

Minutes of the October 1, 2007, Michigan City Fire Merit Commission Meeting

Chairman John Skierkowski called the meeting to order. Commissioners Skierkowski, Chatfield, Mock, Lombard, and Stimley were in attendance, and a quorum was noted as present. Others present included Dave Lamb, Pamela Krause, Philip Jankowski, Pat Boy, Ron Meer, Jeff Bruder, Kyle Kazmierczak, Mark Weber, Chuck Oberlie, Randy Novak, and Kathy Dubie.

Several Commissioners had not received minutes from the August and September meetings; therefore, three sets of minutes were held over until the October meeting. A request was made that future mailings of minutes be done at least two weeks prior to the meetings.

Communications: Louise Mock reported that a memo from Ta-Tanisha Clark, EEO Officer, was received.

Pat Boy, City Council Liaison, reported that the municipal code still has not been updated. She added that she was given copies of all Fire Merit amendments from 2002 to present. She will provide copies to all commissioners and try to have this information placed on the city's website as a link.

Attorney Pamela Krause reported that she is continuing to meet with city/council/human rights attorneys to gather records and other information regarding the consent decree. Bart Lombard asked what she thinks the commission should do. Attorney Krause said the commission should continue to follow the ordinance to the letter. Depending upon the information gathered, she might suggest postponing any new hires. Mr. Lombard expressed concern since three firefighters were hired this year. Attorney Krause said the current process needs to continue at this time. She added that a tremendous amount of time and effort is being spent on the hiring process and the consent decree, and she will continue to keep commission informed.

New Business: On a motion by Bart Lombard and a second by John Stimley the commission approved forwarding an \$833.30 bill from Stanard to the Board of Works for payment.

Old Business: Chris Chatfield reported that 33 of the original applicants took the written test and 28 of those passed both the written test and ladder climb. (53 submitted applications and 45 were qualified to take the written test.)

Chief Dave Lamb reported that Tom Frontchakas will be returning to active duty, helicopter training will be conducted on three days next week, and two captains will be retiring in December. Also the department recently acquired two rescue pumpers, which will be demonstrated at city hall on October 2 at 7:00 p.m.

Chris Chatfield thanked the Chief and his staff for the use of the training center and their assistance during the recent testing.

Comments: Bart Lombard made comments and read from a prepared statement (inserted), "*Mr. President, in my 51 years of existence, I've been called many things, some of them true, others not, while yet apparently others just merely wishful thinking.*

But imagine my surprise when I read this past weekend that I was now part of some little group, a good old boy's club. Me, a good ole boy.

Surprised at first, but after careful reflection merely saddened, because when I took this oath, as did my fellow Commissioners, that swore that I would be committed to Developing policies which would encourage persons of the highest possible qualifications to pursue careers in the fire department; while Promoting efficiency and improving the morale and fitness of fire department personnel through objective standards politically and racially neutral

while emphasizing training, experience, aptitude, ability and conduct affecting job performance and to Ensure all persons employed by the fire department of fair and impartial treatment at all times while benefiting my community through helping improve fire protection and fire ratings as a consequence thereof.

But apparently, to some, I've failed.

Apparently back in 2003 when I recommended to the body we try to expand the pool of applicants by awarding preference for city residents and encourage a more diverse pool of applicants, including minorities – something that drew the ire of some at the time as dumming down the department that was just something to cover my real status as just a good old boy. And mind you this well 2 years prior to any knowledge of some 30 year old Consent Order that not one elected official at any level spoke of or to my self or any other Commissioner to my knowledge.

And apparently my efforts to break further barriers by seeking out the Commission's endorsement to eliminate the past practice of requiring proof of physical fitness prior to submitting an application in hopes of enlisting a more interested but perhaps financially unable applicant base was just a ruse. As was the efforts to seek out more women applicants by supporting a change in the physical agility testing to a pass fail component along with a nationally recognized and accepted general aptitude written test rather than one based heavily on firefighting experience. Again, just good old boy tactics.

And when I sought out the long overdue credit our heroic firefighters deserved in their rightful place of recognition by a local service organization in their annual salute to public safety officers it was apparently simply a disguise to my real motives.

Similarly the hours spent to personally visit the many businesses throughout our community to inform them of these changes and hopefully enlist more Michigan City residents to become applicants for a position with the Michigan City fire department was not enough. As was the countless hours and weekends along side my fellow Commissioners to ensure a fair hiring process.

Mister President, I believe there are people of good will doing the best job on behalf of this department, city and its citizens. I would hate to think that all their efforts are all for naught or for some other organizations preplanned agenda.

And so for as long as my Mayor sees fit to ask for my service on this Commission, I will continue as I have since day one, irregardless of any order – and that is with respect, dignity and opportunity for all. Thank you for listening.”

Ron Meer asked Attorney Krause if any determination has been made as to whether or not the consent decree is still in effect. Attorney Krause said the attorneys are still gathering information. She added that the Fire Merit ordinance was never taken back to federal court once the commission was established in November, 1987. Bart Lombard added that the decree evolved out of the sense that federal dollars were used to fund the fire department. The commission evolved 10 years after the decree was filed. A lengthy discussion followed. Mr. Meer discussed changes to the ordinance which had been proposed by the commission. Attorney Krause added that the commission did request amendments but no hiring changes were requested. Further discussion followed.

Mayor Oberlie said that the Human Rights Commission called for a meeting in 2005 to discuss the consent decree. He provided a brief chain of events that have occurred since that meeting. This matter will be on the next meeting agenda of the city council.

John Skierkowski stressed that everyone is on the same team and striving for answers.

Chris Chatfield added that every city council member should read the entire consent decree. He added that the commission has worked very hard regarding the hiring process.

On a motion by Bart Lombard the meeting was adjourned.