

The November 12, 2022 Full Board meeting of the New Jersey Firemen's Home Board of Managers was called to order by Chairman Greci at 0930 hours followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Invocation was provided by Mr. DeLaurentis.

Roll call was taken with 17 managers present. Mr. Sutphen and Mr. Silvestri were excused; Mr. Dutch and Mr. Matthews were absent.

Public notice of the meeting was printed in the Star Ledger Newspaper and posted on the Firemen Home's website.

The minutes from the October 8, 2022 Re-organization meeting, Full Board Meeting and Executive Committee re-organization meeting were approved after minor typographical errors to meetings dates was corrected.

At this time Chairman Greci requested that the usual order of business be suspended so that we could discuss the possible hiring of our new solicitor and to review the budget for adoption since Mr Bell and Mr. Galazzo were in attendance.

#### **Solicitor Search Committee:**

Mr. Wilson read a prepared report about Committee's meetings and work and in recommending a new Solicitor. A copy of Mr. Wilson's report is attached. The Committee had received and reviewed 5 resumes/ applications for the Solicitor position. The committee felt that a full time Solicitor on staff as an employee was not needed. After review, the committee narrowed it down to 2 applicants and ultimately found the firm of Bell, Shivas and Bell PC to be a good fit for our needs and recommended Mr. Bell Jr. for the position Solicitor. What stood out most about the firm was that they could handle almost all of our needs in house without the need to hire outside counsel as much as we had in the past. The firm's retainer of \$3,000 a month provides significant savings compared to our previous Solicitor costs. (approx. \$70,000 savings annually). The firm is also located nearby in Rockaway, Morris County. Discussion was also held to change the title from Solicitor to Legal Counsel, but after finding this would require changes to the NJ Statutes that govern us, it was decided to leave the title Solicitor. Mr. Wilson thanked the committee for great teamwork.

Mr. Jeffer commented on the outstanding reputation of Mr. Bell as an attorney.

Mr. Signorello felt that the committee did an "A+" job in their work.

#### **Resolution:**

At this time Resolution 13-2022 "*Resolution Appointing Joseph J. Bell Jr., Esquire as Solicitor to the New Jersey Firemen's Home*" was read by Secretary Hull. A motion to appoint Mr. Bell Jr. was made by Mr. Washer and seconded by Mr. Signorello. A roll call vote was taken and the appointment was approved. An executed copy of the Resolution is attached.

Mr. Bell gave a brief statement after his appointment introducing himself and his back ground experience.

#### **2023- 2024 Budget:**

Mr. Hull provided a written report on the budget and finance committee meeting held on October 24, 2022 to prepare the budget. A copy is attached. Mr. Galazzo was present to assist with any questions from the floor. The budget had been sent to all Managers by mail and the committee received no input or questions. The report on the budget shows that the budget reflects an 11.4% overall reduction and a 5% reduction in the request from the State Association. At the meeting the committee discussed the use of reserve funds to offset the budget, particularly the \$1.5 million dollars from the defeated Community Nursing Program. The consensus was to keep approximately 5 million dollars in reserves (approximately 6

months worth of our operating funds) and to continue to use excess reserves to offset the budget each year. For this budget, \$750,000 in reserves was used with \$750,000 planned to be used next year (the Community Nursing Home funds). The budget plans for the approximately 23% increase in cost to the State Health Care benefits; the inflationary cost of our inventory items (band aids, diapers, increased cleaning costs, etc); increased fuel costs; increased pension obligation and the loss of revenue from the suspension of the monthly \$850 fee from guests. The budget was described as “tight” with some wiggle room as the former Solicitor’s salary was used and the continuation of utilizing the lobbyist to be discussed. The only “big” capital project was the replace meant of the old elevator.

President Ordway questioned the current balance in the reserves which is approximately 7.1 million, after using the planned \$750,000, the balance would then be approximately 6.3 million dollars. President Ordway felt that the budget could have used another million dollars in reserves and still left the balance above the 5 million dollar goal. Discussion followed that the committee is committed to using reserves each year. A motion to accept the budget was made by Mr. Freeman and seconded by Mr. Strube. A roll call vote was taken and the budget passed with Mr. Ordway being the only No vote.

\* Normal order of business resumed.

**Communications:**

Secretary Hull reported receiving an O.P.R.A. (Open Public Records Act) request from Manager Heflich regarding former Solicitor Tom Ward which was forwarded to the Superintendent and our new Solicitor, Mr. Bell.

**Reports of Officers:**

**Secretary:**

Mr. Hull had no report and thanked everyone for bearing with him as he learned his new position as Secretary. The minutes were sent out and there was an issue with the format. If anyone has issues with the files in the future, please contact the Secretary. Mr. Hull advised that after discussion with the Chairman, roll calls would be taken in random order so the same person isn’t always voting first or last.

