

**Board of Fire Commissioners
GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP FIRE DISTRICT 6
Monthly Board Meeting Minutes**

Meeting Held: December 17, 2019
Meeting Place: Board Office
Meeting Called to Order: 7:05pm
Members of Board Present: **Chairman** – George Brown
Vice Chairman – Richard Annacone, excused
Treasurer – Brian Robinson
Secretary – George Flinn, excused
Commissioner – Steven Funkhouser
Administrative Clerk – Renee Evans
Solicitor – David Carlamere

Salute the Flag

The Sunshine Law – George Brown: In accordance with the NJ Sunshine Law this meeting is open to the public. The public portion will follow the regular business of the Board.

Roll call Commissioners:

Comms. Robinson, Funkhouser & Brown are present. Comms. Flinn and Annacone are excused.

Minutes of the previous meeting - Motion to accept the previous month's minutes as they are available to the public upon request.

Motion made by Comm. Funkhouser, seconded by Comm. Robinson. Roll call vote, all yes.

Correspondence – Renee Evans

Adm.Cl.Evans: All has been distributed.

Treasurer's Report – Rich Annacone

William Penn General Account	2,079,718.47
William Penn Payroll Account	38,768.74
Expenditures: 12/17/19	112,666.56
TOTAL AMOUNT FOR APPROVAL	112,666.56

Motion made by Comm. Robinson, seconded by Comm. Funkhouser to approve the Treasurer's Report as read. Roll call vote, all yes.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Budget Co-Commissioner – George Brown

Comm. Brown: Thanks to the effort of the Clerk and Mr. Allen and retired Clerk Jan and others, the budget is complete, and you have some numbers I could read to that?

Adm.Cl.Evans: Here it is.

Comm. Brown: I'm not going to read the entire resolution. The total revenues is \$1,861.845 which includes the amount to be raised by taxes of \$1,474.659 and total appropriations of \$1,861.845. This is the first reading of the budget. The big question that everybody asks is what happened to the tax rate, and the tax rate is going down slightly, it's not going up. So I think that's the message that everybody is asking on what happened to the tax rate. Most of the people that I've run into ask are my taxes going up? And we can say not this year. Roughly it's a slight decrease. It's not like anybody is going to get rich off of their fire tax decline, but we had some extraordinary expenses last year if you recall, including fulfilling the SCBA's, that was \$48,000. We had a Clerk that was at the top of the salary, there were a bunch of things that we just won't have for another couple of years. Rather than go out and spend money, we just did it the way we did, figure out what you want in your budget and everybody did that. When it all totaled we were below last year, and we'll take it. So this is the first reading. We'll do the second reading in January. I don't know why honestly Jan said not to distribute the budget, because I think we should so they could look at it and ask questions about it.

Budget Co-Commissioner – continued

Comm. Funkhouser: Why wouldn't she want us to?

Comm. Brown: My guess is she didn't want people flipping through it during the meeting and not paying attention. It's only the first reading, so if we issue it today and everybody looks at it by the second reading, everything will be OK. So I guess I've lost edge. The Solicitor is now playing solitaire during the meeting.

Sol.Carlamere: I'm checking the calendar for the dates for your January 21st. I wanted to make sure it complies with the statutory requirements. It's 25 days prior to the Election for your adoption, so your adoption on the 21st is fine.

Comm. Funkhouser: So we're good?

Sol.Carlamere: Yes.

Comm. Funkhouser: OK.

Comm. Brown: So that's the reading of the budget, so I think we're in pretty good shape. Our hat's off to the new Clerk for getting this done on time, like I said smart kid. Any questions on the budget? (hearing none)

Comm. Brown: Also on the budget going forward Mr. Robinson, we did some moving around of a couple things. One is to provide some more clarity to the expense lines as it relates to the fill-ins. Right now it all gets bunched together. When you look at your spending performance, you can't really tell where you are. So it would be 5 lines as it relates to the volunteer cost. District 5 fill-in cost, District 6 fill-in cost, fill-ins for career personnel where we bring them in when a guy is out, the regular volunteer stipends, and the recruitment and retention line. Those were bunched together at least in a couple lines and it was really hard to manage, and the Chief agreed to that. The Clerk has put those in the new budget so they'll be in the new reporting that we're going to get come the January spending. So every month we'll have a very good idea where you are.

