

## **September 18, 2025 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 September 18, 2025 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 Mary Lou DeSimone, Michael Dugan Sr., Robert Gallagher, Thomas Harrington, and Gary Keyser were present.

Administrator Hark Jr., Deputy Administrator Schultz, Asst. Chief McGuinness, Lt. Gilson, and members of the public were also in attendance.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** None.

**CORRESPONDENCE:** None.

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

**The minutes from the September 4, 2025 Regular Meeting were reviewed.**

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

**Commissioner DeSimone made a motion to approve the minutes from the September 4, 2025 Regular Meeting, seconded by Commissioner Gallagher. All were in favor.**

**The minutes from the August 14, 2025 Special Executive Session were reviewed.**

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

**Commissioner Harrington made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 14, 2025 Special Executive Session, seconded by Commissioner Gallagher. All were in favor.**

**REPORT OF THE TREASURER:** Commissioner Dugan Sr. distributed interim September 2025 financials and reported that through 75% of the year the District has spent 75.4% of the budget. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that things are still tight.

Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the Board was signing checks totaling \$88,000 tonight.

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

**MONTHLY REPORTS:** Asst. Chief McGuinness distributed his Monthly Report and the Lieutenants' Reports prior to the meeting and asked if there were any questions.

Commissioner DeSimone asked when the PHTLS class would be offered in 2026. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported that the class would be offered in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2026 but did not have a hard date. Administrator Hark Jr. clarified that the PHTLS class would be held in February 2026 and the EMS Core classes would be held in March 2026.

Commissioner Harrington noted that the Fire Prevention registration fee income was running a little behind and asked for an explanation. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported that the District is chasing down delinquent payments and noted that there is one business that owes the District almost \$10,000.

Commissioner DeSimone asked for clarification on the new FT EMTs schedule. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported that the District needs coverage on weekends so he has the EMT working one weekend shift and two weekday shifts.

Commissioner Keyser noted that the Power Truck does not seem to be running in September. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported that the priority is to get the regular EMS schedule filled before the District starts trying to man an additional ambulance.

Commissioner Keyser asked how many members participated in the recent live burn training. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported that only the on-duty staff and Deputy Chief Costello participated but noted that there is another live burn scheduled in October.

Commissioner Keyser noted that the report indicated that Ambulance 39 is out for warranty work and asked how long it would be out. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported that Ambulance 39 will be picked up tomorrow.

Commissioner Keyser asked what big event is happening at the Marriott and what date it will be held. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported that the District will be providing fire watch service October 24-25 at the Hanover Marriott for a Chill Out Halloween Expo. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported the he is working with the Marriott, Hanover Police, and OEM because thousands of people are expected to attend the event over the 2 days.

Commissioner Harrington asked if the reported Power Truck numbers for August were in fact 6 total calls over 2 shifts. Asst. Chief McGuinness confirmed that the

Power Truck numbers were correct. Commissioner Harrington asked if the 2025 year-to-date Power Truck figures could be provided for the next meeting.

Commissioner DeSimone asked for clarification that the Power Truck was not getting staffed is because of trouble staffing it or because people do not want to ride it. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported that the issue is purely availability of staff not because they do not want to ride the Power Truck.

Commissioner Keyser congratulated Lt. Sulpy, EMT Schneider, and EMT Waldron for a CPR save. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported that they did an accommodation for them and noted that the individual ended up walking out of the hospital.

**EMS:** Commissioner Keyser reported that he spoke with the Deputy Chief of Morristown regarding District 3 EMTs going into Morristown. Commissioner Keyser noted that Morristown has a contract with Atlantic Health for 2 ambulances to be in Morristown. Commissioner Keyser reported that his problem is that when mutual aid requires District 3 send 2 FF/EMTs to Morristown when there are 6 Morristown FF/EMTs sitting in their station with an ambulance. Commissioner Keyser reported that Morristown informed him that their ambulance has mechanical issues that they are not planning to repair but they will speak to Atlantic Health to straighten out this issue.

**BUDGET:** Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the Board would discuss the preliminary 2026 Budget tonight under Old Business.

**PERSONNEL:** Commissioner DeSimone reported that the Board needs to go in to Executive Session.

**NEGOTIATIONS:** Nothing to report.

**LIAISON TO THE VOLUNTEERS:** Commissioner Harrington reported that the Fire Co. is hosting the Open House at the firehouse on September 20, 2025 from 3 PM to 7 PM.

