

TOWN OF SCHERERVILLE

SCHERERVILLE, INDIANA

FIRE MERIT BOARD MEETING

March 18, 2025

The Fire Department Merit Board Special Meeting was called to order by David Turoci at 5:00 p.m., in the Schererville Town Hall Meeting Room, 10 E. Joliet Street, Schererville, IN.

Attendance was taken with the following Board Members present: Roger Florkiewicz, Paul Petrie, Tom Fulk, David Turoci, and Tim Arvanitis. Staff members present: Fire Chief Robert Patterson, Deputy Fire Chief David Meyer, and Interim Recording Secretary Stephanie Bottiger. Also present: Attorney Christian Bartholomew, Town Manager James Gorman, Director of Operations Andrew Hansen, and Town Council Liaison Thomas Schmitt.

THEREUPON, Approval of the Minutes

There were no prior minutes.

THEREUPON, Correspondence

ITEM A. NONE

THEREUPON, Old Business

ITEM A. NONE

THEREUPON, New Business

Attorney Bartholomew recommended the Board begin with the selection of Officers for the 2025 Fire Department Merit Board. There were no objections. Mr. Fulk nominated Mr. Florkiewicz as President, Mr. Florkiewicz nominated Mr. Arvanitis as Vice-President, and Mr. Arvanitis nominated Mr. Petrie as Secretary. Motion made by Mr. Turoci to accept the slate as presented seconded by Mr. Fulk. Motion carries (5 – 0).

ITEM A. Terms of Office for FD – Elected Members

President Florkiewicz requested to know the terms of office for the individuals on the Board. Attorney Bartholomew advised the Board the terms for the Merit Board Commissioners are generally four years, however, in accordance with the statute, two of the five individuals will serve two year terms. He clarified further stating there are staggered terms of office to ensure the entire Board would not be replaced at once. Attorney Bartholomew informed the Board the Town Council designated which of their appointments would serve two years and which would serve four. He further noted the Fire Department did not stipulate the terms of office for their appointments, therefore, the Board must decide which of the Fire Department appointments would be a two year term and which would be a four year term. Attorney Bartholomew suggested the Board members introduce themselves and advise if they were a Town Council appointment or a Fire Department appointment. At this time, the members of the Board introduced themselves and stated by which group they were chose: President Florkiewicz, Mr. Fulk, and Mr. Turoci were appointed by the Town Council while Mr. Arvanitis and Mr. Petrie were appointed by the Fire Department. There was a lack of certainty with the Board as to their terms. Councilman Schmitt was in attendance but was unable to recollect the specific term limits. Mr. Petrie offered to take the two year limit leaving Mr. Arvanitis the four year term. Attorney Bartholomew recommended the Board make a motion to accept Mr. Petrie taking the two year term and Mr. Arvanitis taking the four year term. Motion made by Mr. Arvanitis, seconded by Mr. Turoci. Motion carries (5 – 0).

ITEM B. Formulation of Rules Governing the Board's Operation

Attorney Bartholomew explained to the Board, that, again, according to the statute, the Board should meet on a regular basis, preferably each month. He proposed the Board convene on the same day as the Board of Safety meeting as many of those currently in attendance would already be on hand. President Florkiewicz inquired how long the Board of Safety meetings typically ran, to which Chief Patterson responded the meetings typically ran fifteen minutes, but at times they could last an hour. Mr. Tuocki requested to know the day of the meetings, to which Chief Patterson replied the first Thursday of the month

two candidates, to which Chief Patterson stated, yes, and to offer the conditional offer of employment to the two selected.

Mr. Fulk inquired of Attorney Bartholomew the implications of accepting the recommendations of Chief Patterson at this meeting, believing there was more to the hiring process than a recommendation. Attorney Bartholomew elucidated to the Board that Chief Patterson had described the past hiring process. He went on to add that, ultimately, it would be the decision of the Board to continue with this practice or make changes. Attorney Bartholomew expressed the current situation necessitated the decision to be made today. President Florkiewicz concurred with Attorney Bartholomew, and stated he did not believe it was in the best interest of the Board to disregard the data compiled by the previous Board and was of the opinion that the Board should accept the list as presented by Chief Patterson to fill the two positions.

Mr. Arvanitis promulgated his opinion that the Fire Department should continue to hire personnel to accommodate not only the needs of the current and future fire stations, but to service the town as well. He went on to add that he too, was in agreement with President Florkiewicz in regards to accepting the list as presented.