Computer Services – George Brown

Comm. Brown: As you know, we have a new accountant that starts in January. I originally asked him to start in December to work on the budget so he was aware what was in it. Basically there was a concern by Mr. Allen that there might be too many Chefs in the kitchen, and he could get it done so I left him commit to getting it done. The new accountant did not participate in the budget, but he is the accountant for a number of other Districts. I have full faith in his knowledge of the process. Renee and I have had discussions with him to get the new accounting system up and running. It's going to be up in the cloud which means he'll have access. He won't have to come in here, Renee will have access remotely. We won't have to worry about the cyber threat because the company's providing cloud services are built with required backups that we're now paying \$560 for which will climb to \$1,000 next year. It's \$1,000 we can defer in the future and not have to worry about being hacked.

IAFF Contracts Co-Commissioner – George Brown

Comm. Brown: We'd like to handle that in Closed Session.

Liaison to the District Volunteers – George Brown

Dep.Chief Brown: No report.

Comm. Brown: They did a great job on Santa rides the other night. It was an ugly weekend for doing that.

Dep.Chief Brown: To their credit, all the Officer's talked Friday about the possibility of calling Friday off just because the rain was not good. We told the personnel hey, we'd reschedule or whatever. I came in to kind of make the final call and I walked into a firehouse full of firefighters that were geared up and ready to go and addressed Santa that said this is what we do for the kids and it was awesome. Not that they took the decision out of my hands, but I was trying to act in consideration of the guys that would be out in the elements, and they were ready to go and do the work. So it's a little testament to the dedication of the personnel we have here.

Comm. Brown: I think the fact that you had a duplicating Santa.

Dep.Chief Brown: We like to call that the magic of Santa.

Comm. Brown: OK, so you get it done all in one night.

Chief Brezee: The turnout was exceptional. The best turnout we've ever had for Santa and that's how we got it done in the short amount of time.

Comm. Funkhouser: They did so well, they even hit a couple streets twice.

Comm. Brown: Great, nice job. Please tell everybody the Board said nice job.

Fire Prevention – George Brown

No report.

Legal Liaison – George Brown

Sol. Carlamere: I have nothing to report.

Budget Co-Commissioner – Rich Annacone

No report.

IAFF Contracts Co-Commissioner – Rich Annacone

No report.

Personnel / Administration – Rich Annacone

No report.

Personnel / Operations – Rich Annacone

No report.

Apparatus – Brian Robinson

Comm. Robinson: I'm good sir. I'm going to defer to the Chief's report. It covered apparatus, maintenance is all up and running, and training is very well.

Fire Department Equipment – Brian Robinson

No report.

Fire Department Operations – Brian Robinson

No report.

Training – Brian Robinson

Comm. Robinson: Doing very well.

Insurance – George Flinn

No report.

Sign – George Flinn

No report.

Water – George Flinn

No report.

Building Maintenance & Grounds – Steve Funkhouser

Comm. Funkhouser: On the 27th of this month we're having a blood drive here. The paid staff is on that day.

I'm going to defer to the Chief's Report also in regards to the building.

We had discussed, I think Mr. Brown and I discussed getting quotes on how much it will cost for the roof to be repaired. I haven't really gotten ahold of any contractors. We were talking the other night, and I think we're going to have to go to bond for \$20-21,000. So we're going to have to think about a bond next year for the budget. I think the roof should hold up. I've been walking around and haven't seen major leaks, but there are still the leaks we got, and we are concerned about mold. So if we do have leaks, take down some of the tiles and take a peak up there.

Chief Brezee: I usually keep an eye on it, take a look. The last time we had a roof repair to try and fix some of the leaks, the guys went up in there to make sure there wasn't any structural or something rotting up there causing the problems, and they didn't report any issues like that.

