

**FIRE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES**

**Wednesday, October 28, 2020 – 5:00 p.m.
This meeting was held remotely on WebEx**

The Video can be viewed by clicking this link:

https://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=180&clip_id=36979

President Covington called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Commission President	Francee Covington	Present
Commission Vice President	Katherine Feinstein	Present
Commissioner	Stephen Nakajo	Present
Commissioner	Ken Cleaveland	Present
Commissioner	Tony Rodriguez	Present
Chief of Department	Jeanine Nicholson	Present
Victor Wyrsh	Deputy Chief – Operations	
Jose Velo	Deputy Chief –Administration	
Dawn DeWitt	Support Services	
Joel Soto	Training Division	
Mark Johnson	Airport Division	
Erica Arteseros	Homeland Security	
Sandra Tong	EMS	
Natasha Parks	Health, Safety & Wellness	
Staff		
Mark Corso	Deputy Director of Finance	
Olivia Scanlon	Communications and Outreach	

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES [Discussion and possible action]

Discussion and possible action to approve meeting minutes.

- Minutes from Regular Meeting on October 14, 2020.

Commissioner Cleaveland Moved to approve the minutes and Vice President Feinstein Seconded. The motion was unanimous. There was no public comment.

There was no public comment.

4. CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT’S REPORT [Discussion]

REPORT FROM CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT, JEANINE NICHOLSON

Report on current issues, activities, and events within the Department since the Fire Commission meeting on September 9, 2020, including budget, academies, special events, communications, and outreach to other government agencies and the public.

Chief Nicholson reported on activities since the last meeting on October 14, 2020. She thanked everyone for their support during the services of Firefighter/Paramedic Jason Cortez and for President Covington for being present at the funeral. She added that it was a very emotionally challenging time for the Department, and she appreciated everyone who pitched in and that the Cortez family felt the support and love. She introduced Chief Bryan Rubenstein, the new Deputy Chief of Operations, who stated he was very excited about the opportunity and that he is available to the Commissioner 24/7.

Chief Nicholson announced that EMS along with Chief Tong and her command staff held a virtual town hall meeting to provide a forum for the medics, EMTs, and rescue captains to hear about new information such as policy and procedure changes and upcoming position openings for the critical response team. She added that she and her command staff will resume station visits in December. She mentioned that she had ongoing dialogue with different employee groups. Chief Nicholson touched on the new team they are putting together with the Department of Public Health to respond to the behavioral health crisis on the streets and reminded the commission that Chief Pang will be presenting on this at our next commission meeting; she also mentioned the upcoming H-3 Level 1 academy and the FEMA grant of almost 14 million dollars which will allow the hiring of 36 recruits for three years for the next academy class, which she hopes will start in February 2021. She stated that regarding the search for a site for a new training facility, they had a meeting with the Department of Real Estate and the Port. She mentioned that more members were sent out on mutual aid to the Blue Ridge fire in Southern California.

Vice President Feinstein stated she noticed she has been getting notifications of an increase in surf rescues. Chief Nicholson confirmed that anecdotally, they have seen an increase in surf and water rescues as a whole and it is due to several factors, such as the shelter in place orders, where people can't get to many places so they are heading to the beach, without realizing that Ocean Beach is the most dangerous in the Country. Captain Tillman added that as an experienced surfer for the past 30 years, he has seen a huge influx of new surfers out there who are inexperienced with the dangers of Ocean Beach and in his opinion is contributing to the higher number of rescues.

There was no public comment

REPORT FROM ADMINISTRATION, DEPUTY CHIEF JOSE VELO

Report on the Administrative Divisions, Fleet and Facility status and updates, Finance, Support Services, and Training within the Department.

