



LAGRANGE FIRE DISTRICT

504 Freedom Plains Rd • Poughkeepsie, NY 12603



going on, it's been catch up year after year after year, we just keep slapping a band aid on to try to solve the problem and it's not working. We have to make some bold steps here tonight, make some decisions, obviously the Board thought there was a need for this, otherwise, you guys wouldn't have responded and hired a grant writer to pay him to put a grant out there, to try to get a grant, unless you guys just thought it was dust in the wind and we'll never get this, don't worry about it. But that is not the fact, there is always a chance you can get it, but you guys got it. Obviously, you thought there was a need to get this grant so you went after it and now we have it. Perfect example, again you can give a thousand different examples of this, stabbing at the high school, possibly three people stabbed, the crews went out there, there was a fight, there were people injured, the ambulances were tied up right there, the next available ALS unit was from Rhinebeck. You are going to sit here and tell a citizen of this town that when the crews are busy and their loved one is laying there and you are doing CPR on their loved one, and you are going to look them in the face and say that's acceptable that an ambulance comes from Rhinebeck to treat their loved one at their house. That's on you guys. You guys have a responsibility, an obligation to serve the residents of this community, to make sure they are getting served. And right now we are short staffed and we need the help. I understand there are a lot of logistics on the financial side of things but that is your job to take care of that. You got a great guy sitting right there that knows his math and that is the guy you turn to to solve these problems. You guys got to get off, stop with kicking the ball down the road, kicking the ball down the road. I don't want my taxes to go up, if it has to go up, it's got to go up. We've got to solve the problem. These guys are short staffed, the call volume is only going up. You guys have it, the chief had the sheet up there, there is tons and tons of – it's not, well we'll worry about it when it happens, it's happening – there is going to be a ton of building in this town. There is already a ton of building going on in this town. This stuff's got to be solved today. It really does, you can't keep kicking the can down the road, this has been going on for years with a lot of issues in this fire district. Take the courage step forward, let's do the right thing for taxpayers, let's do the right thing for the district, let's get the ball rolling down the road in the right direction to take care of this fire district and the members. You have a ton of dedicated people here, between career and volunteer, that want to do the right thing. You guys need to look at doing the right thing and I hope that you will all agree to do this. We really can't count on the volunteers and you guys know as well as I do if you get 10 volunteers today, they are not really up and running for probably a year and a half to two years and by then the call volume is going to go up. And volunteers don't stay, that is just a fact, not picking on anybody, but volunteers do the best they can. You've got to have manpower here to take care of the community and I hope you guys do that tonight. Thank you."

Komorsky thanked Mr. Kaiser and said on behalf of the Board of Fire Commissioners that they will respond to Mr. Brandl and Mr. Kaiser. Komorsky stated that this Board has been diligently negotiating with the collective bargaining unit - the union - , this Board does not have a problem with approving this SAFER grant, it's not a political issue at all, but there is economics. He said they are down to one sticking point left in order to get the deal done – instead of an eight man minimum, they want a seven man minimum staffing to eight at the chief's discretion. He said that would do the deal, with everything the collective bargaining unit and this Board discussed. Kaiser said he thought the grant rules required an eight man minimum to get the grant money. Chief O'Connor said that is does, that for the first three years the District has to staff to eight, that after the grant was over in three year then the District has to fund it. He said that he is the biggest proponent, that he wouldn't have put eight people in the grant if he

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didn't think the District needed it; however, when you look what is coming down the pike with inflation and issues faced by developers, he said the concern is that the development that is being banked on isn't going to happen. O'Connor said that five is the current minimum but that he has convinced the Board that the District needs six, because operations don't work below six. He said that the District needs eight because of the lack of volunteers at Station 1, but due to the economics of the whole thing and if all of this stuff (development) falls through then seven is better than six. He said that in his mind it is bites of an elephant to get to what is needed. He said that is everything goes well - the call volume goes up, volunteers continue to decline, the buildings come in – then eight men is a no brainer for him because it is dictated by those things. He said that otherwise the District gets nothing. He said he wants to hire eight people and he doesn't want to lay people off so it is a step to where the District needs to be.