Motion made by Mr. Fulk to accept the list as presented by Chief Patterson, seconded by Mr. Arvanitis. Motion carries (5 – 0). Attorney Bartholomew inquired of Chief Patterson if all of the candidates had undergone all aspects of the testing process, to which he responded with they had. He elaborated further, stating the next step in the process was the conditional offer of employment, followed by the psychological and physical testing. The results of the testing then go before the Public Employees' Retirement Fund (PERF) Board for final approval before they are sent down state. President Florkiewicz asked how long the process would take, to which Deputy Chief Meyer stated approximately a month.

ITEM E. Formulation of Annual Budget

President Florkiewicz felt more investigation needed to take place before a budget could formally be put in place. Mr. Petrie sought clarification on the budget, asking if it was for the Merit Board or the Fire Department as a whole, to which Attorney Bartholomew replied, the Merit Board alone.

President Florkiewicz proposed for next months' agenda, to follow up on the Recording Secretary position, review the current hiring procedures, and investigate the budgeting process. He further recommended the Board review the Board of Safety policy and procedures to determine whether or not they can implement a portion of the same into the Merit Board regulations and protocols. President Florkiewicz raised the question with respect to open meeting laws as the members of the Board attempt to gather and collect information. Attorney Bartholomew advised the Board that under the Open Door Law, any decision making must occur at the public meeting. He continued by encouraging the members to engage in independent research to present to the Board at the next meeting. Attorney Bartholomew additionally mentioned the Indiana Public Access Counselor has assembled a comprehensive list of frequently asked questions in regards to the Open Door Law specifically written in plain language which he can dispense to the Board. Along with the Open Door Law, Attorney Bartholomew urged the Board to review and become familiar with Indiana Code 36-8-3.5, which governs both the Police and Fire Merit systems and will serve as a foundation for the Fire Departments' provisions and directives. He further stated Ft. Wayne, Indiana, had finalized their ordinances, should the Board wish to review a completed version. President Florkiewicz believed the Board should start with what the Town already has in place with the Board of Safety and make adjustments to their Standard Operating Procedures based upon the needs of the Fire Department Merit Board.

Mr. Arvanitis made a motion to table the budget until the next meeting, seconded by Mr. Petrie. Motion carries (5 – 0).

THEREUPON, Reports

ITEM A. Fire Department - NONE

THEREUPON, Board Members

Mr. Petrie raised a question in regards to the Secretaries responsibilities, such as advertising of the meetings. Attorney Bartholomew requested the staff members present provide the Board with the details

as to how this is handled. Mrs. Bottiger informed the Board that it is the responsibility of the Recording Secretary to draft the notice, obtain the agenda from the Chief and circulate this information to the appropriate personnel through email and fax forty-eight hours before the meeting is convened. The Recording Secretary also prepares the minutes for the next meeting.

President Florkiewicz asked Attorney Bartholomew to clarify his role as the Merit Board Attorney as opposed to the Town Attorney. Attorney Bartholomew advised the Board his responsibilities included attending the meetings and answer any questions the Board may have in regards to the Law. He subsequently stated his position is advisory only. President Florkiewicz clarified further by asking Attorney Bartholomew if he is the contact for the Fire Department Merit Board. Attorney Bartholomew affirmed that he is the attorney for the Fire Department Merit Board.

Mr. Fulk requested confirmation that the members of the Board were present on account of the Fire Department voting to have a Merit Board. Attorney Bartholomew confirmed this was correct. Mr. Fulk inquired what the difference was between the Fire Department Merit Board and the Board of Safety. Attorney Bartholomew recapitulated that the state had enacted a law stating it was preferable if there was a separate decision making board for personnel decisions for both Fire and Police unless departments explicitly decided to opt out.

Discussion circled back to the budget. Attorney Bartholomew, to ensure understanding, advised the Board, the budget was for the Merit Board administrative operations and not the operations of the Fire Department.

THEREUPON, Business from the Floor - Collin Zackavec

Collin Zackavec, the Secretary of the local Firefighters Union, #4279, thanked the Board for their time and stated the Union looked forward to working with them.

THEREUPON, Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Fulk made motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Arvanitis. Motion carries (5 – 0). The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

ROGER FLORKIEWICZ
SCHERERVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT
MERIT BOARD PRESIDENT
A TRUE COPY

TIM ARVANITIS
SCHERERVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT
MERIT BOARD VICE PRESIDENT
A TRUE COPY