

BURLINGTON FIRE COMMISSION
Minutes of the Meeting
December 2, 2024

These are the minutes of the December 2, 2024, Meeting of the Burlington Fire Commission. The meeting convened at 08:30 hours via Zoom and in person with Commissioners Bond, Chapman, Perkinson, Sheehey, and McLaughlin. Chief LaChance, Deputy Chief Curtin, and Administrative Assistant Meghan Sweeney were also present. From the public, Todd Deluca joined the meeting.

Call to Order

Commissioner Bond called the meeting to order at 08:34.

Motion to Adopt Agenda

Commissioner Bond asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. Commission Sheehey made a motion to adopt, Commission McLaughlin seconded, and no objections were made.

Public Comment

A member of the public, Todd Deluca, is present. Todd is there to listen and join. He is a resident of Burlington and likes to film and publish fire and other first responder interactions. Commissioner Bond welcomed Todd and went around the room for everyone to introduce themselves.

Review and Accept Minutes from the October Meeting

Commissioner Bond asked for a motion to accept the October minutes. Commissioner Sheehey made the motion, which Commissioner McLaughlin seconded.

Chief's Oral Report

Chief LaChance's report (attached) was previously emailed. Additional discussion of topics included:

Personnel—Chief LaChance expanded that eleven applicants fit the minimum criteria in the lateral hiring process so far. We hope to continue gathering more interest before the 12/31 deadline and have a hire date sometime in April.

Fit4Fire—New money in the FY25 budget allowed us to have funds to support mental health efforts. Peer Support training will take place at the Coast Guard station this week. This training will be attended by BFD members as well as members from other New England, New York, and Canadian departments. Thank you to the USCG for allowing us to use their space.

Fleet—Chief LaChance would like to thank and recognize the department mechanics, Francis Aumand and Eric Casavant, for their hard work getting the new trucks in service. Outfitting the new vehicles was a huge task that they completed.

DC Curtin is also working on applying for a grant that would allow us to purchase a UTV to carry the skid-load portable pump we have purchased. This pump will enable us to respond to more challenging places, like encampment fires. The UTV would also be used for the marathon and other event coverage.

Buildings—If funding allows, Chief LaChance wants to send DC Curtin to a fire station design conference in the spring. If we move forward with a combined space for emergency services, we can identify the current best design practices for a new station.

Radio System Upgrade – Thank you again to LT Brad Wilson for his work for the fire department and for assisting the police department with this upgrade project. A few unexpected issues have been coming up,

including recent FCC guidelines, as we are so close to Canada for licensing. Commissioner McLaughlin asked if there was a change in the wattage. Chief LaChance said the radios were tested in June/July, and the signal was better, and the challenging zones now have a signal.

EMS Division – PREVENT Initiative: We are the first in the nation to use the model utilizing the Advanced EMT level of licensure. Other departments administer Buprenorphine. However, it's only at the Paramedic level. The logistics of this meant we had to get additional lock boxes on the ambulances that allowed AEMTs to have access to locked medications. The state is looking to roll this model out for all EMS agencies. For Burlington Fire, the impact is at the Paramedic level; 22 members can offer care. Seventy people can engage in the program by allowing A-EMTs to provide this service. Commissioner Bond stated she thinks the department did a great job. Commission Chapman asked how it works. When our department responds to an overdose, instead of giving Narcan, which can take someone out of an overdose but leave them feeling the effects of withdrawal. Buprenorphine gives them a more normal feeling, which might allow us to provide or connect them to other services. So far, we do not have any data showing that it has been used.

Operations Division—Medicare (CMS) reporting was completed. Without this extensive data collection, our revenue would have dropped by 10%. Thank you to Michael Curtin, Marsha McCombie, Nancy Veronneau, and Meghan Sweeney for their efforts in completing this.

Training—Recruit class 24-01 has completed its academy and now counts towards minimum staffing, which helps our budget with overtime staffing.

