters and the citizens. He stated that having four firefighters on a truck is the minimum. He noted geographic limitations increase response times. Mr. Cunnane stated that when the adequate crew sizes are not sent, firefighters can not perform. He stated that the firefighters in the Town are brave and they will go above and beyond. He stated that the Town is not where it

needs to be in regard to staffing. Mr. Cunnane stated that he and the Chief recently discussed supporting documentation on three versus four firefighters on each apparatus.

Chief Mixon stated that he can not dispute that fact the four personnel can do more work than three.

Mr. Cunnane addressed concerns that an ordinance would create liability. He stated that the real liability is four months of Committee hearings with the inadequacies on record. He stated that there was some improvement last year by placing Captains on the ladder trucks. He stated that there are steps in process to improve the department, but they do not get the department to minimum staffing. Mr. Cunnane stated that they were the ones to improve the department.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that there are two parts to this issue; firefighter staffing and the ordinance. He asked the question if there is any staffing in the Town done by ordinance.

Mr. DeMoura stated that he was not aware of any staffing done this way.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that in his opinion the firefighter staffing should be improved, but he does not think it should be done by ordinance. He stated that an ordinance would give Mr. Cunnane assurance that the staffing would be addressed, but he feels that the burden should be placed on Council. He does not feel an ordinance should be used to accomplish this.

Mr. Owens stated that he agrees with Mr. O'Rourke that an ordinance is not needed. He stated that some of the staffing issues have already been addressed by adding six additional positions. He stated that we need to commit as a Town to follow NFPA 1710 sooner than later. He also noted that there are budget constraints to complete the initiative. Mr. Owens stated that the Strategic Plan needs to be followed.

Mr. O'Rourke asked if there are departments that staff with five or more personnel. He asked if four personnel are adequate for the Mount Pleasant Fire Department or would more be needed.

Chief Mixon stated that there are larger cities that staff some units with five or six personnel, but he did not foresee Mount Pleasant needing five or six people per truck.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that he has heard the public say that four is the minimum and Mr. Cunnane state that four is the minimum.

Chief Mixon stated that in the Strategic Plan they started with the ladder companies to bring the staffing to four personnel. He also stated that was also a factor in requesting the third ladder company at fire station #4 in the center of Town. He stated that the fire department has addressed staffing and the ladder companies are that starting point. He also stated that in the future there are multiple options to change the staffing model of the department.

Mr. Cunnane stated that FDNY has six on the ladders and five on the engines. He also stated that the firefighter from Jersey City noted that four is their minimum. Mr. Cunnane stated that he supports the strategic plan but noted that he also stated before the vote to approve the strategic plan that it was a start, but more was needed. He stated that the engine that runs the most calls in Town is 13 years old. He stated that if an ordinance wasn't the answer he would like to see additional staffing at the McCants Station, Carolina Park Station, and Belle Hall station. He stated that those units don't have a ladder immediately responding with them.

Mr. Cunnane made a motion to staff the single engine stations with four personnel Mr. Owens provided a second.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that it would be better to tell the Chief what type of staffing level to have, but not how to do it. He stated that it would be a better motion if committee recommended to bring the entire department to a certain staffing level by a specific time.

Mr. Cunnane withdrew his motion. Mr. Owens withdrew the second to the motion.

Mr. Cunnane stated that he would like to make a motion to direct staff to bring the Fire Department to minimum staffing.

Mr. Cunnane then asked Chief Mixon how long it would take to hire 12 firefighters.

Mr. DeMoura stated it wasn't the time, but the money needed to hire.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that he was thinking that the process would take several years.

Mr. Brimmer made a motion to amend the strategic plan to meet national standards by the end of the plan. Mr. Cunnane provided a second to the motion.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that this motion should be gradually implemented and should not wait to be completed at the four-year mark.

Mr. Owens stated that it is up to Council and staff how fast the plan is achieved.

Mr. Brimmer stated that if this motion was to pass some of the other goals in the strategic plan may be pushed back into future years. He stated that the plan has been created by the leadership of the fire department and this may reorder the priorities that were already presented.

Mr. DeMoura stated that staff is happy to build anything that Committee wants. He noted that with the current plan and the addition of bringing the fire department to a four-person minimum that it would increase the fire department budget by \$2 million dollars annually. He noted that all of these initiatives are currently unfunded. He noted that there is going to have to be a funding initiative at the Council level that is substantial and greater than anything that has currently been proposed to meet that obligation.

Mr. Brimmer stated that the plan is a good plan for a vision. But with available funding the plan may have to be adjusted and not completed.