**Treasurer:**

Mr. Sutphen was excused and Mr. Veras provided a report on his behalf advising that the monthly budget is fine and the signatures on the bank accounts that are required to be changed and are on the agenda for this meeting.

**Superintendent:**

Mr. Veras reported that it was busy month with repairing items around the Home. The demolition of 320 Vreeland Avenue will cost approximately \$80,000 due asbestos and oil tank removal. Asbestos alone was \$58,000 as it was found in the plaster.

The battle with the leaves has begun.

Mr. Veras reported that there are currently 16 guest that have tested positive for COVID 19. None of the guest are really ill as most have very mild symptoms. A bigger fear for the medical staff is this year’s flu season. Safety precautions are in place for quarantining guests and the allowing of guests “out on pass” has been suspended. Suspicion is that the COVID is coming from visitation. Discussions are being had with regards to the upcoming holiday parties. The Home is still having communal events but the concerns are for how many of the public will attend. The staff is taking it “day by day, week by week.”

**Buildings and Grounds:**

Mr. Signorello provided a written report which is attached. The list contained updates on multiple projects. Mr. Signorello added to Mr. Veras report on 320 Vreeland Avenue about moving forward with the demolition. Mr. Signorello advised that the kitchen floor needs to be re-epoxied and that it is a logistical issue for shutting down the kitchen for up to 10 working days. Mr. Mitch inquired about the repairs to the fire sprinkler system and Mr. Veras advised that the parts are on order.

Mr. Apgar suggested moving forward on the demolition of the house on Vreeland Avenue. Much discussion was had about the cost. Solicitor Bell provided advice on the wording of a motion to have the buildings and ground committee and Superintendent complete the project not to exceed a set cost. A motion was made by Mr. Mitch to do the demolition project with the cost to not exceed \$100,000, seconded by Mr. Signorello. A roll call voted was taken and the matter passed. Mr. Keyser abstained.

**Applications:**

Mr. Freeman provided a written report from the application committee meeting held on November 8, 2022 which is attached. The report indicated 61 guest in Long Term Care and 7 in Residential Care for a total of 68 guests. Since the last meeting there have been 5 new admissions and 5 guests answered their final alarm. The next meeting for the Applications Committee is 0900 hours on December 5, 2022 at the Home.

**Employee Committee:**

Mr. Dutch was absent and no report was provided.

**Finance and Budget Committee:**

Mr. Hull provided a written report on the November 8, 2022 meeting of the Adult and Finance Committee which is attached. Mr Hull reported bills for the month in the amount of \$378,370.60. All revenue and expense vouchers were reviewed and found to be in order. The committee discussed that 2023-2024 budget had been sent to all managers by mail and no feed back had yet to be received. To date, two employees have waived the health benefits. The next meeting of the finance committee will be Tuesday, December 6, 2022 at 0800 hours at the Home.

**Insurance:**

Mr. Strube reported no changes to the insurance. Chairman Greci requested the committee look for additional quotes for insurance policies in July, 2023.

**Legislative Committee:**

Mr. Lugossy reported on the following legislation that was introduced: Senate Bills S2881 and S3237 and Assembly Bill A4842 which involve legislation regarding Division of Fire Safety training programs on the Handling of Electric Vehicle Fires and the funding of that training through Universal Service Fund for Emergency Services. Mr. Lugossy reported on Senate bill S3324 that regarded County Board of Election be permitted to open drop boxes for fire district elections.

Mr. Lugossy reported the Governor Murphy signed Assembly Bill A4107 into law which concerns regulation of Emergency Medical Services and establishes mobile integrated health programs.

The Governor also has designated October as 1st Responder Appreciation Month.

**By-laws:**

Mr. Jeffer reported that the By Law committee had a very long meeting regarding updating the By-laws. Mr. Jeffer advised that the by-laws are from the 19th century and that a complete revision should be crafted. It was suggested by Mr. Jeffer that the chair of each committee submit proposed changes that effect their committees to the by-law committee by January 1st. One item that the committee is working on is that there is one Executive Board and that the full board is charged with making decisions. The discussion are ongoing and involve having full board meetings each month and determining how many meetings would be mandatory for a manager to make. Remote attendance is also being looked at as a possibility.

**Museum:**

Mr. Hull provided a written report on the museum committee meeting and work detail held on October 22, 2022. There were several groups of people who came to the home to donate items. We took receipt of a 1914 chemical hand cart from the Cedar Knolls Fire Department; a go-cart replica fire chief car from Northville Firefighter Rocco Venezia and numerous prints, Code 3 models and Red Hats of Bravery figures from Patty and Charles Bonnell of the Hillsborough Twp. Fire Department. Mr. Veras had also received model fire trucks from Russell Dodge of Elmer. Committee members Washer and Hull met with Dave's Tire Service of Boonton on November 8, 2022 with regards to repairing the tire on the Athens Fox on the lower level. Mr. Hull thanked Chairman Greci on completing the installation of the new fire ring by the museum entrance.

