



Three Rivers Fire District  
50 Springfield Street  
Three Rivers, MA 01080

# Prudential Committee Minutes

Chairman Stephen Chiacchia called a meeting of the Prudential Committee to order at 6:00 p.m.

## **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Stephen Chiacchia; Prudential Committee Chairman  
Norman Czech; Prudential Committee Vice Chairman  
Richard Pobieglo; Prudential Committee Clerk

Sherrie Bellefleur; District Recording Secretary  
Scott Turner; Three Rivers Fire Chief  
David Basler; District Clerk

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

## **Review The Prudential Committee Code of Conduct**

Chairman Steve Chiacchia asked the District Clerk David Basler to review and update the Code of Conduct. Chairman expresses appreciation for composing this well written substantial document. Prudential Committee Clerk Richard Pobieglo asked what the reasoning behind this request by the Chairman. There is no specific reasoning except to review and update. This basically calls for professional conduct by the Prudential Committee and how District employees are treated, in a dignified and professional manner.

## **Report of the Fire Chief**

- **Recent Resignations**
  - **RE: Equipment Readiness Checks~Experience & Training~Education~Attendance History:**

Equipment Readiness Checks are checks of the apparatus and all the equipment that is on the apparatus and personal protective equipment assigned to each member. Chief states if one individual was to check one apparatus and all the equipment on the apparatus it would take no more than 20 minutes. The Fire Chiefs Policy & Procedures (P&P) that came out in 2018 did not have any complaints or issues at that time. The Officers, Lieutenants and Captains who were responsible for overseeing this had developed several schedules when trucks were checked once per week then once per month, it kept going back and forth and turned into one of those things that never really got accomplished. Within the last 8 years this task was up to every member of the department and the list would rotate so the same person was not always doing this check. The Lieutenants should be checking up on the member, the Captain checks on the Lieutenant, the Deputy Chief checks on the Captain then the Chief checks on the Deputy Chief. Pobieglo asked Chief Turner if the P&P have been approved by the Board and Chief replied he is responsible for creating the policies and procedures of the fire department and the P&P are written by attorneys. The attorneys are experienced nationwide with call fire departments, police, and EMS. Pobieglo feels it is hard for them to do their job if they do not know what Chief is doing. Pobieglo states he is elected by the towns people to make sure Chief is doing what he is supposed to be doing. Chief says he is elected to be sure everyone is doing what they should be doing in the *financial area*. Pobieglo stressed that the Board is there for more reasons than just financial reasons and requests that Chief Turner get out of his Hitler mentality that is "whatever I say is". Chairman stepped in to stop this conversation and the direction it was going but Chief Turner asked to address the Hitler comment by saying that he can be called Hitler if he actually wrote the Policies and Procedures on his own, but he did not write them. Chairman does not want to hear

this kind of talk from either one of them again and went on to read a portion of the Bylaws on page 3 and common in most towns and codified in Mass General Laws ***“The Fire Chief should have full and absolute authority in the administration of the department, shall make all rules and regulations for it’s operation shall report to the Prudential Committee from time to time as they may require and shall annually report to the District the condition of the fire department with recommendations there thereof”***. There is a reason that this is codified as Mass General Law and that is because certain elected officials didn’t want politicians messing with the fire and police department. They want the professional to run these departments.

Pobieglo objects to the section “shall meet with Prudential Committee” and asks if they, the Prudential Committee can say anything to Chief Turner based on being elected officials. Pobieglo recalled being told he needed to go through a liaison who was to be Norman Czech. This led to Czech telling Pobieglo he did not need to go through him first if he wanted to discuss anything with Chief he could go directly to Chief.

Czech reiterates that the Chairman’s point is Chief has full and absolute authority of the fire department, he makes his rules, his regulations and he does meet with the Board, he meets with them every month.