**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS:** Commissioner Gallagher reported that the grounds are looking good. Commissioner Gallagher reported that the sink in the bathroom on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor is leaking. Asst. Chief McGuinness reported that he will ask Lt. Belott to contact a plumber tomorrow but the water is currently turned off.

**APPARATUS/EQUIPMENT AND MAINTENANCE:** Nothing to report.

**INSURANCE:** Nothing to report.

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

**WEBSITE:** Nothing to report.

**PLANNING COMMITTEE:** Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the architect was out last Friday to measure the building and he hopes to hear from them soon with a renovation idea.

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

**RECORDS RETENTION:** Nothing to report.

**LIAISON TO HANOVER TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE:** Commissioner Keyser reported that the District is meeting with the Town on Monday.

**OLD BUSINESS:** Deputy Administrator Schultz reported that he hopes to sign a new contract with the agent for the Post Office regarding the parking lot rental in October.

Commissioner Keyser reported that the Board has copies of the scope to get quotes to paint the building and asked if everyone agreed with the scope. Everyone on the Board agreed with the scope.

Commissioner Harrington reported that he has been a part of consolidation proposals with District 2 on 3 different occasions. Commissioner Harrington reported that he was not at the last Joint Board meeting to discuss consolidation but his understanding is that the discussions ended the same as the prior occasions, if not worse. Commissioner Harrington felt that it is time for this Board to let the residents of Hanover Township know what is going on. Commissioner Harrington reported that District 3 goes back and forth with District 2, give them numbers, have the District 3 Administrator get them any information they want, and District 2 does nothing to further the process. Commissioner Harrington felt that District 3 should let the public know and let the Town Committee start doing something to move the consolidation process along. Commissioner Harrington reported that the consolidation discussions between the 2 Fire Districts are in the same place as they were 10 years ago and District 3 never involved the residents and/or Town back then. Commissioner Harrington felt that District 3 should make the choice to involve both the residents and Town this time. Commissioner Harrington felt that all the District 2 Board wants is for District 3 to provide them with EMS service. Commissioner Desimone clarified that District 2 wanted EMS service for free. Commissioner Harrington reported that he has just had enough and does not know if he wants to attend more futile meetings. Commissioner Harrington felt that if the residents know what is going on then perhaps things

will change. Commissioner Keyser felt that District 3 made a case for providing the best quality EMS service and that District 2 agreed. Commissioner Keyser reported that he was shocked when District 2 brought up looking into Atlantic Health again at the last Joint Board meeting. Commissioner Keyser felt that it all comes down to services; District 3 wants to provide the best services they can for the residents while it appears that District 2 is not as concerned with this as much as keeping the taxes low. Commissioner Keyser noted that the quality of service that District 2 wants to provide is not District 3's business. Commissioner Harrington reminded Commissioner Keyser that the fight should be to achieve one uniform tax rate in Hanover Township. Commissioner Keyser reported that it bothers him is that from 8 PM to 6 AM District 2 is getting a free service from District 3 career staff when the volunteers do not respond. Commissioner Keyser felt that perhaps District 3 should not respond to District 2 during those hours. Commissioner Gallagher understood the frustration that Commissioner Keyser felt but pointed out that the residents should not have to pay for a political dispute. Commissioner Harrington noted that District 3 is doing right by the residents by utilizing compensated staff to ensure coverage but it comes at a cost. Commissioner DeSimone noted that the District 2 Board also reported that there have been complaints from residents about the EMS service, primarily billing, that District 3 provides but could not point to many specific complaints. Ms. Atkinson felt that if the District 2 residents were really complaining about EMS, they would have submitted written complaints or come to a meeting. Ms. Atkinson felt that the couple of District 2 individuals who stated they called District 3 about balance billing going to collections would have pursued it further if they were that upset instead of letting it drop and paying the balance. Commissioner Keyser noted that a couple District 3 commissioners regularly attend the District 2 Board meetings and the issue of EMS complaints has never been brought up. Commissioner Keyser reiterated that maybe having District 3 not respond to District 2 between 8 PM and 6 AM would force District 2 to act. Commissioner Dugan Sr. agreed with Commissioner Gallagher that while the disparity is extremely frustrating, the Districts are here to serve the residents and to withhold that service is wrong. Commissioner Dugan Sr. illustrated that withholding the service could actually harm a District 3 resident if that resident is involved in a motor vehicle crash in District 2. Commissioner Dugan Sr. felt that if you state that your mission is to serve the residents then you have to serve them at all times. Commissioner Gallagher felt that District 3 should respond to District 2 but also find a way to let the Whippany residents know that District 3 is providing

