

November 21, 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 November 21, 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 Mary Lou DeSimone, Michael Dugan Sr. and Gary Keyser were present. Commissioners Steven Cornine and Michael Dugan Jr. were absent.

Deputy Administrator Hark Jr., FF DiGiacomo, FF Gilson, FF Martin, EMT Bergman, and members of the public were also in attendance.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: None.

CORRESPONDENCE: Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the District received a letter from the Morris Township Fire Department. Commissioner Desimone reported that the letter is regarding a regional SAFER Grant that will allow participating departments to receive funding to hire 4 additional firefighters. Commissioner Desimone reported that the letter stated that this will enhance their operational capacity and ensure a more robust response to emergencies within our communities. Commissioner Desimone reported that the District should contact Chief Nunn if we want to participate in the regional grant application. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the District has been looking into the SAFER Grant itself and will respond back to Chief Dunn affirming our interest.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES:

The minutes from the November 7, 2024 Regular Meeting were reviewed.

Amendments to the Previous Minutes: None.

Commissioner Dugan Sr. made a motion to approve the minutes from the October 17, 2024 Regular Meeting, seconded by Commissioner DeSimone. All were in favor. Commissioners Cornine and Dugan Jr. were absent.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER: Commissioner Dugan Sr. distributed interim November financials which indicates that through 91.6% of the year the District has spent almost 96% of the budget. Commissioner Dugan Sr. felt that the District

will exceed the budget this year. Commissioner Keyser asked where the District gets the money if it exceeds the budget. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that it comes out of savings. Commissioner Keyser asked if the District would have a resolution approving budget transfers. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the District may have a resolution to approve budget transfers but these only transfer money between the State statutory lines and do not help if the District exceeds the total budgeted expenses. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the District balance sheet shows that the District has about \$50,000 in the bank and while the District has received the 4th quarter tax check, it has to last until the end of February 2025. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the District is averaging between \$55,000 and \$60,000 for each payroll so salary alone will eat up much of the tax check. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the District is still in trouble. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that he will discuss the 2025 budget later but the District will be going for a referendum to cover operating expenses and if the residents do not pass the referendum the District may go under.

Report of Fire Commissioner Board Committees and Chief of Department:

MONTHLY REPORTS: No report from Asst. Chief Costello.

EMS: Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that Ambulance 32 should be picked up the 1st week of December for the outstanding repairs and it will be out of service for 5-6 weeks.

BUDGET: Commissioner Dugan Sr. distributed 2025 Budget workpapers for the Board to review and indicated that the District will be going for a referendum to cover operating expenses. Commissioner Keyser asked what percent the referendum come out to. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the percent increase of the referendum has not been calculated yet because the budget workpapers are still in draft form. Commissioner Keyser felt that the District has to be very careful with asking for too high a percent increase in the referendum. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the District will have to send out a letter to the residents that outlines exactly why the District is in the current financial position including the fact that the 2% cap and the referendum not passing last year has resulted in deficit spending that the District is not able to continue to do. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the District's accountant has advised the District to send out a letter to the residents outlining the reasons for the increased expenses and to include a link that would allow the individual residents to see what the specific increase would be for them. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. noted that if the referendum had passed last year the District would be

operating within budget. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the District is still trying to catch up from years of utilizing savings to cover any budget overage. Commissioner Keyser felt that the problem is that residents will toss the letters without reading them. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that the recommendation is that the envelope be marked to indicate that there is important information enclosed and to state on Facebook that residents will be receiving a letter. Ms. Atkinson felt that posting something on social media and / or going to a Senior Meeting to explain the reasons for the referendum would help. Commissioner Keyser asked if the percent increase will be included in the final budget. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the information will be available when the budget is finalized and there will be a calculator on the District website that will allow residents to put in the assessed value of their home and calculate the dollar increase in taxes for the proposed percent increase. Commissioner Dugan Sr. felt that this will help cut down on the spreading of misinformation. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that if the District is awarded the Booker Grant next year for building repairs then the residents will be asked to contribute the 20% of the total grant award that the District will be required to put up in order to accept the grant. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the staff has done a phenomenal job keeping costs down including not going to certain non-mandatory training. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that he would like to see some money for this training in the 2025 budget so that the staff has the opportunity to better themselves if they want to. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. noted that the cost of preventative maintenance on the apparatus has gone up significantly over the years also. Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the 2025 Budget calendar indicating the important dates in the budget process was sent out to the Board last week.

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

NEGOTIATIONS: Nothing to report.

LIAISON TO THE VOLUNTEERS: Nothing to report.

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS: Commissioner Dugan Sr. thanked FF DiGiacomo and FF Shay for getting the fallen leaves to the curb for pickup.

APPARATUS/EQUIPMENT AND MAINTENANCE: Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that Ambulance 39 will need preventative maintenance that will be scheduled to ensure that the District is not down 2 ambulances at the same time.

INSURANCE: Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that a check for Worker's Compensation Insurance premium was paid last week and there will be a Property and Vehicle Insurance installment due in December.

BY-LAWS: Nothing to report.

WEBSITE: Nothing to report.