**Public Relations:**

Mr. Wilson reported a successful convention with the items we gave out. The committee will be meeting early next year to discuss ideas. The new pamphlet we had printed is undergoing a "re-write" to remove the \$850 monthly fee to guests. The committee opted for new pamphlets instead of crossing the information out, which would make it look unprofessional.

During public relations, Chairman Greci inquired of the floor if they were happy with Uries Restaurant or should we look for other another place to hold the Wildwood meeting. Complaints were heard about the noise form the ice machine and that it was a poor room they placed us in. Chairman Greci will follow up with Mr. Matthews to look for a new restaurant.

**Ethics and Code of Conduct:**

Mr. Sutphen was excused absence and no report was presented.

**Pension:**

Mr. Greci reported that "we are good".

**Inventory:**

Mr. Wilson reported that the inventory had been completed and is on file with Mr. Veras. It will be update as we receive items. Mr. Veras added that the inventory report was provided to the insurance committee and after review, applicable changes were made to our policy coverages.

**Golf Committee:**

Mr. Greci had new fliers for the 2023 Golf Outing. He reported his disappointment that we did not get more sponsors and asked managers to try to get sponsors and golfers for the event. He asked managers to take fliers after the meeting.

**Liaison to the State Association:**

Mr. Lugossy reported that he and Mr. Ordway had a "liaison meeting" over the phone. The conversation was productive and he added that Mr. Ordway will have more under his report.

**Inspections:**

Mr. Greci reported no major problems and that he spoke with Mr. Veras.

**State Firemen's Association:**

President Ordway advised that the first 2 reports that were due from each association were turned in with 100% compliance. The next reports that are due are the Financial Statement; "Old Style Green Sheet" and Quarterly report. These reports must be completed online and the State is no longer accepting paper/ handwritten reports.

President Ordway added that they are working with the Legislature to introduce a Cancer Bill that covers all volunteer firefighters that are members of the State Health Care Benefits Program. After that bill is passed, they will follow up with another bill to cover ALL volunteer firefighters. This was the same approach that was taken with the paid firefighters Cancer bill instead of doing it all at once.

President Ordway reported that the State Association's next meeting is Saturday, November 19th at 0900 AM.

**Unfinished Business:**

Mr. Keyser asked Mr. Veras about the sprinkler parts which are on order.

Mr. Jeffer asked about allowing a fire department to use the Vreeland house for training before demolition. This was not recommended due to the asbestos condition.

**New Business:**

Changes were required to the authorized signers on the Home's bank accounts. A motion was made by Mr. Wilson to add Chairman Greci, Mr. Sutphen and Mr. Hull to the accounts and to remove past-managers Frato and McDougall. A roll call vote was required and the matter passed.

Mr. Heflich questioned the policy of only 1 year of fire service as the criteria for admission into the Home. He advised that it is wrong and it used to be 7 years of service to come into the Home. He asked the Board of Managers to "think about it". Discussion followed about different means to verify service and if it is a statute, policy, or by-law? Utilizing a Division of Fire Safety Firefighter ID was also discussed. Mr. Washer added that he recently had an applicant that served 1 year and 8 days who was overaged and verification came from the township. Suggestions for changing the qualification requirements should be forwarded to the Application Committee.

Mr. Freeman offered that with the qualifications there should be a line of duty injury provision.

Chairman Greci advised that specific topic has been part of discussions between the State Association and Home and will be continued to be discussed adding he wishes to create an ad hock committee to do so. An Ad Hock committee of Mr. Wilson, Mr. Apgar and Mr. Heflick was formed to continue meetings and discussions with the State Association.

Mr. Veras added that the Board has the Authority to run the home and can set any qualification procedure.

**Payment of Bills:**

Mr. Signorello made a motion to approve payment of bills in the amount of \$378,730.60, the motion was seconded by Mr. Jeffer. Roll call was taken and the bills were approved.

**Public Participation:**

There was no participation by members of the public in attendance.

**Executive Session:**

None had.

**Good and Welfare:**

Mr. Giglio reported that he had spoken to Mr. Silvestri on Thursday (November 10) regarding a joint Christmas party to be held by their counties and he learned Mr. Silvestri may have had a stroke. Mr. Veras will reach out to Mr. Silvestri.

Mr. Washer thanked everyone for the fruit basket that was sent to him for his hip replacement surgery.

**Adjournment:**

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Apgar and seconded by Mr. Giglio. Meeting adjourned at 11 AM

Respectfully submitted,



Roger Hull  
Secretary