- Kyle Rancourt: "Kyle Rancourt, I am the union president for LaGrange Professional Firefighters. First of all, I want to start out - thank you guys for coming. You just put this grant on the head of the union, I want you to soak that in for a minute. I negotiated with you guys for over two and a half weeks and on the Board the whole time was eight man. We negotiated, we went back and forth, we got 2.5 million dollars in concessions for a six year contract – 2.5 million dollars - six million dollars that you are being handed to make this happen. Then on Sunday, the final hour before I had a meeting on Monday to talk to my guys about this, you pull the rug out from under this whole negotiation and you think you can change the biggest part of the whole contract negotiation, which was eight guys. So don't sit up here and act like this is on us, you guys pull this stunt on Sunday afternoon and when I asked what you guys would give back if we were to do this, it was nothing. We started two and a half weeks ago, the things that the union asked for, four things, have been the same four things. Our concessions have grown every single time we've talked, we started way low – maybe in the million dollar savings – and you guys keep saying give me more. Marc, sweeten the pot, as you always say. We're done sweetening the pot, you are not going to come in here the last minute, pull the rug out from under this negotiations, and then sit in this meeting and blame the union and tell us that we need to make a change for you to accept the grant. Unacceptable, absolutely unacceptable. The chief came in to us in the beginning and said we needed eight. That is where it stands, if you wanted to do this, this should have been a discussion in the beginning of the negotiations and we could have negotiated for that. Unacceptable."
Komorsky: "Commissioner Piehler, was there a discussion that you want to"
Commissioner Piehler: "There was a discussion, not only last week, but before we even filed we had spoken about seven. In our very first meeting, that I had with Tony, myself, and you were there"
Rancourt: "Yeah"
Piehler: "That topic, that very topic, was brought up"
Rancourt: "Correct, it was brought up and killed."
Piehler: "It wasn't Sunday night. Well, you just killed it, but it wasn't killed, just because you said no, doesn't mean it's not going to happen."
Rancourt: "We were, literally, on Saturday before you guys pulled this out, we had one thing to talk about, we were working on salaries and what the raises were going to be and that is what we were working on. It was established this whole time. I tried to get a hold of your lawyer, because I pretty much think that this is not negotiating in good faith. I mean I honestly think you guys are at that point to try and pull this on Sunday afternoon. If this was a thought"
Piehler: "It wasn't pulled Sunday afternoon, it was in the meeting that I was at, that is for sure"

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Rancourt: "There was a conversation and we left that meeting, the meeting was left with an eight man minimum. That was the only time we talked about it."

Piehler: "It wasn't over, I mean that wasn't the end of discussions, that was just part of the discussions."

Rancourt: "So it's ok, on Sunday afternoon, the day before you know I had a meeting to try to put our hand to the fire, because that is what it was, it was a stunt. You guys have 2.5 million dollars. We are a union of twenty-six guys, that is the most incredible thing that I think I have ever accomplished as union president, to find you two and a half million dollars to accept this grant. There are union guys here, they can tell you, unions don't give up 2.5 million dollars in one contract. It doesn't happen. Rich, you are on the union, you know that doesn't happen. This is incredible. I am proud, regardless of what happens, I am proud of my negotiating team and my guys for accepting what was on the table with eight man, with 2.5 million dollars. I am proud of that. I think you guys need to rethink about this a little bit. We came a long way up until Sunday afternoon. We were pretty much there, until Sunday afternoon. This is where it lies. So please, do not make your decision tonight based on the union. You make your decision based on safety, the community, and everyone that you said that you would protect- the visitors of LaGrange, the residents of LaGrange, your employees. That is who you need to do it for, not some political stunt to try to drain us for a little more."

- Jeff Kaiser: "I guess there's a Board of Fire Commissioners, the faces have changed, but the tactics haven't changed. I was also union president for a long time, it's the same tactics that the past board has done. Last minutes changes and then blame it on us. In the past we have negotiated for \$300,000 and the Board was thrilled to death to get \$300,000 dollars from the career staff that we gave back to the district. I'm surprised to hear seven minimum when the chief asked for eight, the grant asked for eight and I understand now it's three years that you have to keep it with the grant and, I guess, after the three years, you're going to drop it to seven? I don't understand, where does the seven come in to play?"

O'Connor: "It wouldn't drop to seven, so the idea would be that if someone took time off we have to fill that shift. So you drop to seven if someone took time off, the minimum manning is seven. I'm not happy about it. It's not something that pleases me to say, that to agree to do that with all that I have fought for since March, but it that is what it means to get the deal done and we worry about moving down the road, forty years from now, it gets the people here and we can work towards to making our financial footing better. We have equipment we have to buy, we have building to repair, apparatus to purchase, and none of that is factored into any of this. I need to put grants together for all of that stuff and plan for the future. I want to get people here and if I have to settle for seven, and it's not even settling for seven, everything would have to fall apart, the economy would have to completely collapse, for this area to not support eight. It only growing. If the area grows and the economy turns around, this is a moot conversation. It is a safety net the Board was looking for, I'm trying to pull a rabbit out of a hat to get this grant accepted so we can move forward."

