

**TOWN OF MOUNT PLEASANT, SOUTH CAROLINA  
FIRE DEPARTMENT COMMITTEE  
Monday, April 2, 2018**

**Municipal Complex, Committee Meeting Room, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor**

**MINUTES**

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

**Staff Present:** Eric DeMoura, Fire Chief Herbert Williams, Deputy Fire  
Chief Mike Mixon

Mr. Brimmer called the meeting to order at 9:02 pm.

**1. Approval of Minutes from the January 8, 2018 meeting**

*Mr. Owens moved for approval of the minutes; motion seconded by Mr. O'Rourke. Motion carried unanimously.*

*Mr. Cunnane made a motion to amend the Meeting's Agenda on Item 7. He motioned that "Boone Hall Plantation" be struck through and replaced with "public events, all traffic management issues". The motioned was seconded by Mr. Owens. Motion carried unanimously.*

**2. Public Comments**

None

**3. Employee years of service recognition**

Chief Mike Mixon recognized Engineer Randy Dahlman and Engineer Ken Franks for their fifteen years of service with the Fire Department. He expressed the Fire Department's thanks for their service and being valuable members of the department. Chief Mixon stated that Engineer Dahlman was also a Paramedic, a part time Fire Inspector and was actively involved in the Fire Department Boat and Water Rescue Program. Chief Mixon also stated that Engineer Franks was also a Paramedic and a very skilled carpenter that used those abilities for the Fire Department Technical Rescue Unit.

#### **4. Budget Review FY 2019**

##### **a. Fire Department operating expenses**

Mr. DeMoura stated he would offer highlights of the Fire Department's proposed budget. The budget will increase by approximately four percent or just over five hundred thousand dollars from last year. Most of the increase is found in the salaries and the one percent retirement match lines. Mr. DeMoura explained that one hundred twenty thousand dollars would be used to purchase new cardiac monitors and fifty thousand dollars would be used to purchase self-contained breathing apparatus. Mr. DeMoura explained that part of the increase of the salaries and training portion would be to add paramedic training for three more firefighters.

##### **b. Fire Department capital and maintenance expenditures**

Mr. DeMoura stated that the Fire Department planned to purchase four Explorers or Tahoe trucks next year. He also stated that five and one half million had been designated for the design and construction of Fire Station Four. In addition, eight hundred thousand was assigned for the Public Services Training Facility Site and one hundred and sixty-two thousand for traffic preemption devices. Mr. DeMoura asked if the Committee had any questions. Mr. Cunnane started by asking what the membership and dues were for. Chief Mixon explained they were used for various affiliations such as Fire Chief, Fire Marshals, Fire Arson and EMS Associations. Mr. Cunnane asked if traveling to Association meetings was a part of travel expenses. Chief Mixon explained it was included, but much of the travel expenses was used for training. Mr. Cunnane asked how much it cost per year for the Fire Department to be Accredited. Chief Mixon replied that the costs were fourteen hundred dollars in fees per year. Chief Mixon further explained, that every fifth year the Fire Department had a site visit that cost approximately ten thousand dollars. Mr. Cunnane asked how many paramedics the Fire Department has and Chief Mixon answered there were forty-five paramedics. Mr. Cunnane asked why three additional were needed and Chief Mixon explained that if a paramedic leaves, the

Fire Department tries to replace them with another paramedic/firefighter, but sometimes not able to do so. He explained that by training three additional firefighters to be paramedics would assist in ensuring we had the correct staffing. Mr. Cunnane questioned why paramedics were leaving and whether it was a pay issue. Chief Mixon replied there were many reasons involved such as moving closer to their family once children were born. Chief Mixon said that he could not give an accurate number of firefighter/paramedics leaving in relation to pay. He went on to say that the Fire Department paid a respectable pay incentive of \$3.12 per hour for a certified paramedic. Chief Mixon went on to say it was hard to compare with other areas because MPFD was one of the few Fire Departments that had firefighters that were also paramedics.

Mr. Owens inquired about the four percent salary increase and Mr. DeMoura said that the increase could be as high as five percent or as low as three percent, because it was based on employee performance. If an employee failed to meet the required performance, they would not receive any increase. Mr. Owens asked if the Fire Department was hiring three new firefighter/paramedics. Mr. DeMoura explained we were not hiring any more personnel, but training three existing firefighters to also be paramedics.

Mr. Owens said that he thought it would be helpful for the Fire Committee to have an organizational chart for the manpower and the equipment in the Fire Department. He also said that he did not want to micromanage the Fire Department.

Mr. O'Rourke had no questions but commented that when looking at compensation regarding job retention, that it should be done for the entire personnel in the Town of Mount Pleasant (TOMP).

Mr. Brimmer stated he believed that compensation for job retention should be brought up with and looked at by the Human Resources

Department to identify where and if any problems existed for all TOMP personnel.

