



Bristol Fire Department

Inter Office Memorandum

To: Steven Contente, Town Administrator
From: Michael DeMello, Fire Chief
cc: File
Date: July 25, 2023
Re: Deputy Chief Training & Safety- New Hire to replace retirement

2023 JUL 25 PM 1:12

TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE
BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND

Due to retirement the full-time training & safety position within the department will become vacant. On February 1st, 2023, the position was promoted to a Deputy Chief level position to reflect the responsibilities and daily activities that the position had been performing for over 20 years. The following information will illustrate the activities of the position and discuss concerns that may be real or perceived.

The training & safety position was established some 25 years ago and has grown and adapted to changes in the fire service and community. The role of the position has grown to include added responsibilities, other than just training/safety, due to the increasing complexity of daily fire department operations, particularly administrative functions that require managerial level problem solving and decision making. The department now responds to nearly 4,400 calls annually and associated administrative functions have increased in similar fashion. Though the need for this adjustment was evident prior to COVID-19, the pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities in continuity of operations that could occur in the future.

Examples of functions and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, oversight of other full time department personnel, scheduling of all initial and continuing education related training programs, personnel injury management, vehicle accident management, personnel record management, town safety committee meetings, fire inspection, fire investigation, EMS, grant writing & administration assistance, weekly duty night, rotating weekend coverage, communication with various state & federal agencies, and the ability to handle administrative items that arise at a moment's notice. A job description is included with this memorandum for review.

In the absence of the Chief of Department, past practice has had the position oversee all administrative operations and provide support to volunteer chief officers faced with administrative matters they are not accustomed to handling. This has provided additional support to our volunteer officer core and allowed them to concentrate on emergency responses, rather than administrative matters. The volunteer Deputy Chief position is rotated annually,

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meaning each year a new person serves in that role. It is unfair and overburdensome to that individual to expect that they will be able to run day to day operations such as budgeting, conference calls, and other town functions that require intimate knowledge of department and town processes. Volunteer personnel have full time jobs and family commitments. The volunteer focus must be on emergency responses, and anything that can be done to reduce any other burdens is essential to continuing our volunteer traditions.

Any change elicits a response, many of which are perceived concerns without factual basis. The creation of a two Deputy Chief model, a career Deputy of Training & Safety, and a volunteer Deputy of Operations, is a template utilized by communities throughout New England. The idea that this somehow means the department is going paid because of this change is untrue, as this change trialed since February of this year has only strengthened the departments operations. The chain of command still includes all volunteer chief officers and has not eliminated any of those positions.

Past practice indicates that the department has essentially been functioning this way for over 20 years. This FTE position already exists, though a slight salary adjustment may be necessary based upon qualification and experience.

It is my opinion that incremental changes such as this are necessary to respond to changes in the community and fire service to stay ahead of the curve and avoid a situation that would require immediate action with drastic effect to operations and finances. Upon approval the department chain of command would be as follows: Deputy Chief 2- Administration, Health, Training, & Safety (Full time Employee), Deputy Chief 3- Fireground Operations (Volunteer Chief Officer), Assistant Chief 4, Assistant Chief 5, & Assistant Chief 6, all volunteer chief officers from each fire company elected annually by their membership.

This would require adding the second Deputy Chief to the Board of Engineers through ordinance amendment. Draft ordinance amendment from the solicitor is included for review.

NC
7-25-23

ORDINANCE No. _____

AN ORDINANCE IN AMENDMENT TO
THE BRISTOL CODE OF ORDINANCES

IT IS HEREBY ORDAINED by the Town Council of Bristol, Rhode Island, that the Code of Ordinances of the Town of Bristol, Sec. 12-57, be amended to read as follows:

* * *

Sec. 12-57. - Composition and election.

- (a) The board of fire engineers shall consist of the chief, two deputy chiefs, three assistant chiefs, the captain of the rescue squad and the clerk of the board. Candidates to the board of fire engineers shall be elected annually to the board by the aforementioned companies. The names of those elected shall be forwarded to the chief of the department for presentation to the town council for appointment to the position of assistant chief with the exception of the rescue captain. One assistant chief shall be appointed to the position of deputy chief after selection in accordance with department policy.
- (b) The town council shall, annually, appoint members to the board of fire engineers. Such appointments shall consist of deputy chief and three assistant chiefs. Upon their appointment they shall be sworn in as town officers. The chief shall serve as chairman of the board and shall be appointed in accordance with section 802 of the town Charter. The captain of rescue shall serve on the board by virtue of his office.

* * *

This Ordinance shall take effect upon its passage.