Piehler: "I don't think this was a surprise, Chief, I think your words are exactly the same as when you filed for this, said it was not what you wanted to do, but if it has to be done, it is not your ideal, but that is what has to be done."

Kaiser: "Number one, it's not what the chief wants, it's what the chief needs. It's not a want for him. He is the chief of this district and he understands that he is liable to take care of the people of this town and to take care of his firefighters. He is probably nervous as hell going home every night, knowing that he is short staffed and that his guys could get injured or killed on the scene without the proper staffing. So it's

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not a want, it's a need for him, it's a need for these taxpayers. You guys knew back in January that you wanted to do this. You've had, we're in the tenth month of the year, you've had ten months to figure this stuff out. Obviously you haven't figured it out, you haven't been doing your job. The other point, forget the grant, it's not about a grant, it's about what we need. If we had no grant whatsoever, the chief would be coming to the Board going "he guys we need more manpower, lets add more manpower". You go to the union at contract time and you negotiate a new contract. Without getting into a contract, with all of these details, they just said they conceded 2.5 million to give back to the district. The district they gave back, the district is going to hire eight guys, that is what it is about. Forget the grant, you need more manpower. The blessing of it all, the government is willing to give you 3.5 million to help you out. That is a plus for you guys to move forward. The last point is, I don't care what the economy is, this area has grown since day one. Oh, IBM shut down, everybody's moving out of the area – no, it didn't happen. Call volume has been going up and the town has been growing every year. SO we need to take care of the people in the town and do the right thing. Thank you."

- Rob Ridley: "Hi, my name is Rob Ridley, I'm the sergeant-at-arms for the Fairview Professional Firefighters' Local 2623 and I'm not here today to browbeat the Board into what you guys are facing with everybody that's involved in in this room. Out of many of the things that I'm an expert in is mismanagement of fire districts. I've experienced it pretty much since the start of my career in 2007 in Fairview and my question that I pose to you is what legacy will you all leave behind here? You have an opportunity to increase the staffing, make right for your district, your taxpayers, the visitors, workers - everybody, pretty much that you have a responsibility to protect in this elected position that you owe here. I see your crews at the hospital, we say hi. They are beat, they are tired, they are running back to back calls. This system that's in place, has been in place for quite some time, it needs improvement. I can tell you and Chief O'Connor can tell you what happens when we don't improve the system. You're worried about your fiduciary responsibility and I get that, I understand it. I work in Fairview, we have so many tax free properties, we make the news all of the time; however, the other side of that cost has been transfers. Where we have lost our people as they start to get burned out and what that costs the fire district and what that costs us in overtime and loss of personnel and experience. So my question for you as you're making these decisions, it's more of a consideration, consider the legacy that you will leave behind, because eventually one day you will step down from this position and people will remember the people who are sitting up here are the one who are going to steer the district in the direction that it is going to go. I can tell you, having lost several people and the only district that I think is beating us is north of here - Pleasant Valley - as far as turnover goes, we have incredible turnover in our fire district and our union and we are feeling the effects of it in experience. We have younger and younger people come out on the streets. They, God bless them, they have great heart and we are doing our best to catch up. You have an incredible group of people here with a lot of experience. The LaGrange Fire District is in no book. I can't think of a Fire Officers' handbook that reads how to be a Lagrange firefighter. The only people who can do that are the people that have been here before and the people behind me and if you do not take care of them and alleviate the concerns that they have as far as their call volume and the things that are happening in this fire district as far as the burnout and everything else that his happening with these members, you're going to even pay more. As somebody who's been there, and by all means, if you are looking for a consultant or a contractor, I will gladly sell my services to you, but I can tell you what a mismanaged fire district looks like, I can tell you what mismanaged commissioners look like and I can tell

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you the financial cost of what it actually whittles down to when the district doesn't stand behind the people and they choose to leave. I don't want that to happen for you guys, I've been down that road, I've got the T-shirt and I don't like wearing it. And like I said, Chief O'Connor, as much as we're happy that you guys took him – thank you – he can tell you the story himself. So just keep in mind what legacy you are going to leave with all of this. Thank you."