Administrator Schultz joined the meeting at 7:19 P.M.

PLANNING COMMITTEE: Commissioner Dugan Sr. reported that the Planning Committee has not met since the last Board meeting since the budget process has taken precedence. Administrator Schultz reported that Ms. Lee, the District accountant, has indicated that because of the way the budget process works the planning process has become a little less urgent because the District will not be able to bring any grant money into the budget until 2026.

LIASON TO EXEMPTS: Nothing to report.

RECORDS RETENTION: Nothing to report.

LIAISON TO HANOVER TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE: Nothing to report.

OLD BUSINESS: Commissioner Keyser reminded the Board that they are supposed to review vendors for 2025 annual physicals. Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. reported that one vendor is looking to come in next week depending on Commissioners availability.

Commissioner Keyser reported that there was a Joint Board meeting set for Tuesday night to discuss the consolidation but only one District 2 Commissioner attended so there was not a quorum and the meeting did not take place. Commissioner Keyser felt that District 2 is stalling any consolidation process. Commissioner Dugan Sr. noted that the Assets Committee held a committee meeting that night since the Joint Board meeting was cancelled and felt that other Consolidation Committees should take advantage of any time together to hold a meeting with or without District 2 participation. Commissioner Dugan Sr. felt that the 3 things needed to keep the Consolidation process going are: both Districts passing a resolution to move the District elections to November; District 2 needs to settle their union contract; and redistrict to allow the elections to move to November. Commissioner Keyser felt that if the Consolidation process goes nowhere then the Fire District lines could be changed to make areas of District 2 that District 3 can respond to quicker part of District 3. Commissioner Keyser felt that in the meantime of the Consolidation Committees are going to ask the Joint

Board to vote to approve aspects of the Consolidation Plan the plans should be sent to the Joint Board for review 48 hours before any Joint Board meeting. Commissioner Dugan Sr. felt this made sense.

NEW BUSINESS: Commissioner DeSimone reported that the Board has the letter from Morris Township asking if the District would like to be included in a regional SAFER Grant application. Administrator Schultz felt that the best path forward would be to apply for the SAFER Grant from a regional aspect. Administrator Schultz reported that a regional grant application is manually graded and have a higher chance of being approved. Administrator Schultz felt that if neighboring communities were able to increase staffing and provide more reciprocal automatic aide it would benefit all the communities. Administrator Schultz recommended that the participating Districts should consider hiring a grant writer to write the grant application and share the cost. Commissioner Keyser asked if there would be any out of pocket costs with the SAFER Grant. Administrator Schultz believed that some personnel hiring was covered 100% by the grant but that there is a 5-year commitment and the District must maintain their TO's. Administrator Schultz noted that once an organization is approved for a SAFER Grant renewing the grant after the performance period is over is relatively easy as long as the organization is living by the rules laid out in the SAFER Grant. Administrator Schultz felt the District should move forward with the regional SAFER Grant in addition to the Firefighter Grant that he and Deputy Administrator Hark Jr. will be working on for PPE and uniforms. Commissioner Keyser asked about the process for applying for the SAFER Grant. Administrator Schultz reported that a contract between the participating Districts would need to be adopted by resolution by each of the participating Districts.

Commissioner Keyser thanked the crew that was working on November 11th, Veteran's Day, and attended the services at the American Legion.

REMINDERS:

The next Regular Meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners will be held on Thursday, December 5, 2024 at 7:00 P.M.

The next Joint Fire Prevention Board Meeting will be held on Thursday, December 5, 2024 at 6:30 P.M. at the District 3 Firehouse.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: Ms. Atkinson felt that if the District does a good job of informing the residents of the reasons for the 2025 Budget and referendum, the residents will approve both of them. Ms. Atkinson noted that at the last

Township Meeting an ordinance for Fire Prevention was introduced. Commissioner Keyser reported that it was the ordinance that District 2 and 3 were working with the Township on and after the introduction there will be a hearing in the middle of December.

RESOLUTIONS:

Commissioner DeSimone read Resolution 24-11-21-131 setting 2025 Commissioner Salaries. Commissioner Dugan Sr. made a motion to introduce the resolution, seconded by Commissioner DeSimone. All were in favor. Commissioners Cornine and Dugan Jr. were absent.

Commissioner DeSimone read Resolution 24-11-21-132 offering a COE to Per Diem EMT Wittnebert. Commissioner Dugan Sr. made a motion to introduce the resolution, seconded by Commissioner DeSimone. All were in favor. Commissioners Cornine and Dugan Jr. were absent.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: Commissioner DeSimone read Resolution 24-11-21-133 to enter into executive session. Commissioner Dugan Sr. made a motion to introduce the resolution, seconded by Commissioner DeSimone. All were in favor. Commissioners Cornine and Dugan Jr. were absent.

The Board went into closed session at 7:42 p.m.

Personnel matters were discussed, and action will not be taken.

The Board came out of closed session at 8:02 p.m.

ADJOURN: A motion was made by Commissioner DeSimone, seconded by Commissioner Dugan Sr., to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor. Commissioners Cornine and Dugan Jr. were absent.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

Mary Lou DeSimone, Secretary