Comm. Brown: OK. So it's something serious we have to think about because there is a lot that needs to be done at the Station, and the only way we're going to be able to do it is by bond. The doors need to be replaced. We've had some of the doors replaced here, the locking mechanisms are breaking, the door hinges are falling apart. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to the building. That's all I have to report.

Comm. Brown: And I think just while it's fresh in our memories, we looked up what were the estimates for the roof repairs, and they are not really within reach of doing that through the budget. That's why we would have to go that route. I think the one number was \$400,000 and the other was \$200,000. One was a repair, one was a replacement. The amount that it took us to get the new SCBA filling station took a couple years. It would take us 80 years to get that kind of fund balance

Building Maintenance & Grounds – continued

to do it, so we have no other choice is what you're saying.

Comm. Funkhouser: Um hum

Communications – Steve Funkhouser

No report.

EMS / Supplies & Equipment – Steve Funkhouser

No report.

Turn-Out Gear – Steve Funkhouser

No report.

Uniforms – Steve Funkhouser

No report.

Chief – Michael Brezee

Chief Brezee: My report has been submitted, and I was going to bring up Santa but you guys covered it.

Comm. Brown: If we could, I'd like to go on the record with a conversation that you and I had, and that is that there will be more than sufficient money if the budget is approved to replace the 19 year old apparatus that's now in the building there, so I think we can vote on it tonight but I think we can green light that so we don't have to wait until the actual budget is approved in February, because I don't see how it won't be. And if we get a two month start on anything, that's two months closer to doing that. So that was a question I was holding from last month. Secondly, there was a question that we were going to have a discussion about Saturday coverage last month, but we didn't do that because of the people not here. My concern with getting a SAFER Grant, especially in light of other things is that until we do an financial analysis of whether or not we can afford years 4 and 5 of that, we're just backing ourselves into a corner. The last time I did that analysis which was some time ago, we couldn't afford it then. In which case if we said in year 4 we could no longer do this, we had to pay them back for years 1, 2 & 3. If you recall, we originally filed for a grant, we got one position, then we looked at what the numbers were, and I don't recall it exactly, but they give you I think 80% the first year, 60% the second year, 40% the third year, so you're paying more and more each of the five years. By the time you get to year 4, the percentage is not insignificant. If you're in it for two firefighters, you're talking about a lot of money in year 4. I think they've revised that so that you could say I can't do this anymore, and they don't come after you for the money. But we can't commit to something that we don't have the numbers worked out on...

Chief Brezee: I do believe that the last grant issued was 100% for 3 years. But like you said, we have to figure out what we're doing after that. I have some ideas and of course with your financial knowledge, that's why I wanted to have these discussions. The reason that came about is, I can't guarantee Saturday coverages. It seemed like I was being asked to guarantee Saturday coverages, and I cannot with volunteers. Not to slight the volunteers at all, but we have the same 5, 6 or 7 that are available and they just cannot do it every weekend. And I don't expect them to, they have families and jobs, so we're doing the best we can with it. It's going to be hot and cold. The month of November was awesome. The guys were there 9 out of 10 shifts that we provided and were available. But in the summer it's going to be less. There are family commitments, jobs, and we cannot guarantee to have people in the building 24 hours on a Saturday unless we're going to make those positions paid.

Comm. Brown: The only thing I have to say is, you just can't look at that expense unto its own because we just heard Comm. Funkhouser make a passionate plea for getting a bond, and that's going to add to your overall spending. We used to have a \$90,000 payment on what was about a \$700,000 bond that I remember when I first came in here. So you're going to have \$150,000 for a bond repayment, and then you're going to add a bunch of other costs, plus in the current agreement the substantial increases in year 7 & 8 in the step agreement. So the big thing we're really missing, more than anything else that gives us this building and to all those things that we're already obligated to do looking down the road. The apparatus, as I said, we have the money but as soon as you put that out there, you still have to put money in the truck fund every year. It's not like we're going to stop doing that. And I think we need...I don't want to necessarily call it a five year plan, but we need a plan that says these are all the things that we know we're obligated to do, and this is how it's going to impact us and do the financial analysis, because otherwise you're going to paint yourself into a corner where you just can't afford that. And the other thing too is, I'm still wondering why we're trying to fill Saturday's and our shared services partner is also trying to fill Saturdays. There is something wrong there, and we could all say what it is, but I would rather see us sit down and say we take every other weekend and try to fill that, rather than both of us trying to fill it.