Chief Velo presented his report for September. Highlights of his report included the mutual aid update where they had a strike team that was deployed on a prepositioned assignment from Contra Costa and it is a program that Governor Newsom started two years ago with funding where agencies and counties can ask for resources before the fire actually strikes so the deployment of them is much faster and it's proven to be effective in many instances and then they were called to assist Contra Costa County, He added that they also had an OES engine assist in San Mateo County soon after that they were both redeployed to the Blue Ridge fire in Orange County. He touched on the Division of Training, where they hosted three leadership

series from the National Fire Academy and they selected Captain Julia Delucchi as a new in-service training captain who will be replacing Captain Lathrop who will return to the field; NERT, which has been quite busy as they continue to supply personnel to food banks, testing sites and many other projects that the City has asked them to do as well as being National Preparedness Month, where Mayor Breed announced that October 17, 2020, be selected as Neighborhood Emergency Response Team day. He added that October 17, 2020, is also the 30th anniversary of NERT's founding. He mentioned that Chief Parks of the Health, Safety, and Wellness unit has been quite busy not only working on all kinds of plans for COVID and safety plans, but she was also instrumental in planning events for FF Cortez's services. He added that it is the goal of the SFFD to achieve 70 percent of members getting the flu shot.

Chief Velo provided an update on Support Services, which is the busiest division under his command, stating that the hose tender bids are due after Thanksgiving, 7 new trucks are in progress of being delivered and two more are going to be ordered soon, and they are working on specs for six new vans for the Crisis Response teams. He mentioned that Station 35 is scheduled for completion in February 2021 and move-in day for Station 49 is slated for mid-January/early February 2021. Chief Velo concluded his report by displaying a video of Firefighter/Paramedic Cortez's funeral service at Oracle Park.

President Covington thanked Chief Velo for his report and for showing the video which she thought was quite moving and she thanked the fire departments from outlying areas that provided mutual aid the day of the funeral. She added that there was a go fund me page set up for the family of Firefighter Cortez for anyone who wanted to donate.

Vice President Feinstein stated that she thought the video was a lovely tribute and she appreciates all the work that went into the events to honor Firefighter Cortez. She expressed her concerns about some of the fire dangers she sees with the parklets that have been constructed in front of restaurants. Although Chief De Cossio was not attending the meeting, Chief Velo confirmed that they have inspected 700 of the permits for those parklets and about 30 came back with some issues that had to be corrected. He added that they can't control if restaurants are constructing the structures without permits, but they do have Chiefs in the field that have been instructed that if they see a danger, to check with Prevention and make sure the businesses are permitted and that they have been very active inspecting to make sure those businesses comply with the permit. Vice President Feinstein also suggested that NERT volunteers be recognized for all the work they have been doing as well as the fire auxiliary reserves and the services that they are all providing.

Commissioner Cleaveland stated that the memorial tribute that was put together was very good and moving.

Commissioner Rodriguez confirmed that red cap exercises at the airport are multi-company drills they are required to do by FAA regulations. He also confirmed that the Department may soon be able to conduct COVID tests on its members.

President Covington suggested that it would be nice for the new commissioners to get photos of the Mass Casualty Buses and get an update on the cooperative agreement with Muni regarding those apparatus at the next meeting. She also reminded people that if they see a dangerous

situation concerning the parklets/shared spaces, they should let the authorities know. She also acknowledged how active NERT has been and the fact that the people who usually work at the food banks are the people who are in the most vulnerable group now, and she thinks it's wonderful to see how people have stepped up to volunteer. She added that people who have never utilized food banks previously are now making it part of their route to go out and see what is available and get food. She thanked every NERT volunteer for their participation as well as Chief Arteseros for putting together such a wonderful robust program for the Department and the community.

Commissioner Nakajo welcomed Chief Rubenstein to his new position and stated that he thinks that the Department will benefit greatly from his skills, expertise, and support. He also thanked Chief Victor Wyrsh for all his contributions throughout his career and he thanked Chief Velo for the video he showed during the meeting. He thanked President Covington for representing the Commission at the funeral. He confirmed that they are in the process of interviewing for the replacement of Chief Arteseros' position overseeing NERT and that it's gets filled as soon as possible.

There was no public comment.

5. PRESENTATION FROM THE BLACK FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION [Discussion]

Sherman Tillman, President of the Black Firefighters Association to provide an overview of their employee organization.