- Greg Bolner: "I'm one of the youngest volunteers here in LaGrange, I think I'm actually the youngest, Greg Bolner (Jr.). I've been here since my junior year of high school, and throughout that whole time I can say I've probably been, maybe on occasion one of the two volunteers that have shown to any of the calls. Most of the other times it was usually by myself. I was hoping when I left for my time in the military, that things would change, more volunteers would come through as society changed, but when I came back I found that now I'm the only volunteer showing up. And that is only times that I can show up because I have started working other jobs. Working for a commercial EMS agency, I go to Vassar all of the time and I see both of LaGrange's ambulance there. I can't imagine why we don't need more personnel because we have a third ambulance and that third ambulance is always sitting because we don't have enough personnel to man it. I'm merely here to give what I see through my eyes. I kind of hope to see more volunteers show up but I've already hoped and it hasn't happened so I think those spots do need to be filled. This grant will fill it but eight personnel is better because the more the merrier in that sense."
- Tracey Rancourt: "Tracey Rancourt, don't roll your eyes at me because of the last name, you know who I'm related to. The sad part of this is, I'm a history teacher, I teach young kids so it is going to go into simple terms for you. Have you ever heard the term history repeats itself? If you ever want to look at something tragic, people always look back and say 'Oh, we should have done better'. You have the chance to do better, that is the sad part right now and if you vote no on this when you were given the chance and then you want to look back – I'm going to get morbid for a second, I know, obviously my brother, Cam, Jason, any of these guys – if something tragic happens, one of them gets hurt and you show up to that funeral, look any of their families, their kids, us in the eyes and you say 'Oh, I'm sorry for your loss', don't want to hear it. Because I'm sorry, you had the chance to make this safer. You had the chance, you're given this money. It is something and you're going to look family, you are going to look at anyone in the eyes and say 'I'm sorry', I'm going to say 'No'. I'm sorry, you had this chance. Don't make this part of history where something tragic happens and you say 'ah', let's fix this now. You have a chance, do something about it. That's all."

Komorsky asked if there were any other comments and EMS Administrator Michael Benenati said there were some online comments. Secretary Le said there have been several comments and asked if it would be best to ask if the participant could unmute to make their comments. Komorsky said the participants should unmute, state their name, and ask their questions or make their comments. He asked who made the first comment because he can't see behind him. Le said the first comment was from Ron Schulz and Komorsky asked him to unmute to make his comments. While waiting, Komorsky asked if Dan Wysocki had any comments and Wysocki said he did not. Commissioner Pignataro said he saw some comments in the chat and was just bringing them up to Le. Le asked if the Board wanted her to read the comments that came in for the Board and Komorsky said he would prefer people to ask as he doesn't know who is writing the questions. Benenati asked Komorsky to give them a minute to figure the technical stuff out as it is a lot to manage. Pignataro

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asked if the Board was answering questions being left on the chat and Komorsky said he was hoping that whoever left the question would ask it themselves. Pignataro said he thinks there is a member of the public who is leaving messages in the chat expecting them to be read. Komorsky asked if there was a reason he couldn't go live to state his feeling. Komorsky said he was happy to hear their questions or concerns and Sassi said that historically they haven't done the chat. Le said that Mr. Schulz does not have a microphone and Le read the questions:

“what will the Board position be when the firefighters union DEMANDS that the “new” contract in Dec be such that 2 additional firefighters be REQUIRED on each of the 4 rotating shifts and 1 additional firefighter be REQUIRED on the day shiftthese new “REQUIREMENTS” will mean there will be NO additional flexibility to limit overtime despite 9 additional (36%) employees and in fact the overtime will likely INCREASE.....surely the board knows this is coming and they MUST be on record that they will not accept these manpower requirement changes.

what does the study on the effect of 9 ADDITIONAL employees on overtime costs show for the next 5 years?.....What % of salaries is overtime for the last 3 years?.....I was told two years ago that it was 29% for that year and that it could not possibly fall to or has ever been less than 20% (from Chief Ward)

I thought the SAFER grant was suppose to pay in full for the nine new employees for the first three years... Why then does the proposed budget which includes the 9 new employees and the grant money also include \$229,000 in ADDITIONAL taxes over the previously proposed +5% budget without the grant and new employees?.....What is going on here??.....Does the grant pay for the first three years or not??

it seems that the proposed budget allocates \$688K for salary and \$610K for benefits for the additional 9 new employees in the first year (1.298M total).....yet the grant for year 1 is only for \$1.164M.....also you are appropriating an additional \$100K for the NEW ubiquitous "transfer account" (transfer to SAFER surplus)clearly, the grant does not pay for these additional employees even in year 1.....and it will be worse in years 2 and 3.....Explain all this

9.98M proposed spending in year 1.....compounding 5% additional each year puts spending at 12.13M in year 5.....that is 48% more spending than this year.....in years 4 and 5 and thereafter, the spending will be virtually all on the taxpayer.....I want to see YOUR 5 year projection on spending.....I project a tax rate of \$6/\$1K valuation by year 6.....meaning an "average" \$350K home in Lagrange will pay OVER \$2K in fire tax alone.”