Chief Brezee: Quite frankly, my response would be we either need to hire or we need to find a better relationship, because time and time again they have proven that they have no intent on working with us.

Chief – continued

Dep. Chief Brown: They don't know of the responsibility to properly staffing apparatus. And with all due respect to the Board, the shared services agreement is not between the two Chiefs of the departments, it's between the two Districts.

Comm. Brown: I'm not denying that, but I'm just saying a great teacher of mine told me to put all the alternatives on the table, figure out which are the good ones and which are the bad ones. I don't think we have put all the alternatives on the table, and I don't think we've identified any good ones, we have identified the bad ones. I don't know, maybe it's us and Pine Hill on Saturdays. But if we can get by with one crew six days a week across two Districts, why can't we do the same thing on Saturdays. What stops us from doing that? That's the problem I think needs to be solved.

Chief Brezee: Six days are covered by full time firefighters.

Comm. Brown: I agree, but if you say it's either a question of finding a better partner or hiring career people, I think there are some other alternatives. They may not be great but they may be viable. And I'm just saying until you exhaust all those and do the financial analysis, I couldn't support additional career people. And not only that, now we're already passed the first reading of the budget, so we can't do that for next year, so we've got to figure out something that we can do in 2020. We can start talking about 2021, but the horse has left the barn for 2020.

Chief Brezee: You're absolutely right, the discussions need to take place in 2020 to find a better way.

Comm. Brown: OK, so that was two of the three things that were in your report for the last time, and the third one was...

Chief Brezee: And the third one ties in with the discussions with the District 4.

Comm. Brown: OK. So you had a conversation with District 4's Chief?

Chief Brezee: Yes.

Comm. Brown: And I authorized, rather than wait another month for you to continue that so you could let the Board know what happened as a result of that?

Chief Brezee: The reason the question came to you at the last meeting was because the District 4 Chief approached me and stated that the Commission may be interested in discussing with us the possibility of going forward with some type of shared service agreement. So I put that in last month's report and I was told that was going to be OK. And then the Chief of 84 then approached me again and said have you heard anything? And I said yes, they're OK with us having discussions, but right now we're in the middle of Santa. How about we plan for the first week back after the first of the year, we'll try and get something set up. He agreed to that, so we're going to meet that first week of January and see what we could set up to start having those discussions. He states that his Board is interested.

Comm. Brown: So the potential for maybe Saturday coverage between 4 & 6 is another alternative. And that's what I've been saying, there are some other alternatives.

Chief Brezee: Not that you're saying we're not, but we are constantly trying to figure it out.

Comm. Brown: And we're not here to criticize you, we're here to see if there is something else that somebody could think of because none of us have all the answers.

Comm. Robinson: Did the insurance agreements come back that we sent the other Districts?

Chief Brezee: Yes. That's another reason, there was the issue why couldn't we offer our volunteers a little more money. Well one there is an FLSA ruling that you can only give so much based on our firefighter salaries. The other reason is, the four of us that are in the SAFER Grant have agreed six hour periods at \$50 per the six hour period as so we're not competing with each other. Chews Landing could have easily that night said we're going to pay our guys \$100 for six hours. Well with that agreement we have, our guys could go there on a Saturday and get twice as much money. So we've all agreed to stay at the \$50 per six hours.

Comm. Brown: Again, I'm not here to criticize people, but I'd like to understand more about that and see what other alternatives are. Because first of all, I'd like to know who the FLSA expert was.

