

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

**President:** Steve Buschmann  
**Vice President:** NaTrina DeBow  
**Secretary:** Russ Sipes

**Members:**  
Nancy Poore

July 22, 2026  
**Regular Meeting**

**ATTENDEES:**

Merit Commission –Steve Buschmann, Natrina DeBow, Russ Sipes, and Nancy Poore.

Pike Township – Chief Jeff Beam, HRM Jill Smith, Firefighter Nathan Wilkey, and Captain Steve Mills

**CALL TO ORDER:**

At 1803, President Buschmann called the meeting to order. The meeting began with The Pledge of Allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Copies of the May 20, 2026, minutes were distributed for review. President Buschmann noted that during the Moment of Silence portion, former Commissioner Steve Hendrixson's name was spelled incorrectly. Vice President DeBow made a motion to approve the minutes as amended, Secretary Sipes seconded and all approved.

**AGENDA/NEW BUSINESS:**

**Disciplinary Review - Firefighter Nathan Wilkey**

**President Buschmann's Opening Remarks**

President Buschmann explained that the hearing was conducted under Indiana Code 36-8-3.5-19 and the Commission's Rules and Regulations. The Commission could uphold or reverse the discipline imposed by the Fire Chief; a tie vote would leave the discipline in effect.

**Chief Beam's Presentation**

Chief Beam stated that Firefighter Wilkey accepted a callback assignment for June 6, 2026, with a 7:00 a.m. reporting time but did not report as scheduled. Firefighter Wilkey contacted his executive officer at approximately 7:56 a.m. and arrived at approximately 8:30 a.m.

| <b>Officer Appointment Information</b> |
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| <b>Officer Name</b> | <b>Appointing Authority</b> | <b>Term Start Date</b> | <b>Term Expiration Date</b> |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Stephen Buschmann   | Pike Township Trustee       | January 1, 2025        | December 31, 2028           |
| NaTrina DeBow       | Pike Township Board         | January 1, 2023        | December 31, 2026           |
| W. Russell Sipes    | Pike Township Trustee       | January 1, 2023        | December 31, 2026           |
| vacant              | Pike Township Fire Dept.    |                        | December 31, 2028           |
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Department practice treats failure to report within sixty minutes as absent without leave (AWOL), and personal leave cannot be used for a callback assignment.

Chief Beam explained that the initial written reprimand was increased to a forty-hour unpaid suspension after review of Firefighter Wilkey's active disciplinary history. That history included a May 19, 2025 written reprimand for AWOL; June 4, 2025 verbal counseling concerning incomplete EMS documentation; an October 7, 2025 suspension concerning insubordination and an EMT certification lapse; and a February 25, 2026, forty-hour suspension, of which sixteen hours were deferred while Firefighter Wilkey completed a performance improvement plan. Chief Beam stated that Firefighter Wilkey successfully completed the plan and that the June attendance incident did not constitute a failure of that plan because the plan addressed insubordination only. The Chief described the current discipline as progressive and intended to correct behavior.

**Human Resources Review**

In response to Commission questions, Chief Beam explained that Human Resources ordinarily reviews an employee's file during the disciplinary process. Human Resources Manager, Jill Smith, was on vacation when this matter arose, and Chief Beam performed the review.

**Firefighter Wilkey's Presentation**

Firefighter Wilkey accepted responsibility for reporting late. He explained that his phone charger was not connected properly, causing his alarm not to sound. After waking, he contacted his executive officer at approximately 7:56 a.m., reported at approximately 8:30 a.m., and completed the callback assignment. He stated that since this incident he has started to use multiple alarms and other safeguards to keep this from occurring again.

Firefighter Wilkey argued that the attendance policy distinguished between being AWOL and being tardy and that his notification before the sixty-minute mark should have caused the incident to be treated as tardiness. He asked the Commission to reverse the suspension and

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cited his work history and positive evaluations as mitigating factors. Captain Steve Mills discussed geographic differences affecting callback arrival times and the benefit of clarifying how notification and arrival requirements apply.

#### **Commission Discussion**

The Commission questioned the parties concerning the meaning of proper notification, the difference between notifying the Department and physically reporting within sixty minutes, callback staffing requirements, Firefighter Wilkey's prior discipline, and his successful completion of the performance improvement plan. Commissioners also noted that the applicable policy could benefit from greater clarity.

#### **Motion and Vote**

President Buschmann asked whether the Commission wished to make a motion to uphold or reverse the disciplinary decision. Secretary Sipes moved to uphold the written reprimand and forty-hour unpaid suspension. President Buschmann seconded the motion.

President Buschmann called for a vote. President Buschmann and Secretary Sipes voted in favor of the motion. Vice President DeBow and Commissioner Poore voted against the motion. The vote resulted in a 2–2 tie. Because the Chief's decision was not overruled by a majority of the Commission, the written reprimand and forty-hour unpaid suspension were sustained.

#### **Notice of Judicial Review Rights**

President Buschmann advised the parties that the Commission's decision was subject to judicial review as provided by law.

#### **MISC. BUSINESS:**

##### **2026 Firefighter Hiring Process Update**

Chief Beam reported that the Department received approximately 500 applications and that approximately 220 applicants passed the initial screening and advanced to the physical fitness evaluation. Physical fitness evaluations were ongoing during the week of July 20, 2026. Interviews would follow the week of August 24th, after which a final eligibility list will be presented to the Commission. No Commission action was taken.

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**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business, President Buschmann asked for a motion to adjourn meeting at 1901. Vice President Sipes made the motion, Commissioner Poore seconded, and all were in favor.

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**Members:** Bruce Schumacher  
Nancy Poore

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

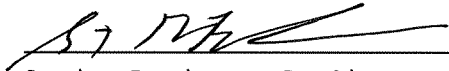
**Date of Minutes Being  
Approved:**

July 22, 2026

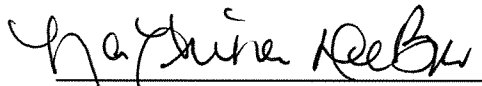
**Date Minutes Approved:**

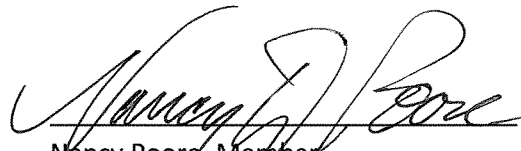
September 16, 2026

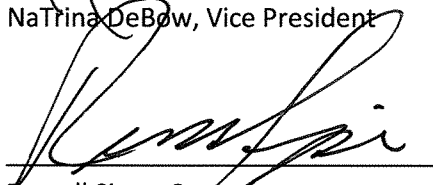
The undersigned members approve the minutes identified above:

  
Stephen Buschmann, President

abstained  
Bruce Schumacher, Member

  
NaTrina DeBow, Vice President

  
Nancy Poore, Member

  
Russell Sipes, Secretary

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| W. Russell Sipes    | Pike Township Trustee       | January 1, 2023        | December 31, 2026           |
| Bruce Schumacher    | Pike Township Fire Dept.    | August 29, 2026        | December 31, 2028           |
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