



Solon Township Hall
15185 Algoma Avenue NE
Cedar Springs, MI 49319
616-696-1718

**Minutes of the Solon Township Fire Committee - amended 6/13/16 (1d)
May 18, 2016 meeting 7:00pm**

Meeting called to order by Chairman Mather at 7:00 PM

Members Present: Fire Chief Jeff Drake, Vice Chairman Curt Steinebach*, Chairman Jeff Mather*, Township Trustee Fred Gunnell*, Community Representative Don Hamblin*, Fire Department Representative Dan Spangenberg, Community Representative Burt Dent*.
(* = voting member)

Members Absent: None

Approval of Agenda: Motion by Curt Steinebach to approve agenda. 2nd by Don Hamblin, Motion carried 5-0.

Approval of February 2, 2016 minutes: Motion by Curt Steinebach to approve minutes. 2nd by Fred Gunnell. Motion carried 5-0.

Business:

- 1) Review of the qualifications and skills for the sole candidate for the open Deputy Chief position. Chief Drake indicated that he received only one application for the position, Lieutenant Chris Paige of the Solon Township Fire Department, which he presented to the Board for approval. Chief Drake indicated that Lieutenant Paige embodies the character, discipline and dedication of a fire fighter. The Board requested further review by the Fire Committee which has been the longstanding practice in Solon Township.
 - a. The Chief Drake and Fire Fighter Spangenberg gave positive references for Lieutenant Paige's professionalism, skills and dedication to the fire service.
 - b. Chief Drake discussed the particulars associated with the missing records associated with Lieutenant Paige's FF 1&2 certifications which the State of Michigan had misplaced or otherwise lost track of.
 - i. Lieutenant Paige subsequently sat for and passed the FF 1&2 fire service test. Chief Drake also administered a written fire service test on "leadership and administration" which Lieutenant Paige passed.
 - c. The Committee members ask multiple interview questions of Lieutenant Paige related to his skills, understanding of the job duties of Deputy Chief, and motivations for his interest in the position.
 - d. Fire Fighter Spangenberg indicated that the posting for Deputy Chief had not been posted for the full 21 days. This was verified and the committee voted to

recommend the posting be reposted for an additional 10 days to fulfill the policy requirement and to provide a fair opportunity for other fire fighters to submit their application. The motion included unanimous support for Chief Drake's recommendation to promote Lt. Paige unless any additional qualified candidates submit their application. The motion was presented by Representative Hamblin, seconded by Representative Dent, and passed unanimously by the committee.

- 2) Vice Chairman Steinebach initiated a conversation about the recent resignation of a fire fighter who had just completed training. The cost of training was paid for by the Township, and is therefore considered a loss. The committee discussed the pros and cons associated with various options/ideas related to the funding of fire service training, including requiring reimbursement if a firefighter leaves the department within a specific period of time. Chief Drake and Committee member Spangenberg explained that requiring a firefighter to stay in the department (who otherwise wants to leave) in order to avoid paying for his training would have a negative impact on the working relationship with other firefighters. The committee made no further recommendations on this topic.
 - a. Mrs. Regan Paige, community member and member of the Solon Township Firefighters Association suggested that the Association may be able to assist in some of the funding for future fire fighter training. Mrs. Paige indicated she would discuss this further with her Association.
- 3) Township Trustee Fred Gunnell inquired about the results of the meeting between Chairman Mather and Vice Chairman Steinebach regarding fire department morale and camaraderie.
 - a. Chairman Mather indicated that he has met with some fire fighters and discussed concerns related to morale with others. There are various opinions on this subject and consequently no conclusive courses of action have been established.
 - b. Some internal and external factors that seem to influence morale and camaraderie within our fire department are noted below. It was also noted that Chief Drake is well apprised of this concern and is redirecting his efforts to facilitate improvements in this area. It was also discussed that many of the firefighters are engaged in regular exercise, training, and related departmental activities that will help to address some of the risk factors noted below.
 - i. Traditional dynamics of the volunteer fire service are in conflict with our changing/changed society, i.e., other careers, family, too busy, etc.
 - ii. Some disengagement of senior fire fighters, i.e., burn-out and/or bad feelings associated with sustaining a high response rate for a while, then dropping off. Feeling of "others aren't contributing".
 - iii. Structured leadership. This is perceived as a change from the past. The need for structure is not always well understood or appreciated.
 - iv. Limited face-time between the Chief and firefighter's. i.e., need for improved communications.
 - v. Limited interaction between new firefighters and senior members of the department... creating a potential division between them.

1. We noted that this creates a great opportunity to better utilize the experience, skills and professionalism of our senior members as mentors for the newer firefighters.
- vi. Need for appointment of a Deputy Chief to relieve the Chief of some administrative duties so he can focus more time on his leadership role.
- vii. Comparisons with surrounding fire departments that don't provide a full or fair picture of the strengths, progress and evolution of the Solon department.
- viii. Need for improved methods to maximize morale and camaraderie. i.e., fire fighter recognition (all fire fighters – as a team), dinners, banquets, community night, team building exercises, etc.
- ix. Need for the establishment of goals, expectations related to a minimum number of responses (per month) a firefighter should be making.
- x. Need for improved methods of evaluating firefighter performance, participation, and development.
- xi. Need for more formal process for dealing with questions, comments, problems, and communication of decision making process.

Additional public comments: none

Adjourn: Motion to adjourn and accepted: Time 8:45pm (approx.)

Submitted by: Jeff Mather