Captain Sherman Tillman congratulated Chief Arteseros and Chief Rubenstein for their recent promotions. He mentioned that pre-COVID, the Black Firefighters Association (BFA) participated in the Zoo Day on December 17, 2019, and they cooked for participants and the toys for kids' programs. In January they went to the Creative Arts School and did a presentation and marched in the yearly Martin Luther King parade. In February they had a Black History Month parade and visited Mission High School for Black History Month and did a presentation. He added that they do four to five presentations a year to different schools spreading the word and goodwill of the San Francisco Fire Department. He mentioned that when COVID hit, there were quite a few unusual requests for their community to help with rent and for food. He added that normally, that's not something that the BFA does because, they don't have the budget that Local 798 has, but they asked for donations from their membership and were able to pay rent for two families from the Western Addition. They also delivered bags of groceries to some elderly residents. They also helped other groups financially, including a dance group they sponsored to get them to Las Vegas to compete in a contest. He added that they also participated in all the rallies for the tragedy that happened with George Floyd, where they provided hand sanitizer and face masks. He mentioned that they did a collaboration with the Justice of Diversity Center to provide access to free legal help with living wills and powers of attorneys for their members because it's expensive. He described the collaboration he has developed with the Asian community, working closely with David Ho, Diana Pang, and Dickson Lee on violence being committed against them from citizens outside San Francisco, including gangs. He touched on other events they participated in including working the renaming of a street after Earl Gage Jr., who was the first black firefighter in San Francisco. He touched on the Black Firefighters Association Youth Academy explaining that it was founded 20 years ago with mostly African Americans, and now it's comprised of Asians,

Blacks, Latinos, and Caucasians, and their goal is to expose the students and get them interested in being firefighters or provide a pathway to an EMT career. Other activities they participated in are: they collaborated with the Mayor's office, and they had testing for COVID 19 in the Fillmore District, and they handed out flyers informing the neighborhood that there was free testing and recently, they worked on voter registration and last month, they participated in the census.

Captain Sherman Tillman expressed the BFA's concerns by stating: their biggest concern and something that they've been beating the drum about is the numbers in the San Francisco Black Firefighters Association as well as the numbers of black firefighters in the San Francisco Fire Department in general. He added that he has been in the Department for almost 22 years and the average number of black firefighters has been in the high 180s to 190s and it's at a low of 152 right now which is going back to Consent Decree numbers. For him, he said it is an alarm bell and while all the other ethnicities' numbers are going up, their numbers are going down. He said that over the last seven or eight years, since they've been doing national testing and with national testing comes national numbers, so you can't look at the numbers like they did in the past by saying, oh, well, we have to look at the numbers of the Bay Area or San Francisco, because nationally, African Americans are 14 to 15 percent of the population, and right now we have 7.84 percent of firefighters are black. He added that the lowest number is black women, which is only one percent. He mentioned that there were academy classes where no black women were present and there have been two or three classes under Chief Joanne Hayes-White where there were no black people at all in the fire academy and when you're hiring 52 to 54 people like they are now that's unacceptable and he stated that Chief Nicholson has talked to them about this, and she is committed to turning this around. He added that they cannot say that San Francisco is this great place of diversity when the numbers like this are going down. (there was a brief interruption in the presentation as the internet at Headquarters went out). He added that they all want to see the department thrive and see it the way that when he came in, they want to see it improve and they don't want to see it go backward. He acknowledged that black women in the department are at 22 members. the lowest of all the other groups by far.

Commissioner Cleaveland thanked Captain Tillman for his report and thought he presented a great list of accomplishments that his organization made. He confirmed that out of the 152 black firefighters 110 are dues-paying members of the Black Firefighters Association that pay about \$50.00 per paycheck. He also confirmed that the dues are a little bit higher than the other groups because they are the only group with a building so those dues help with the upkeep of the Union building the BFA owns. Commissioner Cleaveland confirmed the history of the purchase of the BFA's Union Building as follows: "The Black Firefighters -- this came I guess around the Consent Decree when they were meeting at different venues trying to get a strategy on, you know, the Consent Decree, like what do we need to do? Do we have a lot of meetings? How do we get involved? And then they got tired of going from here to there to the other, so a couple of members actually got together, bought the property" and deeded it to the BFA. Chief Mark Johnson added that he believes it was in the early '80s when they decided they wanted to make that leap from being more of a social organization to an organization that wanted to effect change in the Department. Commissioner Cleaveland also confirmed that Captain Tillman has been the president of the BFA for three years and that their top three goals are always equality, diversity, and making sure their people are trained and promoted. Captain

Tillman stated that in his 22-year career in the SFFD, he would say 20 of those years, African Americans have not been treated fairly. He added that opportunity should be for everyone and everyone should have a chance to be promoted and have the choice of different venues of education and the chance to get out and make those connections that will help their career to further and add to the value and diversity of the San Francisco Fire Department and he wants fairness and to get the same calls that everyone else is getting. Commissioner Cleaveland confirmed that the BFA does outreach at junior high schools and participates in job fairs. He mentioned that he thinks the Youth Academy is a great success and he would like to see it grow.

