



Lowell City Council

Special Meeting Minutes

Michael Q. Geary
City Clerk

Date: February 16, 2021

Time: 6:30 PM

Location: Pursuant To Governor Baker's Emergency Order Modifying The State's Open Meeting Law Issued March 12, 2020, Meetings Will Be Held Using Remote Participation As Follows: Members Of The Public May Not Participate In-Person And May View The Meeting Via LTC.ORG (On-Line; Live Streaming Or Local Cable Channel 99) And Zoom.

1. ROLL CALL

Roll Call showed 9 present.

M. Leahy presiding. Meeting was conducted audio stream by LTC and Zoom due to Covid-19 pandemic.

2. MAYOR'S BUSINESS

2.1. Communication Remote / Zoom Participation:

Pursuant To Governor Baker's Emergency Order Modifying The State's Open Meeting Law Issued March 12, 2020, Meetings Will Be Held Using Remote Participation As Follows: Members Of The Public May View The Meeting Via LTC.Org (On-Line; Live Streaming; Or Local Cable Channel 99) As They May Not Participate In-Person. Those Wishing To Speak Regarding A Specific Agenda Item Shall Register To Speak In Advance Of The Meeting By Sending Email To City Clerk Indicating The Agenda Item And A Phone Number To Call So That You May Be Issued Zoom Link To The Meeting. Email Address Is MGEARY@LOWELLMA.GOV. If No Access To Email You May Contact City Clerk At 978-674-4161. All Request Must Be Done Before 4:00 PM On The Day Of Meeting.

For Zoom - [HTTPS://SUPPORT.ZOOM.US/HC/EN-US/ARTICLES/201362193-JOINING-A-MEETING](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362193-joining-a-meeting)

In City Council, **Motion** "To accept and place on file" by C. Conway, seconded by C. Mercier. So voted.

2.2. Discussion - Regarding Closures Of Fire Stations Throughout The City.

In City Council, M. Leahy noted purpose of the meeting and that he would first hear from all of the members. C. Mercier noted increased public safety is the goal and it must be attained. C. Mercier suggested the possible use of retired firefighters to fill positions and that data must be used to ensure proper closing if needed. C. Mercier noted that certain areas in the City, like Branch Street, must always be kept opened. C.



Mercier recognized difficulty in filling positions in the department due to pandemic and that money was not reason for brownouts. C. Chau noted closing should be reviewed closely and cautiously as they create dangerous situations. C. Chau noted that dense populated areas require added protection and need must be identified that will get City to zero closings. C. Rourke noted the meeting was needed to address concerns of the citizens and that the right people are in the room. C. Rourke noted goal is for the elected body to formulate a plan which would enhance public safety. C. Elliott noted the need to reassure public and that he would like to hear from fire chief, manager and union representative. C. Conway noted meeting was for safety purposes and there must be input from administration and safety personnel. C. Conway noted all avenues must be explored. C. Drinkwater noted system needs correction and that if taxes need to be raised to correct system then it should be explored. C. Samaras noted the support of the Council and that resources must be available for public safety and personnel safety. C. Nuon noted Council support of the LFD and noted that closures and increased sick leave need to reconcile to improve system. Manager Donoghue expressed condolences to fire victims and recognized the efforts of police and fire during the event. Manager Donoghue noted prior report regarding November fire causality and commented on the need to share ideas and support as well as keeping public informed. Manager Donoghue noted that budget did not institute any cuts on positions in the LFD and working on funds to supplement the budget. Chief Charron (LFD) noted the closure issues has been going on for decades and the pandemic has increased the closures tremendously as there is sick time issues as well as barriers to hire added personnel. Chief Charron outlined process regarding closures noting it was dependent on manpower and equipment and is done on revolving basis. Chief Charron noted hiring is hampered during pandemic as the fire academy is not fully staffed and getting physicals is difficult. Chief Charron noted that department must work with money that is available and need to increase manpower in the department. Chief Charron note overtime budget is critical to keeping stations open and that it must be addressed in budget preparation. Shawn Sirois (Local 853) noted brownouts are an old practice and that closures are not safe for public or safety personnel and the practice must end for all to be safe. Mr. Sirois noted that closures impact the valiant efforts put forward by firefighters. Conor Baldwin (CFO) commented on LFD overtime budget and that there is flexibility in there for FY21 and FY22 by use of grants and Cares Act money. M. Leahy commented on the concerns and the need for discussions to continue. C. Rourke noted coverage for the remainder of fiscal year and that there will need to be adjustments in future budgets. C. Mercier commented on frozen fire hydrants in the City. Chief Charron noted that water department is in charge of clearing hydrants. Manager Donoghue stated that they will generate a report regarding issue. C. Mercier questioned the number of water trucks used by the City. Chief Charron stated that City had a number trucks that hold 600-700 gallons of water. C. Elliott noted that brownouts must be minimized with use of funds and ensuring that properties are up to code and compliant with ordinances. C. Elliott questioned if personnel have access to Covid vaccinations. Chief Charron noted that many members are receiving their second shot. C. Elliott noted Council will continue commitment to LFD. Manager Donoghue noted they would provide inspectional service reports regarding incidents. C. Elliott requested report regarding budget perspective surrounding closures. C. Conway noted the goal is for a safe City and experts have spoken and City should provide



needed resources. C. Drinkwater noted budget cuts were not the issue and the problem is long standing so a solution will take effort. C. Drinkwater note a review of the department and what is needed to prevent closures and develop plan to achieve that result. C. Samaras noted this was thirty year problem which needs a solution and resources are available to reduce closures. C. Chau noted any solution must be timely and perfect scenario would be no closures. Chief Charron noted the need for fully manned department and keep it funded. Mr. Sirois noted the need for staffing as the department is losing more members. C. Chau commented on agency in place to help victims of Westford Street fire and information was displayed on zoom screen. M. Leahy provided closing remarks.

3. ADJOURNMENT

In City Council, **Motion** to Adjourn by C. Rourke, seconded by C. Mercier. So voted.

Meeting adjourned at 7:50 PM.

Michael Q. Geary, City Clerk