Chiacchia asks Chief of his on-duty schedule and who responds to a call at 11pm or 2am. Chief is on Monday – Friday 6am – 6pm. Then from 6pm – 6am if there is an emergency one calls the police department or 911. The Duty Officer responds at these times but currently Chief is the one to respond. There has in the past been a rotating schedule but currently there is not one and Chief is responding as the Duty Officer. The number of nights during a rotation and depending on the number of officers would determine how many times one person would have to be the Duty Officer. Pobieglo questions who covered the station the night of the CO/smoke detector call. The Lieutenant, from Ludlow was covering as Duty Officer this evening in question. Allegedly the response time was 30 minutes, but Chief Turner is still waiting for the report from the Police Department. The newspaper states 15 minutes response time and Pobieglo would like to know why the two numbers do not match up.

- **Staffing Update:**

- An update on staff/roster of the fire department was given 2 weeks ago but since then there are 2 new members. One member is from Three Rivers and the other from Ludlow. Chief states that even though he has members in Ludlow the response times have not slowed down. Pobieglo feels he is not receiving the correct data, but Chief assures him that each month in his Report of the Fire Chief he hands him the data that shows the response times, and it is correct. Palmer, being a full-time department has a budget of approximately \$1 million and Pobieglo feels Three Rivers is leaning toward this. Chief states that never once has he asked to hire full time members to his department, he’s saving the taxpayers a lot of money by paying part time members only. Our budget is under \$300K compared to a full-time budget of \$1 million. Pobieglo asks about the number of hours the members work each week, assuming it’s 6 hours a day 5 days a week. Chief again says, in his monthly report it is recorded what his members work and that is no more than 20 hours per week working only 2 shifts per week. Assurance of this reporting was confirmed when Chief asked the other two committee members if they know the hours worked by the members based on the report. They both said they know the report tells them this. Pobieglo now asks the other committee members if he knows the yearly pay that these members receive. The prior pay schedule they receive a stipend. According to the state and federal law they could not make over 20% of what a full-time firefighter would make. Now the members are getting paid hourly so that rule does not apply because they are considered part time firefighters on call not volunteers so they are going to make more money. Chairman directs to Chief the financial report that was looked at last meeting, showing his numbers are still under budget. Pobieglo says this is because they do not have the manpower. Chief says he has plenty of people. A report at

last month's meeting comparing 2015 to 2021 was brought up and reminding all that the numbers have not changed as far as number of responding members. When Chief began, he had 33 members on his department and average responding to calls was 3 to 4 people.

### **Public Comment**

- Gerard Charrette's "Ged" primary question was what is the goal here? The Chairman says the main thing being examined is the staffing. There has been a Lieutenant resign earlier in the summer. Then, about 1 month ago 5 other individuals resigned from the department. These are members that have been on the department a significant number of years. The committee is concerned about this which led to this questioning of the Chief about staffing and safety issues due to not having enough staff. Some of the members that resigned have been questioned by the Chairman and now he's questioning Chief about this. The upside tonight is the staffing has been increasing and the committee is very happy with this. Ged then asked if the goal is to get rid of our Chief and the Committee said no, they are not trying to get rid of our Chief.

Ged then asked the committee to stop badgering Chief. Find out if there are any improprieties that need to be addressed and stick to the issues. Pobieglyo responded saying Mr. Charrette was not at the last meeting and he pays taxes in this town. The issue Pobieglyo has here is after spending 33 years on this department and he's now seeing it fall apart right in front of his eyes. Concerns are injury or death to a firefighter, injury, or death to the public. Coverage, he feels is not there and he feels things are getting worse. The number 1 concern is injury but also qualifications of a firefighter. Pobieglyo requests seeing records from the Chief confirming his members are qualified. Time to respond to a scene is getting longer and unacceptable. Statistics were discussed some. Lastly a top concern was keeping the Village of Three Rivers residents and taxpayers safe.

Michael Matthieu then commented that the last 2 appointed officers have less than 1 ½ years of time on the department. On the list there are members that have 9+ yrs., 5+ yrs. and 4+ yrs., why couldn't any of these members be appointed officers? Chief says service time does not prove qualification. Experience has been obtained through past fires of recent to the newly appointed officers. Chairman states the Chief is not in court here. Matthieu is asking where the members had their training and how much training they have had. Matthieu was asked to take a seat and we would get back to him later.