Commissioner Rodriguez commended Captain Tillman for all the activities that he laid out at the beginning of his report. He added that he thinks when young adults see a person of the same race promoting jobs, they say, if you can do it, I can do it and he thinks the job fairs are really important if you're trying to recruit. He added that his church delivers food all the time during the holidays and he finds it satisfying when you can help people and see their faces when you give them something that they need. He also mentioned that he would like to investigate why the administration is ignoring the list of names that the BFA is recommending for upcoming academy classes. He confirmed that the BFA building is located at 1468 3rd Street, San Francisco. He congratulated Chief Rubenstein and Chief Arteseros on their recent promotions.

Vice President Feinstein thanked Captain Tillman for his very important presentation and that she appreciated him taking the time to share the information with the Commission. She confirmed that the Black Firefighters Association Youth Academy is open to students typically from the ages 12 to 18, where they teach CPR, First Aid, tying knots and ropes, basically, a fire academy structure where they also learn self-confidence and self-reliance and they get a \$35.00 stipend a week for showing up. The classes usually consist of about 32 students and Captain Tillman thought out of those 32 students, 6 were women.

Commissioner Nakajo thanked Captain Tillman for his report and outlining the intentions and accomplishments of the BFA along with their activities and concerns. He mentioned that the concerns that were outlined need to be addressed and is also a reflection on the Commission and requested, through the Chief, a presentation in terms of how one goes through recruitment and outreach. He stated that in his 25 years on the Commission, he has seen many of the employee groups participate in community outreach programs one way or another. He added that when he came in 25 years ago, they were under the Consent Decree and he described some of his memories of those days.

Chief Nicholson added that when she took over as Chief of Department, most of her command staff knows that she is not just about equality and opportunity, she is also about equity, diversity, and inclusion. She added that they have started several different things within her administration to make sure that they are not leaving people behind and that there are not special phone calls going out. She has begun a program for succession planning, they have been working on a program for training for everyone so that the single mom who has three kids and can't go to Sacramento for the class can take the class here at the SFFD. She added that they have been looking at the National Testing Network which she thinks is not a great test to get into the Fire Department and has an adverse impact on women and African Americans and

they are looking at changing it to the SCTC. She mentioned other ideas they are considering and mentioned it cannot change overnight.

Captain Tillman acknowledged that recruitment is not just a San Francisco problem, it is a national problem because not everyone wants to be a firefighter. He added that what is unique upon San Francisco is that the SFFD is still a diverse department where a lot of these other departments are not.

President Covington confirmed that there will be two classes of the EMS Core, one with males and one with females. She also acknowledged the collaboration that is happening and that things are moving and the current command staff understands the challenges and has heard the wishes and hopes of people who feel they have been underrepresented in the Department. She feels that this evening, they are beginning a new dialogue around these issues and she looks forward to having more dialogue about these issues. President Covington stated that she remembered the last time that the Black Firefighters presented and the hearing room at City Hall was full of young people who had their uniforms on and were very enthusiastic and well-spoken and the young teenaged girls were in charge of it all. She also remembered all the other people who had already graduated out of the program and were coming back to the Saturday program to be of assistance and that it was a wonderful presentation.

There was no public comment.

6. COMMISSION REPORT [Discussion]

Report on Commission activities since last meeting on October 14, 2020.

President Covington announced that she attended the funeral for fallen firefighter Cortez and that it was a wonderful service with his two little boys, who released doves and rang the bell 9 times, and his beautiful family, which everyone will continue to support. She was honored to represent the Commission at the service.

There was no public comment.

7. AGENDA FOR NEXT AND FUTURE FIRE COMMISSION MEETINGS [Discussion]

Discussion regarding agenda for the next and future regular meetings.

- EMS-6 update
- Resolution 2020-03
- Racial Equity Plan presentation
- Women in the Fire Service

There was no public comment.

8. ADJOURNMENT President Covington adjourned the meeting at 7:51 p.m.