Komorsky asked for the last comment again and then asked the Board if anyone would like to address the questions. Treasurer Mark Pozniak said that, yes, in the estimates roughly the 25% - 30% over time is fair as a percentage of total salaries paid. He said with the budget - the SAFER grant does eventually pay for the nine new hires for the first three years, then in year four the District is responsible – if the District allowed no change in the tax levy in year one, and year two, and year three, then the District would be hit with approximately a twenty percent increase above and beyond the normal increases in year four. He said the concept to smooth the increases over time was to have an additional 2.85% increase, above whatever would be normal, for each of six years as opposed to a one time 20% increase in year four. He said so the Board did budget for a surplus in years one through three, that surplus then gets drawn down in years four through six, then in year seven it would be fully funded. Komorsky asked if there were any other comments live in the room or live on the screen behind him and Le said that Mr. Schulz submitted one more comment and then read it:

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“will these 9 new employees be recent fire school graduates or will some experienced and higher paid people be added?.....what is the anticipated mix?.....the \$688K allocated for salaries implies \$76.4K per employee in year 1.....not exactly "entry level".....it seems that the last three (Rogers, Hatfield, Port) new hires (all recent fire school graduates) made an average of \$88K in their third year?”

Komorsky said he couldn't comment on that and asked if the chief could comment. Chief O'Connor said that any new hires would have to be pulled off of the civil service list or potential transfers. He said he didn't know if there were transfers looking or not and that there is quite an extensive process the District has to go through with civil service. Sassi said that Mr. Schulz isn't aware that recent hires are a mix, the District has hired transfers and the District has hired a couple that have been put through the academy. He said it all depends on availability. Pozniak said, not to disclose contractual items that are generally considered private, but part of the work leading up to the grant is negotiations with the union that would lower their benefits and allow those increases that are currently shown to be less than what they are. Komorsky said that would conclude the public comment period.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

At 6:46 pm, Komorsky asked for a motion to go into Executive Session and Le said that there was one more individual on Zoom with their hand raised for a question. Komorsky said it would have to wait as he has already closed the public comment period.

Upon a MOTION made by Pignataro and SECONDED by Sassi, the Board RESOLVED to go into Executive Session to discuss one administrative item from the Chief and one contractual item from the Board of Fire Commissioners. Burns – Aye, Piehler – Aye, Pignataro – Aye, Sassi – Aye, Komorsky – Aye. **Motion Carried.**

OPEN SESSION:

At 8:09 pm, the Board resumed Open Session. Komorsky said that he is pleased to announce that the Board of Fire Commissioners and the Union agreed to a tentative agreement and said there is one other small issue that is being worked on so they are going to defer this until the Tuesday night meeting to get everything on both sides completed. He asked if those in the audience had any additional comments.

- Kaiser: “I think it is annoying, you asked me a question, I think it is annoying that you tell the public that you are going to vote on something and obviously you weren't prepared and you are negotiating a contract on the night you are going to vote on a freaking grant. That's terrible on your part.”

Komorsky: “Well we had to ratify some issues.”

Kaiser: “It doesn't matter what you had to ratify, it goes back to the union's position that you changed the position of the contract last minute and now you have to renegotiate it. It's shameful on your part. You had a meeting for the public, you said you were going to vote on the grant and now you are still negotiating the contract.”

Komorsky: “I respectfully disagree with that, so I'll leave it at that.”

Burns: “Jeff, we are not negotiating the whole contract, just one or two points.”

Kaiser: “My point being”

Burns: “That's what happens in negotiations. You've heard of the twenty-three hour rule? That's what happens.”

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Komorsky asked if there were any further comments.

ADJOURNMENT:

At, 8:12 pm, upon a MOTION made by Sassi and SECONDED by Burns, the Board RESOLVED to adjourn the meeting. Burns – Aye, Piehler – Aye, Pignataro – Aye, Sassi – Aye, Komorsky – Aye.

Motion Carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Bria Le – District Secretary

Approved by the Board of Fire Commissioners on 10/26/2021

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