service to them where their team is not. Commissioner Gallagher felt that most Whippany residents are not aware that District 3 career staff have been responding to calls in Whippany between 8 PM and 6 AM and the District 2 crews are not getting out of bed. Commissioner Harrington felt that the taxpayers of both Districts need to know what is going on. Commissioner Dugan Sr. noted that District 3 has tried to reach out to the taxpayers but it does not seem like they care to participate in the Fire District business. Commissioner Harrington felt that the District 3 taxpayers are fine. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reminded him that only 200 people came out to vote in the last District 3 election and he felt that is because most people do not even know what a fire district is or how Fire / EMS service work in Hanover Township. Commissioner Gallagher felt that as long as residents see a fire engine or ambulance pull up when they need one they do not care about much else. Commissioner Dugan Sr. agreed. Commissioner DeSimone felt that this is why there is a meeting in October to educate the residents. Commissioner Dugan Sr. felt that unless the Board goes door to door handing out flyers and talking with residents or reaches out to them as they move in to Hanover Township that nothing is going to change. Commissioner Keyser pointed out that there was a year when District 3 EMS was going into District 2 without being compensated that the District 3 residents voted down the budget. Commissioner Harrington felt that the Township needs to get involved because the Town gets more response from the voters than the Fire Districts. Commissioner Keyser suggested the Board move on to discuss the 2026 Budget.

Commissioner Keyser reported that after reviewing the proposed 2026 Budget, he informed Commissioner Dugan Sr. that he is not happy with the proposed budget and the referendum. Commissioner Keyser felt that a referendum of that amount would not pass in this District. Commissioner Dugan Sr. agreed that it would not pass and he would like to hear some ideas on how to decrease expenses. Commissioner Gallagher reported that he had some ideas but he is not sure the Board will like them. Commissioner Gallagher asked what the \$8500 in Misc. Income in the budget represented. The bookkeeper reported that Misc. Income is unanticipated income and the District should not be budgeting for it. Commissioner Keyser reminded the Board that the salaries portion of the 2026 Budget would be discussed in Executive Session. Commissioner Keyser asked why there was such a big jump in health insurance. Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the District needs to budget for all staff who qualify for medical coverage whether they choose to take it or not. Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the 2026 health insurance figure represents the maximum exposure to the District if

all eligible current staff choose to take health care along with the 2 FT EMTs that the District would like to hire next year. Commissioner DeSimone asked for clarification that the District insurance agent looks at different carriers when recommending health plans each year. Administrator Hark Jr. confirmed that the insurance agent looks at rates from different carriers. Commissioner DeSimone asked how the \$10,000 car maintenance budget was derived. Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the figure is based on the amount spent on car maintenance so far in 2025 and noted that it is for all the command vehicles, not just the Chief's car. Commissioner Keyser noted that there is \$65,000 budgeted under capital purchases for another command vehicle and he does not feel the District can afford it at this time. Administrator Hark Jr. noted that eliminating this capital item would not reduce the referendum amount and reported that there is about \$17,000 worth of repairs needed for the existing command vehicles that the District has held off on. Commissioner DeSimone asked if the District could look into leasing a command vehicle. Commissioner Keyser reported that he did not know if this was an option but noted that \$65,000 is not a lot of money for a command vehicle. Commissioner Harrington reported that he is against purchasing a command vehicle because the District needs money for a lot of other things. Commissioner Dugan Sr. asked the Board what they would be comfortable with for a referendum. Commissioner Gallagher felt that any referendum will not pass and felt that the District should hold off on any apparatus purchases and hiring. Commissioner Gallagher noted that he would hate to see anyone get hired and then face the immediate possibility of being let go due to budget constraints. Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the referendum figure is needed to allow the District to continue to provide the services that it currently provides and any discussion on salaries should be had in executive session. Commissioner DeSimone asked if District 2 can subsidize the cost of providing EMS service to their District. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that this is not an option and questioned why they would suddenly want to pay for a service they are currently getting for free. Commissioner Gallagher asked if the Town can help subsidize the cost of EMS provided to District 2. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that he plans to address this at the meeting with the Town on Monday and ask them to put the maximum allowable subsidy of about \$150,000 in their 2026 budget. Commissioner Dugan Sr. noted that the Town does not have to do this and any subsidy would be an item subject to being removed if the Town needs to cut their budget. Commissioner Keyser noted that the fire district is not the only one facing hardship, the school district, Town and sewer authority