Mr. Cunnane asked what the amount would be for adding six more captains, so there would be an officer on each ladder company. Chief Mixon said that he did not have that information, but he could supply that a later time. Mr. Cunnane stated that if Mount Pleasant Fire Department (MPFD) sent a ladder truck out of town, they also sent a Chief with it. Mr. Cunnane indicated this concerned him because if there was another incident, the response would be with an engineer in charge. He said it should be a fire officer which was least a captain. Mr. Brimmer reminded Mr. Cunnane that staffing would be covered later in the agenda. Mr. Cunnane asserted that he wanted to make a point on the comments that Public Safety should be treated differently regarding pay compensation. He said he felt there were ways to do it without impacting other departments such as differential pay for hazardous duty. Mr. Cunnane said that he asked Chief Williams how long it would take to get another ladder company. He expressed that Chief Williams said nine months to acquire everything, but he had concerns as to how long it would take to fill the positions required. Mr. Cunnane reiterated that better pay would make it easier to find people faster.

Mr. Brimmer thanked everyone that was involved in putting the Fire Department Budget together. Mr. Brimmer asked where the traffic preemptive devices would be placed. Chief Mixon stated the Highway 17 corridor would be first. The Fire Department would install devices on twenty-five fire units and multiple traffic lights. Mr. Brimmer reinforced that he would like the Fire Department to concentrate on a strategic plan, so it would guide the spending in the capital plan.

*Mr. Owens made a motion to accept the operating expenditures as it is related to the budget for the Fire Department. Mr. O'Rourke seconded the motion. Mr. Cunnane stated that he would be voting against it because he felt that staffing should be a more primary focus. Mr. Brimmer, Mr. Owens,*

*and Mr. O'Rourke voted in favor. Mr. Cunnane was opposed. Motion passed by a vote of three to one.*

**5. Update on automatic aid and operational agreement for Highway 41 corridor and the new Wando River bridge between the Mount Pleasant Fire Department and the Charleston Fire Department**

Chief Mixon informed the Committee that this agreement had been postponed due to Charleston Fire Department recently hiring a new fire chief. He stated that he would reach out to the new fire chief after they had time to settle in the job. Mr. Cunnane asked that it be done as soon as possible.

**6. Update on automatic aid and operational agreement between the Mount Pleasant Fire Department and the Awendaw Fire Department**

Chief Mixon announced the Awendaw Fire Department had spoken with their county officials and they would like to see the plan accomplished in a phased approach. Awendaw would like their Fire personnel to continue manning their Fire Station and for MPFD to respond with automatic aid along with them for calls south of Bulls Bay. Chief Mixon stated that Awendaw felt this would allow both sides to see how they liked it before an agreement was made. The Awendaw Fire Chief wanted to speak to the owner of Boone Hall Plantation, to determine how he felt about it before proceeding. Chief Mixon said that he would relay any updated information. Mr. Brimmer asked what approvals were needed before this could go into effect. Mr. DeMoura stated it would have to go before both governing bodies, TOMP Council and Charleston County Council before an agreement could officially take place.

**7. Review of traffic procedures for ~~the events at Boone Hall Plantation~~ public events and all traffic management issues**

Mr. Cunnane asked if the Fire Department had a game plan for response in dealing with traffic tie ups due to events. Chief Mixon informed the Committee that meetings had been held with Chief Ritchie and the Police

Department to discuss this matter. He said that since the Mount Pleasant Police Department (MPPD) has taken over event traffic on the Highway 17 corridor, the traffic issues had improved significantly. Chief Mixon stated that MPPD did not control traffic on the property where the event was held, and they felt it would significantly help if they could. Mr. Cunnane expressed that he was still concerned with the Fire Department's response plan, if there was a structural fire and they could only get half of the department to the fire. He said that in a town of eighty-five thousand, the TOMP should have the ability to handle two structural fire responses at the same time. Mr. Cunnane asked what would happen if there was a four thousand square foot structure fire in Carolina Park and it was unknown when the next units would arrive. Chief Mixon stated that it would be challenging. Mr. Brimmer asked whether MPFD was included in the planning process, when it was a TOMP event. Chief Mixon stated that we were, but not on events outside of the Town of Mount Pleasant. Mr. Cunnane interjected that MPFD doesn't have the proper staffing for it. Chief Mixon maintained that during any planned events such as the Bridge Run, the Blessing of the Fleet, the Christmas Parade, the Fourth of July or other TOMP events, the Fire Department always bolstered their manning. Chief Mixon also stated, if there was a large incident in the north area of Mount Pleasant and the traffic flow was heavy, it would affect the Fire Department's response times. Chief Mixon asserted that Mr. DeMoura commissioned the Fire staff to develop a fresh and revised strategic plan for the MPFD. He stated this would require input from the Fire Committee, the citizens and from our own internal stakeholders to develop. The Plan would address the direction MPFD needs to proceed, as the TOMP continues to grow. Chief Mixon expressed several major factors to be considered would be staffing, fire apparatus and capital projects for the Fire Department.

