

## **December 5, 2024 Meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners**

### **District #3 in the Township of Hanover**

### **County of Morris, Cedar Knolls, New Jersey**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. on December 5, 2024 in accordance with the Public Meeting Act of 1975, Chapter 231. The Board observed a moment of silence for all those who have given their lives in service of their communities and nation.

**ATTENDANCE:** Commissioners Steven Cornine, Mary Lou DeSimone, Michael Dugan Jr., Michael Dugan Sr. and Gary Keyser were present.

Administrator Schultz, Deputy Administrator Hark Jr., Lt. Belott, FF Colin, EMT Harrington, EMT Waldron, and members of the public were also in attendance.

**DEPART FROM NORMAL AGENDA:** The Board departed from the normal agenda for the swearing in of FF/EMT Bergman. The Board welcomed FF/EMT Bergman's family and friends. Commissioner Cornine swore in FF/EMT Bergman while his wife held the Bible.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** Ms. Atkinson said that the meeting minutes reflect that some of the Consolidation Committees had met and asked which of the Consolidation Committees had not met yet. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Committee has not met to date. Commissioner Cornine reported that the District 2 Commissioners did not participate in some of the committee meetings but they will have a chance to be heard when the decisions made by the committee are voted on at a Joint Board Meeting.

**CORRESPONDENCE:** None.

### **APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES:**

**The minutes from the November 21, 2024 Regular Meeting were reviewed.**

**Amendments to the Previous Minutes: Commissioner Keyser reported that on page 2 it states that Commissioner Dugan Sr. distributed the 2025 draft budget, it should say that 2025 budget workpapers were distributed.**

**Commissioner DeSimone made a motion to approve the amended minutes from the November 21, 2024 Regular Meeting, seconded by Commissioner Dugan Sr. All were in favor. Commissioners Cornine and Dugan Jr. abstained.**

**The minutes from the October 17, 2024 Executive Session were reviewed.**

**Amendments to the Previous Minutes: None.**

**Commissioner Keyser made a motion to approve the minutes from the October 17, 2024 Executive Session, seconded by Commissioner Dugan Sr. All were in favor.**

**The minutes from the November 7, 2024 Executive Session were reviewed.**

**Amendments to the Previous Minutes: None.**

**Commissioner Keyser made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 7, 2024 Executive Session, seconded by Commissioner Dugan Sr. All were in favor.**

**REPORT OF THE TREASURER:** Commissioner Dugan Sr. distributed the November financials which indicates that through 91.6% of the year the District has spent almost 98.3% of the budget. Commissioner Dugan Sr. indicated that the District will probably exceed the budget.

**Report of Fire Commissioner Board Committees and Chief of Department:**

**MONTHLY REPORTS:** Commissioner Cornine reported that Asst. Chief Costello would have a report for the next meeting.

**EMS:** None.

**BUDGET:** Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that there is a budget before the Board to be introduced tonight. Commissioner Dugan Sr. distributed copies of the 2025 Budget for the Board to review. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the budget will be discussed under New Business.

**PERSONNEL:** Commissioner DeSimone reported that the Board would need an Executive Session tonight.

**NEGOTIATIONS:** Nothing to report.

**LIAISON TO THE VOLUNTEERS:** Commissioner Dugan Jr. reported that there would be a meeting on Monday.

**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS:** Commissioner Dugan Jr. thanked everyone who helped with the Holiday Tree Lighting on Saturday.

**APPARATUS/EQUIPMENT AND MAINTENANCE:** Commissioner Dugan Jr. reported that Ambulance 32 will be out of service for at least 6 weeks for repairs.

**INSURANCE:** Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that he would discuss the increases in insurance under the Old Business 2025 Budget discussion.

**BY-LAWS:** Nothing to report.

**WEBSITE:** Up to date.

**PLANNING COMMITTEE:** Nothing to report.

**LIASON TO EXEMPTS:** Nothing to report.

**RECORDS RETENTION:** Nothing to report.

**LIAISON TO HANOVER TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE:** Commissioner Keyser reported that the Township will have the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading and adopt the Fire Prevention Ordinances at its next meeting.

**OLD BUSINESS:** Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the District is looking to move forward with a Joint ERS software package with District 2. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. that the quote would be \$4900 for each District and District 3 is currently paying \$5100. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that there would not be much savings but that the District needs to move forward to be compliant with the NFIRS uploads. Commissioner Cornine asked if the cost would come from the 2025 budget. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that cost would come from the 2025 budget but that he hoped that the contract would be signed this year.

**NEW BUSINESS:** Administrator Schultz asked that the 2025 Budget be distributed to the Board. Commissioner Cornine reported that the Board had the budget paperwork. Commissioner Keyser asked where the actual 2025 Budget package was. Administrator Schultz reported that the District accountant is preparing the 2025 budget package based on the figures provided by the District which are included in the paperwork that the Board is looking at. Commissioner Keyser questioned how the Board could vote on a proposed budget if the Board doesn't have it. Administrator Schultz reported that he spoke to the District accountant and to legal counsel who both concur that the Board can introduce the 2025 Budget tonight as long as the Board has the numbers in front of them. Commissioner Keyser reported that the Board does not have the whole budget only the proposed P&L. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the document before the Board has all the numbers that will be in the Budget. Commissioner Keyser felt that the budgeted P&L was not the 2025 Budget package and he wants to read what is in the package before voting to introduce the budget. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the District would need to have a Special Meeting on December 16<sup>th</sup> if the Board wants to wait until the proposed 2025