Mr. Grimes, a member of the Three Rivers Fire Department spoke next. Himself and multiple newer members of the department have been inside structure home fires, and they all have firefighter experience. He is attending the Call Volunteer Academy. The Academy, in Massachusetts is strictly for call volunteer firefighters. To get into the Academy you must go through the medical examination, waivers, eye, hearing tests and heart tests. After your accepted you go through gear checks, you're not just standing around. There are boot shines and you must be clean shaven. Physical Training out in the yard, could be basic sit ups, pull ups, climbing a rescue tower. Successful graduates of the Massachusetts Call Volunteer Academy will leave with their National Firefighter 1 & 2 Certification. Also leave with Hazmat Operations Certification (nationally recognized certification). Pobieglyo asks after all this where do you go? He feels the training happens then the members leave for other towns.

Michael Matthieu asked Mr. Grimes when he started the academy and Mr. Grimes said he started a couple of weeks ago. Matthieu goes on to say he's called the Academy and the Academy says they are not going to have any more classes there until the first of the year. Grimes assures he has started.

David Basler our District Clerk spoke to say that comments made earlier in the meeting by Pobiegló were not right. Due to the nature of those comments, they have been refrained from these minutes, but they were made, and Mr. Basler brought them to the front row to be sure it was known that they were not right. He then asked Chief if there is any other department that he is aware of that is not going through the same things that Chief is going through. Staffing is becoming an issue all over. The district has encouraged Chief to build a team and he is doing that. Pobiegló responds that he feels Chief has kept issues to himself and that was wrong. He should be outwardly open about his staffing issues and not keep the committee in the dark. Again, Basler stresses all this to build a team Chief is doing what he must do.

Matthew Lemieux states he also attended the Academy. He also went on to say he left 3 weeks early only for personal reasons in his personal life. After being asked why he left the department he states he resigned because he was not allowed to go out on the truck any longer, he was not allowed to do his job anymore because he was not able to pass the fitness exam. Chief showed a document from the National Volunteer Firefighter Council. The cardiovascular state of health and wellness in the fire service is of such concern that researchers identified the correlation to the public safety. Pobiegló asked about the policy and being allowed to keep your uniform. Chief says 20 years but cannot have left on bad terms. The reason Lemieux is not able to keep his is things that were done prior to resigning, he left on unfavorable terms. It is also things that were done, in the community against the fire department. The policy of the fire department and of the district things being said in the community go against district prohibition.

John Modak spoke to say he would like to recognize all the new volunteer firefighters and everyone that is part of this department. He really appreciates them all stepping up and do not let all this stuff get you down. The town appreciates all you're doing and 2/3's of the Board does also.

Mark Graveline spoke to say he thinks were moving in the right direction and he supports Chief Turner 100%. He also says you would have to be living under a rock to not realize the physical standards are the bedrock of being a firefighter. Thank you to the new recruits.

Ending comments from Chiacchia is the Chief has the full and absolute authority of the department. What has been heard tonight will be considered and the Prudential Committee does appreciate all of the members. All will be considered, and action will be taken maybe at the next meeting.

### **Board Members Comments:**

Richard Pobiegló asked Mark Graveline if he is still our insurance agent. We pay his insurance agency to protect our firefighters. If we were sued by someone from town would our rates go up? Mark answers that we are in a pool like all other fire departments making the pool so large we would not see the increase if it were to happen. Pobiegló was asked what his point for this question was and he replied "safety". Mark says the moves Chief is making with his standards it will only improve things.

During Board Member Comments another public comment was taken. A neighbor of the fire department commented on seeing the crew during the day and how much they do and how hard they work. She thinks they are the best and she feels safe.

**MOTION (CZECH; CHIACCHIA): To adjourn from the Open Meeting at 7:00 p.m. Approved 3-0-0**

Submitted by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sherrie Bellefleur, District Recording Secretary

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved as to Form and Content:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stephen Chiacchia, Chairman

Date: \_\_\_\_\_