Mr. O'Rourke stated that the congested traffic issue was not only driven by events, but also Town growth. He said he is excited about the strategic plan because it gives the opportunity to look at the entire area and how we plan for it.

Mr. Cunnane stated that he wanted it on the record that MPFD needed more firefighters. Building new Fire Stations would not help without more staffing. Mr. Cunnane stated that the TOMP would no longer have deniability in this area.

Chief Ritchie of MPPD stated that they had met with the owner of the property and they were looking at another ingress, egress road to the property. He stated that they were also talking to the private parking company about filling the back-parking lots before the front lots. Chief Ritchie said there was a good relationship with the owner and the owner did understand the impact the events made to the Town and the residents and they were working to find a balance. Chief Ritchie stated that MPPD was diligently working on addressing the improving the issues.

Mr. Brimmer stated that the Fire Department, as well as the Police Department should be involved during the planning of the events and if it meant paying overtime for both departments, the event promoter should be required to help with those cost as well. Mr. Brimmer reinforced that it is a public safety issue and not just a convenience issue.

## **8. Discussion of department staffing**

Mr. Cunnane stated that all the issues that were being discussed relate back to the need of more staffing. Mr. Cunnane referred to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710, he said was the standard for structural firefighting staffing. He referred NFPA 1710's definition of a high rise as anything with the top floor being greater than seventy-five feet and requiring 43 firefighters to work on a fire, if there was no fire pump in the building. Mr. Cunnane asked how many firefighters were on duty per day and Chief Mixon replied there were thirty to thirty-five. Mr. Cunnane then asked how thirty-two firefighters would be able to fight the fire. Chief Mixon acknowledge there are several large multi-floor buildings in Mount Pleasant. He went on to explain they were built under a new building standard. With modern building construction, alarms, sprinklers and

protected egress routes, they put the Fire Department at an advantage when it comes to a fire. If a fire were to happen, MPFD would call for aid, but begin fighting the fire with the available personnel immediately. Chief Mixon stated that the strategic plan would address the change in Mount Pleasant, from a bedroom community to a place that had more vertical structures in a semi-commercial atmosphere.

Mr. O'Rourke said that to get elected to Town Council did not mean being an expert on something. He said that Council should set policy and rely on studies, staff and others to help the Town Council make decisions. Mr. O'Rourke stated that it would help him to decide on issues, if he knew where MPFD compared in relations to size, population, standards and salaries with comparable locations. He stated he would like to know where we were in relations to national standards. Chief Mixon stated it is the Fire Department job to give the Fire Committee the information, so they can make decisions. Chief Mixon stated that the strategic plan would be an educational piece that would help them have a frame of reference as to how the MPFD was performing. Mr. O'Rourke said their aim was to have the best Fire Department in the state and to develop standards that accommodate those goals.

Mr. Cunnane stated that because of Mount Pleasant's geographical location, there would be no way to compare it to other Fire Departments. He said that NFPA 1710 was the national standard and that MPFD did not come close to meeting it. Mr. Cunnane stated that he wanted to reiterate everything that he had said for the past three years and now that his was serving on Council, he wanted to make sure that if the Council choose to do nothing, they were not doing it with deniability anymore. Mr. Cunnane stated that while Accreditation and ISO Rating were great, they don't address the staffing.

Mr. Brimmer stated that he believed there was a common agreement with everyone to make MPFD the best it can be. The difficulty, he said, is how we get there and how quickly we will get there. Mr. Brimmer stated that

he believed that every Town Council had tried their best to address public safety during in the tremendous growth of Mount Pleasant. Mr. Brimmer stated that twelve additional Police staff had been added last year and additional Police personnel would be added this year for area schools. Mr. Brimmer stated it was a marathon, not a sprint and that everything could not be accomplished in one budget year, but we can begin the process. He indicated the first part of it should be a plan to examine where we are and where we need to be and beginning next year, with the help of finding funds from Finance, begin building what we need to have.

Mr. Cunnane asked to make another comment and said that he believed a huge turnaround time was an issue. He stated that it would take nine months to get a to get another fire company in order, due to personnel being trained and apparatus purchased. Mr. Cunnane maintained that if no action was taken for a year, it would essentially be two years out before any type of an action would be taken for improvement. Mr. Cunnane stated that he personally believed, in the state that existed currently, action needs to be taken as soon as possible.

## **9. Adjourn**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:55 a.m.

Minutes submitted by:

Terri Chadwick

4/3/18