Mr. Cunnane stated that one of the reasons he wanted a staffing ordinance is so that it could not be swept under the rug. He stated that in

the past population was on the rise and apparatus dropped a bit. He stated that any reductions should be done in the public eye. Mr. Cunnane stated that at this point the question could be called.

Mr. Brimmer restated that motion that the fire department would be staffed up to NFPA standards by year five of the strategic plan. Mr. Brimmer called for the vote. Motion passed 4-0.

4. Discussion with regard to placing the fire department strategic plan in a priority funding position.

Mr. Brimmer stated that he would allow Mr. Cunnane to explain this item as he was the one that placed it on the agenda.

Mr. Cunnane stated that when the plan was passed that it was a good start. He noted that during the retreat he became aware that 11% of the items in the Town's five-year plan had not been accomplished. He stated that this action would prioritize the five-year finding for the fire department.

Mr. DeMoura stated if approved, in his opinion, it would direct Council to place the fire department strategic plan in a priority funding position.

Mr. Cunnane stated that the fire department put a lot of time into the plan and this would ensure that it was completed as soon as possible.

Mr. Brimmer asked if there was a motion associated with this item.

Mr. Cunnane stated it was more of a staff direction.

Mr. Brimmer stated it was a change in priority. He asked for a motion to continue that discussion.

Mr. Cunnane made the motion to place the previously passed fire department strategic plan in a priority funding position over the five-year period. Mr. O'Rourke seconded the motion.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that this could be accomplished by having a review of the fire department strategic plan at the Committee level.

Mr. Brimmer asked Mr. DeMoura to place a semi-annual review of the strategic plan on future agendas.

Mr. Owens stated he agreed with Mr. O'Rourke and did know how to place priority funding on one department and not another. He would rather see a semi-annual review.

Mr. Cunnane stated that the department shrank while the population went from 54,000 to 80,000 and the number of apparatus was reduced. He stated that we have to learn how to grow the department again. No vote was taken.

No vote was taken.

5. Discussion regarding the purchase of a fire ladder truck and pumper from Fund balance.

Mr. Brimmer stated that it was also an item on the Finance Committee today. He said Fire Committee was not a place to discuss the funding, but more of the operations side. He asked that Mr. Cunnane to introduce the agenda item.

Mr. Cunnane stated that stated that over the last 10 years the department went from four ladder trucks to two ladder trucks. He stated that this would bring the department back to three ladders. Adding a ladder truck back to the Six Mile station adds coverage back to the center of Town. He noted that having ladder trucks on scene makes firefighters

safer and allows firefighters to go inside and put out the fire. Mr. Cunnane stated that he wanted it to come from fund balance because that money was the result of prudent financial management. He noted that as the fire department was reducing in size the fund balance was growing. He stated that the reason to also buy the engine was because it is the oldest front-line apparatus at 13 years old and that by the end of the strategic plan it would be 18 years old.

Chief Mixon stated that engine was the next one that was scheduled to be replaced and it would likely occur in FY2021.

Mr. Cunnane stated that it was reasonable now to use fund balance to buy new fire apparatus.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that the fund balance increase came from a savings in all departments and not just from the Fire Department.

Mr. Owens asked Chief Mixon to explain the time frame for the need of both trucks.

Chief Mixon stated that for the ladder truck the department was trying to coincide its purchase with the completion of fire station #4. He noted that if it was purchased now it would have to be housed in temporary housing. He noted that the engine is scheduled to be replaced in the same budget year as the new ladder.

Mr. Owens asked if there were older apparatus.

Chief Mixon stated that the reserve apparatus are older and were purchased in 2002. He noted that when trucks go down for maintenance the reserve apparatus is used.

Mr. Brimmer stated that as we grow there is a need for new apparatus and there is also a plan for implementation. He asked that Ms. Cotov to provide her feedback on purchasing items out of fund balance.

Ms. Cotov stated that her department is still working on the five-year plan. She noted that when it is present it will be balanced. She noted that a replacement ladder is scheduled for FY22 and an engine and new ladder is in FY21. She stated that her department is on course to have most of it funded by different methods such as hospitality tax. She noted that once that money is used it is very difficult to put it back in the fund. Ms. Cotov said the Town has benefited from not budgeting off growth and that when construction slows the Town is in a good position. She noted that the bonding agencies want to see more than the traditional 25%.

Mr. Brimmer stated that there are a lot of ancillary cost such as maintenance, equipment, and personnel that go along with the purchase of a new truck.

