

**PIKE TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENT
MERIT COMMISSION
4881 WEST 71ST STREET
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46268**

President:

Stephen Buschmann

Vice President:

Natrina DeBow

Secretary:

Russell Sipes

Members:

Steve Hendrixson

Nancy Poore

July 26, 2023
Regular Meeting

ATTENDEES:

Merit Commission – Russ Sipes, Nancy Poore, Steve Hendrixson, Stephen Buschmann

Pike Township – Chief Jeff Beam, HRM Kris Harrison, BC Brian Sauer, BC Meg Hogwood, LT Bill Krieger, FF Scott Matthews, FF Chris Beaver, FF Tim Burnell

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Copies of the April 19, 2023 minutes were distributed for review. There was a motion to approve the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded and approved.

AGENDA/NEW BUSINESS:

The meeting was called to order at 1804 hours.

The meeting began with The Pledge of Allegiance.

The first item on the agenda was Merit Commission hiring rules. Chief Beam presented the Commissioners with a copy of Senate Bill 185 that went into effect on July 1, 2023. IC 36-8-3.5-12 now states that an applicant must be at least 21 years of age, but under 40 years of age to be appointed to a department. The previous maximum age was 36 years old. Chief Beam stated that he is confident that the current hiring system that is in place provides the best candidates regardless of age. President Buschmann asked for a motion to amend the Merit Commission rules to allow a candidate to be hired up to 40 years of age. Secretary Sipes made the motion, which was seconded by Vice-President DeBow.

President Buschmann asked if there were any questions or comments. Commissioner Poore asked if this was a mandatory change, since it was approved by the Indiana state legislature. President Buschmann stated that the Merit Commission can set the rules as

they deem necessary. Vice-President DeBow said that the Commission could choose to be more stringent with the age requirements. Mr. Buschmann said that Pike Fire's age requirements must be within the range required by the 1977 Police and Fire Pension Fund. FF Burnell said a person hired at almost 40 years of age has no way to max out the pension at 32 years of service. Chief Hogwood explained that this change to the state law was geared more towards recruiting police officers than firefighters.

President Buschmann asked for a vote on increasing the upper age limit to 39 years of age. The vote was four in favor with Mr. Hendrixson voting against the change.

Chief Beam stated that the Department will apply this new age limit to candidates on the current hiring list.

MISC. BUSINESS:

FF Scott Matthews addressed the Merit Commission regarding what he perceived as inconsistencies with promotion procedures.

In December 2022, FF Matthews applied for a training officer position. He was denied an interview for the position because he did not have one of the required certifications.

On April 28, 2023, a Lieutenant position on Engine 61 opened. Candidates for this position were required to have the Rope Rescue certification. The position closed on May 12th and was not filled. Based on policy, the Fire Chief should have then promoted someone to fill the vacancy.

The people in spots 1-3 had been promoted earlier in the year. At the time the posting closed, Chief Beam had the names of the personnel in spots four and five on the Lieutenants promotion list. The person in the fourth spot did not have the Rope Rescue certification. Chief Beam offered the promotion to the person in the fifth spot who had the required certification but was currently in an administrative position. The fifth person accepted the promotion but elected to remain in his administrative position. FF Matthews was sixth on the Lieutenant promotion list, but his name had not been given to Chief Beam yet by the Merit Commission.

There was still a Lieutenant vacancy on Engine 61. The position was reposted with the stipulation that if a person did not have the Rope Rescue certification; they had until July 7 to obtain it. FF Matthews said that this was confusing and seemed to show favoritism. He stated that he had worked hard towards promotion and feels that he was passed over.

President Buschmann stated that the Merit Commission has authority with regard to changes of rank, but no involvement with jobs. The Merit Commission's responsibility is to provide the top names of the people who have not yet been promoted when requested by the Fire Chief. The Fire Chief has the option to pick any of those three names to promote.

As stated above, Chief Beam received four names at the March 15 meeting because he had to fill two vacancies. He did not request additional names at the April 19 meeting. The May meeting was canceled because Chief Beam was out of town and the June meeting was canceled due to lack of business items. The rope class took place the same week as the canceled June meeting. Chief Beam promoted Ryan Ross on May 30th and Angela Highland on July 8th.

President Buschmann stated that there is no requirement that the Fire Chief must have the top three names at all times. However, the Chief should request the top three names from the Merit Commission every time that there is a vacancy.

President Buschmann stated that the Commission would provide at this meeting the names of the candidates for the two recent promotions that would have been provided at the time of each vacancy. For the first Lieutenant vacancy, the names of Angela Highland, Ryan Ross and Scott Matthews were provided. For the second Lieutenant vacancy, the names of Ryan Ross, Scott Matthews and Jason Allgood were provided. President Buschmann reiterated that it is not a requirement that the Fire Chief select the first person on the list and that the Chief has the discretion to choose from any of the candidates provided.

President Buschmann stated that each of the two recent Lieutenant promotions would need to be reappointed with a new effective date and to restart their probationary year.

Chief Beam stated that he would not have made any changes to the promotions that had been made.

FF Matthews thanked the Commission for hearing his issue.

Commissioner Poore discussed a program on NPR regarding the need to compensate volunteer firefighters. President Buschmann said that one of the benefits of a township department is that certain taxes can only be used by the fire department. This is unlike a municipality where all agencies are competing for the same money.

The meeting adjourned at 1854 hours.