Budget Package from the accountant. Commissioner Cornine asked what additional information would be included in the package from the accountant. Administrator Schultz reported that the accountant takes the District Budget and puts it in the State format and adds required information such as listing the Commissioners, identifying the Township ratable, and other information about the numbers included in the budget document currently before the Board. Commissioner Keyser produced the 2024 Budget package. Commissioner Cornine respected that Commissioner Keyser feels strongly against introducing the budget based on the current document while he is leaning towards going with legal counsel's advice and is willing to have the resolution introducing the 2025 budget to be read and voted on. Commissioner Cornine asked if anyone had questions on any of the numbers included in the document before them. Commissioner Cornine asked if all that was learned in the various ups and downs this year were accounted for in the 2025 Budget. Administrator Schultz reported that the Treasurer and Administration met for 3 hours today going over everything and have considered the areas where the District was restricted from doing things because the referendum was voted down last year. Administrator Schultz reported that while the 2025 Budget is a move forward, it is still an austere budget. Administrator Schultz reported that while he would love to be able to raise as much funds as the District could possibly need to be as comfortable as the District possibly could but the emphasis on this budget is making sure that the District provides the same level of services, are able to maintain our equipment and apparatus, and maybe do a couple of things with the building for our personnel to make them more comfortable. Commissioner Cornine asked if the budget document indicates what the overage of expenses over income would be that would need to be raised through referendum. Administrator Schultz indicated that the overage is \$340,000 over the allowable 2% tax increase. Commissioner Dugan Sr. noted that if the referendum had passed last year then the District would only be going for a \$140,000 referendum this year. Commissioner Keyser noted that the 2025 budget document indicates that the income equals expenses and asked how much money is being raised through taxation. Commissioner Cornine reported that City Tax income is \$2,242,955 on line 2010 of the budget document. Commissioner Keyser asked what percent the taxes are increasing over last year. Administrator Schultz reported that taxes are increasing about 8% or 11% with the referendum. Commissioner Keyser asked if the referendum is going to be a separate line item. Administrator Schultz reported that the referendum has to be a separate question on the budget ballot.

Administrator Schultz reported that for the average *assessed* home value of \$600,000 the tax would increase by \$25 a month. Commissioner Keyser questioned why the Board had to wait until the day of the meeting to get the budget document. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the District received some budget numbers from the State in Tuesday. Administrator Schultz noted that the employer pension contributions are increasing almost \$100,000 in 2025 and the figures were not released until 1 P.M. on Tuesday. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. noted that there have been impromptu budget meetings and emails going back and forth as late as 1 A.M. in an effort to craft this budget.

Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that even if this budget passes the District will still not be able to spend money on discretionary items until June of 2025 because the tax money will be dedicated predominately to payroll, insurance, and the employer pension payment due in April. Commissioner Dugan Sr. noted that if the referendum is not passed then the District will be in trouble. Commissioner Cornine asked if a Plan B has been considered by the budgetary committee.

Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that there is a Plan B if the referendum fails and it requires cutting salaries. Commissioner Dugan Sr. distributed a list of the expense lines that would be cut if the referendum fails to the Board.

Commissioner Cornine reported that it is his understanding that the District will make a great effort to get this information out to the public with the pros and cons of supporting the District budget and referendum. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that he and Administration met with an advertising agency on Tuesday that specializes in referendums. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the agency has a 95% success rate but that it comes at a cost of up to \$15,000.

Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the cost will be determined by which of the offered services the District decides to utilize. Commissioner Dugan Sr. could not stress enough that the District needs the referendum to pass and highlighted that the District has postponed about \$15,000 in apparatus maintenance that needs to be done next year and the routine maintenance costs have been rising by more than 2% over the past years. Commissioner Cornine felt that the District will have to work with the advertising agency to get the maximum return for the minimum cost.

Commissioner Cornine asked if there was any other New Business. There was none.

## **REMINDERS**

The next Regular Meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners will be held on Thursday, December 19, 2024 at 7:00 P.M.

A Special Joint Fire Prevention Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 17, 2024 at 7:00 P.M. at the District 2 Firehouse.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** None.

**RESOLUTIONS:**

**Commissioner DeSimone read Resolution 24-12-05-134 appointing Specialty Services. Commissioner Dugan Jr. made a motion to introduce the resolution, seconded by Commissioner Dugan Sr. Commissioner Keyser asked if there was any local agency that the District could use. Administrator Schultz reported that former Chief Davidson was familiar with this agency and recommended them to the District. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the agency has a large client list from New Jersey. Commissioners Cornine, DeSimone, Dugan Jr., and Dugan Sr. were in favor. Commissioner Keyser was opposed.**

**Commissioner DeSimone read Resolution 24-12-05-135 introducing the 2025 Budget. Commissioner Dugan Sr. made a motion to introduce the resolution, seconded by Commissioner Dugan Jr. Commissioners Cornine, DeSimone, Dugan Jr., and Dugan Sr. were in favor. Commissioner Keyser was opposed.**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION: Commissioner DeSimone read Resolution 24-12-05-136 to enter into executive session. Commissioner Dugan Jr. made a motion to introduce the resolution, seconded by Commissioner Keyser. All were in favor.**

**The Board went into closed session at 7:40 p.m.**

Personnel matters were discussed, and action will be taken.

**The Board came out of closed session at 8:24 p.m.**

**RESOLUTIONS:**

**Commissioner DeSimone read Resolution 24-12-05-137 appointing a Career Assistant Chief. Commissioner Keyser made a motion to introduce the resolution, seconded by Commissioner Dugan Sr. All were in favor.**

**Commissioner Cornine reported that the District needs to introduce a new title of Deputy Fire Chief. Commissioner Keyser made a motion to move forward with the new title of Deputy Fire Chief, seconded by Commissioner Dugan Sr. All were in favor.**

**ADJOURN: A motion was made by Commissioner Keyser, seconded by Commissioner Dugan Jr., to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

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Mary Lou DeSimone, Secretary