

The Board of Fire Commissioners, Gloucester Township Fire District # 4 held a Workshop Meeting on October 4, 2023. The meeting was held at Blackwood Fire Company, 14 W. Central Avenue, Blackwood, NJ 0812. This meeting has been properly advertised according to the State of New Jersey Sunshine Laws.

COMMISSIONERS: D. Vannoni, M. Jones, J. McCann, J. Vannoni

ATTENDEES: Captain Riess, IAFF President K. Kemery

Commissioner J. Vannoni brought the Board up to speed on the captain's position at District # 2. He said Rick Knight came out as the # 1 from the test, but now the question is what will they do with Nick Procopio, who is currently the acting captain. Since Rick Knight is a disabled veteran, District # 2 has no other option but to hire him. He said the one viable option, would be to make a day captain, which would lead to having a day time platoon. Considering there is a lack of volunteer response from both Districts, especially during the daytime hours, that may be the direction this will go in the future. He has an email ready to go to the Chief for statistics, which he will use during this budget process.

Commissioner D. Vannoni said he wanted to make this clear, District # 4 will not pay one dime towards a second captain.

Commissioner J. Vannoni said Commissioner Cristella wanted me to let the Board know, he will look for a referendum to hire another platoon. Just another thought.

Commissioner J. Vannoni stated no decision has been made, and he has been assured he will be contacted.

Commissioner McCann asked which captains work on what platoons, and if Procopio is a certified captain.

Commissioner J. Vannoni stated Procopio is a provisional captain. Here is the way it should go, captain Knight to platoon A as a captain, and thank you to Procopio, have a good day.

The question was raised, on how District # 2 did not know, Knight being the disabled veteran would come out on top.

It was made clear, this is a District # 2 problem, and will need to be resolved by them. District # 4 will protect their interests in the matter.

Commissioner J. Vannoni stated the update on the health benefits is progressing. He said that it looks like it would save the district around \$24,000.00. He said neither side is happy with the way this has been presented. He said it has been slimy. He asked, do we want to deal with the sliminess, and save \$24,000.00 or do we want to pay a 13% increase, and stay with the State Plan. The problem is we currently have the State Dental Plan, which he did not know until recently, and he has been talking to IAFF Local President Kemery. He is confident it is going to work, and he is waiting on a written quote from Lane at Connor Strong. He won't accept anything but a written quote, but it sounds like it will go through.

Commissioner Jones said he heard the State Medical cost is increasing this year.

Commissioner J. Vannoni confirmed that.

IAFF President Kemery said the question is, is this new plan with Connor Strong, which is a George Norcross owned company, trying to cause the State medical plan to falter, so they are the only ones left in town?

Commissioner J. Vannoni brought up the issues with Blackwood Fire Company, and even though they have been given the 90-day period to come up with a plan to fix the issues, he still thinks it needs to be discussed. He was at the BFC meeting last night, and he was appalled and sickened by what he heard. He said there is such a divide between the members and the Board, and he stated the members have no idea how the Board operates.

Commissioner D. Vannoni asked what has BFC asked for, that the Board did not give them?

There are great supporters of the Board, Bob Sambucco, Jason Stott, Joe Cipriano, Joe Imielinski.

The Board discussed the nomination of Joe Imielinski for Chief. So, the question was asked, what is the recourse?

There was a long discussion on how to handle the lack of volunteer response for BFC. The discussion went from taking over BFC, to hiring more career. Commissioner Jones said he spoke to the Chief at District # 5, and he said they are turning volunteers away. He said they hope to go to 24/7 in January. Some Board members found that hard to believe.

IAFF Local 3249 President Kemery added, while he may be getting 19 out on a Saturday, the response from them on the apartment fire, was not that. He feels they will not be able to do 24/7, just District #5 alone. Commissioner McCann added that if you only have 6 or 7 guys, how do you get that kind of response. He added that if you look at the gear racks, 2 are career, and the others are filled with gear from members that are not here any longer. How can BFC get more people out? They started to discuss recruitment, and how both the Board and BFC need to discuss the process. It was stated that all the hostility, and division between the Board and BFC must stop, before discussions can move forward. The subject of having lifetime members cook for a training night, we don't have nay of that anymore. The toxic environment in this building drives people away. The Boards job is to fund BFC, not to hold their hands. It is up to BFC to clean up the toxic environment of BFC. At what point do we say the BFC has failed to do what we fund them to do. What incentive do they provide for people to come back to BFC? It was stated that as soon as some of the members saw that Matt had exceed them in his skills, they became critical of him. It is an environment that drives people to the edge. It was stated the communication by BFC needs to be cleaned up. The topic arose on new applicants, and how that process works. Commissioner Vannoni has inserted himself into that process. Along with that came the subject of comradery, and how nothing is being done to encourage comradery among the members. The subject was raised on members who are not medically qualified to ride the apparatus, and why those members are not trying to do something to change their lifestyle, so they could once again ride the apparatus instead of faulting the Board for going on the information of the medical provider, that says they are not medically qualified.

The discussion continued with Board members, Captain Reiss and IAFF Local President Kemery all addressing the issues and suggestions for change.

The question was raised by the Chairman, what is the Board prepared to do, if the expectations of the Board to BFC are not met within 90 days?

The Board had made up a contract/shared service agreement, because the argument was, if BFC does not know what is expected, how can they follow through.

Chairman J. Vannoni said Dave Carlamere reviewed it, and had him make a few changes.

The next question was, what will the Board accept as progress on the agreement within the 90-days, knowing that the end result will not happen in 90 days?

Commissioner D. Vannoni asked if there is going to a committee with 2 members of the Board, 2 members from the BFC that were going to discuss the expectations of BFC to the Board, and the expectations of The Board to BFC. Has that come to fruition, or not from lack of participation?

Commissioner J. Vannoni said he has not gotten a response from BFC.

The next topic was why did a duty crew, not respond to a call at Scenic Falls, when Engine 88 was dispatched? There seems to be a problem with what calls BFC are permitted to respond to.

Commissioner J. Vannoni said BFC is permitted to go to all calls in Fire District # 4, no question. He does not care what the policy is for Camden County, they cannot stop our apparatus from responding to a call in Fire District # 4.

Commissioner McCann stated that when we joined BFC, all we wanted to do, was to get on a truck to look important. Now, we have done so much to prevent issues, no lights and sirens, only take one piece. Maybe that is a part of the issue. Commissioner Vannoni said that is absolutely another perceived issue, which is actually not an issue. He went on to say, these guys need to make their own success, like he did when he was younger. Get the truck out, try to beat SD88 to a call, do what you need to do to get out and answer calls. Start being men, not mice. He has an email ready to go out when the Chief returns, and get some of these questions answered. He will get the contract reviewed by Carlamere tomorrow, and he will send it out via email.

Commissioner D. Vannoni said it should be adopted at the next meeting. He said this is the expectations come January 1, 2024. We are going to work towards this between now and then, but come January 1, 2024 these are our expectations.

Commissioner J. Vannoni notes that come the first of the year, Inspira will no longer be doing Occupational at Chews Landing. We need to look into other medical providers.

With no further business to discuss.

Motion by Commissioner McCann, second by Commissioner Jones to adjourn. All in favor, motion carries.

DATED: October 4, 2023

BY: _____
Michael Jones, Secretary