BC Webster and BC Ruggles are working on a new career roadmap advancement training. We recognize that there needs to be more money to support further education. In FY23, there was an average of \$500 per member to complete all required training and certifications for the entire year, which was wholly inadequate. FY24 allows for more; however, continuing to expand the ability to educate and advance will require us to keep building those funds.

Chief LaChance is gathering data that will also show fire responses. He's working with DC Curtin to gather incident-type calls and unit responses. Commissioner Bond is excited to see this data.

Commissioner Sheehey asked if we had anything for electric vehicle fires. Chief LaChance has purchased a special blanket, nozzle, and plug to allow us to fight these fires. Unfortunately, due to budget restraints, he's only been able to purchase one set, which costs about \$5,000. The total budget for all equipment for the year was increased to \$27,500 in FY25. With this expanded funding, he plans to have enough left this fiscal year to purchase another set and keep developing our capabilities.

Chief LaChance believes the change in the responses to the homeless/houseless/transient/no-population community is due to the motel program changes. Last year, the city had a shelter set up at the old VFW building, which was positive, and he believes COTS is working on something similar for this year.

Old Business/New Business

- Commissioner Bond recognized that as Chair, she needs to do the commission report for the city council. It hasn't been done in several years, so she is looking at one done in 2018 and would like to reorganize how it's done and what it should include. Commissioner Chapman offered to assist with an outline. They discussed that three points each of concern and success should be included. Points of concern would include the vehicle replacement needs, the effects of police staffing on our members and responses, and the need for response capacity on the water. Todd DeLuca mentioned that he has attended a few city council meetings and doesn't believe they hear how the police department affects the fire department. He also hasn't heard much about the buildings and central. Chief LaChance said the decision to move out of Central would entirely depend on whether the Memorial Block would be developed; otherwise, the cost savings would be in maintaining the current building.

- Commissioner McLaughlin would like to know more about budgeting for the vehicles and if there is a sure way the budget has to be set up to allow departments to use funds to get the vehicles and apparatus they need. Currently, funding for new vehicles is obtained through bonding. However, we are trying to be creative with getting money raised ourselves. DC Curtin is working on selling our old trucks and using some of the money to pay back the city the \$24,000 we went over with the purchase of the new trucks, and then, from the remaining funds, purchase a replacement for Battalion 1, a vehicle that was scheduled to be replaced last year. Chief LaChance has given the city administration a guide on the costs we will face with the replacement of vehicles, the timeline for the turnaround, and the operational needs to be recognized for these vehicles to be replaced regularly. Commissioner McLaughlin asked if we had any statistics to support the argument for a boat for the department. Chief LaChance doesn't have anything right now. He doesn't believe the public knows that the Coast Guard can assist when they can, but they are not a suppression unit and can't assist with a boat fire. We rely heavily on Colchester for any calls like that.
- Commissioner Bond discussed previously suggested meeting dates for the 2025 year. Commissioners agreed to a tentative schedule of:
 - February 11, 2025
 - April 8, 2025
 - June 17, 2025
 - August 12, 2025
 - October 14, 2025
 - December 9, 2025
- Commissioner Chapman asked how the fire department feels about the departure of Chief Murad. Chief LaChance said yes, it's concerning, but there isn't much he can do about it. He is concerned about retention for the fire department, primarily affected by the feeling of burden and burnout. Commissioner Chapman recognizes that there are more instances where the fire department is responding to calls that were traditionally a police response. She asked if there was ever a time when we said we weren't responding for safety reasons because it was a police response call. Chief LaChance has made it clear that if we are on a scene on a call and it doesn't feel safe without police officer presence, we can slow down the entrance to the scene or not engage until a law enforcement presence is on scene. There aren't specific guidelines; it tends to be a more case-by-case instance. We rely on our company officers to ensure scene safety for our responders.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by motion from Commissioner McLaughlin and seconded by Commissioner Sheehey at 09:47.