are all having the same problems that this district is having. Commissioner Dugan Sr. believes that Hanover Township residents have enjoyed low taxes for a long time but when there is no new space to build, which has happened in Cedar Knolls, then taxes will start to increase. Commissioner Dugan Sr. felt that eventually Whippany will be in the same predicament and their taxes will need to be increased along with the overall taxes in Town. Commissioner Keyser asked if there was anything else regarding the 2026 budget that can be discussed in public session. Commissioner Keyser reported that he was not comfortable with a \$600,000 referendum for operating expenses and the referendum could continue to rise each year. Commissioner Keyser felt that at this rate both the budget and referendum will be voted down which means that the District will go under and the Town will have to take over. Commissioner Harrington felt that if the residents vote down the referendum, it is the taxpayers talking and there is nothing that the District can do about that. Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the District needs to make sure that it does everything it can to explain why our numbers are where they are. Commissioner Keyser felt that the District can explain how the Fire District runs, how much everything costs, and how the District is funded to the public at the Special Meeting on October 20<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Keyser noted that the District is not going to go through the 2026 budget at this meeting. Commissioner Dugan Sr. felt that the residents have to understand that just like their cost of living goes up, the District cost of doing business goes up also for a lot of the same items. Commissioner DeSimone felt that the staff need to be cognizant of the cost to heat the building and make sure to leave the bay doors closed in the cold weather because every little bit will help. Commissioner Gallagher felt that the Board will have to work to see what items in the budget can be brought down a little. Commissioner Gallagher noted that in the meantime the building is falling into disrepair. Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the 2026 numbers are being examined a few times a week and adjusted to reflect current operating cost. Commissioner Gallagher felt that the only thing the District can do is make the residents aware of reasons behind the increasing budget numbers. Commissioner Gallagher asked what the referendum number would be with this preliminary 2026 budget. Administrator Hark Jr. reported that there are still figures such as pension that have not come in yet but this budget would require a \$680,000 referendum. Administrator Hark Jr. reported that some of these line items will come down but there is no possible way that the referendum can go below \$500,000 and still provide the services that the District is providing currently. Commissioner Keyser reported that there



was a lot of campaigning done to get the referendum passed last year and it will be more difficult this year to get one passed. The Board agreed to continue the discussion in Executive Session.

Commissioner Keyser asked Administrator Hark Jr. if he is working on getting the call numbers that one of the District 2 commissioners requested. Administrator Hark Jr. reported that one of the 2024 numbers have been provided to District 2 and the other number is not one that District 3 is able to provide but has been requested from the County. Administrator Hark Jr. noted that the 2025 numbers are still being compiled.

**NEW BUSINESS:** None.

**REMINDERS:**

The next Regular Meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners will be held on Thursday, October 2, 2025 at 7:00 P.M.

A Special Meeting of the Joint Fire Prevention Board will be held on Monday, October 27, 2025 at 7 P.M. at the District 3 Firehouse.

The next scheduled Joint Fire Prevention Board Meeting will be held on Monday, December 8, 2025 at 6:30 P.M. at the District 2 Firehouse.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** None.

**RESOLUTIONS:** Commissioner Gallagher asked if anyone had objections to approving the resolutions by consent agenda. There were no objections.

**Commissioner Gallagher read Resolution 25-09-18-96 offering a COE be extended to Volunteer Junior EMT E. Patel.**

**Commissioner Gallagher read Resolution 25-09-18-97 offering a COE be extended to Volunteer Junior EMT Ferrante.**

**Commissioner Harrington made a motion to introduce the resolutions, seconded by Commissioner DeSimone. All were in favor.**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:** Commissioner Gallagher read Resolution 25-09-18-98 to enter into executive session. Commissioner Harrington made a motion to introduce the resolution, seconded by Commissioner Gallagher. All were in favor.

**The Board went into closed session at 8:05 p.m.**

Personnel matters were discussed, and action will be taken.

**The Board came out of closed session at 8:51 p.m.**

Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the FT EMT application process has closed. Commissioner Dugan Sr. made a move forward with the hiring process for FT EMT, seconded by Commissioner DeSimone. All were in favor.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

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Robert Gallagher, Secretary