Chief Brezee: Which I told you I still have to get more info on that.

Comm. Brown: And then I would turn to the labor attorney or the Solicitor and ask them to research when was the last time the FLSA was enforced. Because my research shows that it hasn't been enforced in over 4 years. And it is on the books, but it's no longer considered to be a barrier to do what you want to do. Everybody else is ignoring it, and that's maybe not a good choice, but I'm saying that's another one.

Chief Brezee: At the same time, the Dep. Chief and I, prior to the last meeting and putting those statements out, we polled the volunteers and said what can we do? It's not, oh if you paid me more money I'd be here. That's not what we're being told. We're being told I have family and work, and I do what I can.

Comm. Brown: I've listened to you, and I don't think this problem can be solved by us alone, not in 2020, and not by hiring two career people. This problem is going to require a partner of some form or factor. So I believe you guys have been really shaking trees to try and get people out here, no doubt about that. But there are other choices I think that I'd like to see us exhaust those. Then when we get to the point where we say we've exhausted every single choice, we have no other choice but hire career people, then we have to do a financial analysis to see if we can pay, that's all.

Chief Brezee: OK.

Comm. Brown: Motion to accept the Chief's Report.

Chief – continued

Motion made by Comm. Funkhouser, seconded by Comm. Robinson. Roll call vote, all yes.
Roll call vote, all yes.

Solicitor – David Carlamere

Sol.Carlamere: I have nothing.

Resolutions – Renee Evans

Adm.Cl.Evans: The Budget Resolution.

Comm. Brown: So I'll read them by the budget numbers we adopted,

Sol.Carlamere: And everyone sees that that resolution also includes your public hearing on January 21st.

Comm. Brown: Right, so with the budget, I think we only have the one.

Adm.Cl.Evans: Um hum.

Old Business – George Brown

Comm. Brown: We covered your Old Business, Chief.

Chief Brezee: I think so.

Comm. Brown: All that I remember was it was yes, yes, no. But I can't remember...

Chief Brezee: Yes, yes, no. And you told me be careful with that because that's how you wound up in the Navy.

New Business – George Brown

Comm. Brown: New Business? (hearing none)

Public Portion – George Brown

Comm. Brown: Public Portion? (hearing none)

Closed Session – George Brown

Comm. Brown: At this time the Board would like to go into Closed Session at 7:32pm to discuss the IAFF contract. And if you can stick around, I'd appreciate it.

CS – 68 Firefighter Contract Negotiations & Ff. Adam Craig

Comm. Brown: Let the record show that the Board has come out of Closed Session at 7:57pm.

Roll call Commissioners: Comms. Funkhouser, Robinson and Brown present.

Comm. Brown: During Closed Session, we met with the Shop Steward and discussed some proposed changes that they had asked Comm. Annacone for, and we would like to approve the contract with a minor change to the first sentence that appears in Section B, Article 11, and take out the words "for life of this", so that the sentence will read "all employees not on the guide shall receive a 3% increase in each year of the agreement." So it's a little clearer. Secondly is the second bolded sentence that says "any employee reaching said off guide step shall continue to receive the negotiated percentage to a dollar amount in each year of the contract until such time a successor agreement is reached by both parties." We would like that withdrawn because it does not bring any pressure to negotiate a new contract. They could just go on 3% forever, which we don't know what the economy is going to look like in 2023-2024-2025. So with that in mind, we'd like to approve the agreement subject to the Shop Steward confirming with its membership that its acceptable. We've asked him to do that by December 24th so that we could have an orderly transition to the new contract come January 1st. And I'd like to take a motion that we will approve the contract based on that.

Motion made by Comm. Funkhouser, seconded by Comm. Robinson. Roll call vote, all yes.

Adjourn – George Brown

Motion made by Comm. Robinson, seconded by Comm. Funkhouser to adjourn the meeting at 8:00pm.

Roll call vote, all yes.

Comm. Brown: Thank you everyone, Merry Christmas.