Mr. DeMoura noted that it was an excellent idea to purchase a piece of fire apparatus out of fund balance. He stated that we are very strong in our fund balance. He stated that what is really being discussed here is how discretionary funds are utilized. He said that those funds are strongly competed for and there is a demand to fund judgements, lawsuits, and property purchases.

Mr. Brimmer asked for a motion on the item.

Mr. DeMoura recommended that Council develop a spend down plan to fund one-time expensive purchases.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that the plan should encompass the entire Town and not just fire.

Mr. Brimmer asked if Mr. DeMoura was recommending spending the money of a ladder truck in the coming year.

Mr. DeMoura stated he was advising Council to create a spend down plan like other municipalities have used.

Mr. O'Rourke asked if the concept of a plan could be taken to Finance Committee in April.

Mr. DeMoura noted that if some of the executive session action items go in a particular direction there may not be a need for a plan.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that having the outline of a plan may be beneficial.

Mr. Brimmer stated that a motion and a second would be needed for further discussion.

Mr. Cunnane made a motion to send the discussion to Finance Committee.

No second was given. Motion fails for lack of a second.

6. Discussion regarding the pursuit of a Safer grant for the hiring of firefighters.

Mr. Brimmer stated that this item was also taken up in Finance Committee. He asked Mr. Cunnane to introduce the item.

Mr. Cunnane stated that it is to address the staffing issue. He mentioned that one way to get additional staffing was through funding from the SAFER grant. He noted that it gives the Town time to absorb the full cost of hiring. He mentioned that the deadline is March 22. He stated that he wanted to direct staff to complete the grant.

Mr. Brimmer stated he was fine with directing staff to pursue the grant.

Mr. DeMoura noted that there was some concern at the staff level that if the grant is awarded and not accepted it could hurt the Town's future grant request.

Mr. Brimmer stated that it sounded like it was best not to apply unless the Town was serious about taking it.

Chief Mixon stated that one of the first questions on any federal grant is have you ever received a grant and turned it down. It becomes a mark on your record. He stated that if we decline a grant or mismanage the funding it could affect funding in future years. Chief Mixon stated that to pursue the grant some clear direction and dedication to the funding is needed first.

Mr. Brimmer stated that one of the questions that came up in Finance was how many firefighters were needed.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that there may not be a specific number, but more of what we need to get to the four personnel.

Mr. Cunnane noted that we would not get there in one year because you have to train them all. The idea is to use grant funds for as many positions as possible during the grant funding period.

Mr. Brimmer noted that there was a significant local match to fund the grant.

Mr. Cunnane stated that the Town would receive \$1.5 million in federal funds.

Mr. Owens asked if the Town has ever received this grant.

Mr. DeMoura stated that the Town has received funds of this type.

Mr. Owens asked what the success rate would be moving forward.

Mr. DeMoura stated that the chance was pretty high of receiving the grant, but it depends on what the grant was focusing on during this period. He believes that it is important to take that posture that if we apply we will likely get the grant. He advised that it is currently unfunded, and it may be of benefit to ask for a small amount.

Mr. Brimmer asked if we were more likely to receive the grant if a smaller amount was asked.

Mr. DeMoura stated that he was not sure if that would affect it.

Chief Mixon stated that the department has only 180 days to recruit and train the firefighters. He agreed with Mr. DeMoura that it may be best to start with a smaller number to ensure success.

Mr. Owens stated you must find the people and somewhere to put them.

Mr. Cunnane stated that 12 was a good number because it was how many were needed for the new ladder. He said that if we get them ahead of time the newer personnel could be trained.

Chief Mixon stated that 15 firefighters were actually needed to staff the new ladder to keep the minimum at four personnel.

Mr. Cunnane stated that what would be a functional number. Would 9 or 12 be more reasonable.

Chief Mixon stated that 9 or 15 is feasible, but he has some apprehension because the fire department has received federal grants in the past. He wants to do it right so chances aren't hurt in the future.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that he agreed, and he felt 6 was a safe number and it could be done yearly.

Mr. O'Rourke made a motion to direct staff to apply for funding for 6 firefighters through the SAFER Grant. Mr. Cunnane provided a second.

Mr. DeMoura asked where does Council fit in on this item.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that it has to go to Council for approval.

Mr. Cunnane stated grants traditionally get Council approval until after they have been awarded.

Mr. Brimmer felt that it would be prudent in this case to get approval.

Mr. Brimmer called for the vote. Motion passed unanimously. 4-0

7. Adjourn

There being no further business, meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mike Mixon, Jr
March 7, 2019