

**NOBLESVILLE FIREFIGHTER MERIT COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
MARCH 15, 2023  
4:00 P.M.**

Commissioner Sarah Russell Goddard called the March 15, 2023 Noblesville Firefighter Merit Commission Meeting to order.

Commissioners present were:

**COMMISSION MEMBERS**

Commissioner Mark Glodowski  
Commissioner Sarah Russell Goddard  
Commissioner Chris Renner

Public Safety Director Chad Knecht, Chief Matt Mitchell, Assistant Chief Uriah Eddingfield, Deputy Chief Murry Dixon, Division Chief John O’Neal, and Captain/Executive Officer Jim Butts (representing the Noblesville Fire Department), and attorney Mark Wohlford were all present for the meeting.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Commissioner Renner motioned to approve the minutes from the February 15, 2023 Merit Commission Meeting.

Commissioner Glodowski seconded the motion.

**VOTE TO APPROVE MINUTES**

Commissioner Glodowski	Aye
Commissioner Goddard	Aye
Commissioner Renner	Aye

The motion was passed.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Commissioner Glodowski motioned to approve the agenda.

Commissioner Renner seconded the motion.

### **VOTE TO APPROVE AGENDA**

Commissioner Glodowski	Aye
Commissioner Goddard	Aye
Commissioner Renner	Aye

The motion was passed.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Agenda Item 1: Merit Commission to consider approval of the NFD Professional Development Manual (PDM) (Chief Matt Mitchell)

Copies of the items Chief Mitchell was presenting were distributed. Copies of these items had also been emailed for review prior to the March meeting. Chief Mitchell said he was starting with the Merit Commission Rules - Section IV – Promotional Process document. He said we’re proposing some changes to the way the promotional process is documented in the Merit Rules. Several people within NFD worked to develop this document. This document is a way to capture career paths for a variety of positions in NFD. The Merit Commission specifically has autonomy over the Merit positions of Engineer, Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Chief.

Chief Mitchell started with page 9 of Section IV – Promotional Process. In Section C, language was added that states the education requirements “are located in the Noblesville Fire Department Professional Development Manual (PDM).” Chief Mitchell said these requirements used to be listed in Section C, but those have now been struck. On page 11 in Section D, similar language has been inserted for prior experience and for eligibility, and the requirements that used to be listed in Section D have been struck because these requirements are now listed in the PDM. The inserted language under Prior Experience states “...are located in the Noblesville Fire Department Professional Development Manual (PDM).” The inserted language under Eligibility states “...meet the requirements set forth in the Noblesville Fire Department Professional Development Manual (PDM) and the following:”.

Commissioner Goddard asked about the Executive Officer position. She said it looks like Executive Officer is appointed at the discretion of the Battalion Chiefs and the Fire Chief and asked if that’s how it’s done currently. Chief Mitchell said yes and that it’s not a Merit position—it’s an appointed position.

Chief Mitchell next discussed the packet titled “Degree of Implementation”. He said he printed the pages of the PDM that are specific to what the Merit Commission has authority over. He said on page 5, it identifies the time in grade for the 4 ranks that are Merit positions [Engineer, Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Chief]. He said page 6 lists some assumptions that we assume people will have

coming out of the recruit academy before they get to these Merit positions. Chief Mitchell said the next pages address prerequisite qualifications and certifications for Engineer, Lieutenant, Executive Officer, and Battalion Chief. He said information was also included in the packet about the Battalion Chief equivalency for education, specifically military qualifications. He said the last page is a matrix of what each individual Merit rank needs to have.

Commissioner Renner asked how it was determined on the military equivalency what courses apply. Chief Mitchell said we have two Sergeant Majors in NFD who went through that for us. NFD's Captain/Executive Officer Jim Butts is a Sergeant Major in the US Army and he is in the audience today. NFD Lieutenant Luke Turner also evaluated and help establish this section. Chief Mitchell said the military equivalencies are at a level that are very high. Captain Butts said the levels on that for the military equivalency, the ranks and the schooling we looked at, the level of leadership that those individuals would have would be well beyond the scope of Battalion Chief. You're at a company command level which means you'll have between 80 – 120 soldiers that you're directly responsible for. We also incorporated that they need to have 2 rated years of service in that position and they couldn't be relieved for cause. That was the synopsis behind the schooling. The level of schooling that we're asking for, the Army has equated it to a bachelor's degree.

Commissioner Goddard asked how NFD members will access the PDM. Chief Mitchell said it will be electronically accessible at all times to all members.

Chief Mitchell said the concept of the PDM document is a one-stop shop to define where I want to go in my career and steps required to achieve that. He said he anticipates that this document will continue to be updated and any substantial changes would be brought to Merit Commission for approval.

Chief Mitchell then discussed the two documents labeled Merit Promotion Path [the proposed new document] and Officer Development [the old document which was also previously referred to as the Career Path document]—both of which were included in the paperwork distributed at the meeting and were also emailed prior to the meeting for review. He said that on the Officer Development document, the strikeouts indicate items that are not included on the Merit Promotion Path. He said a lot of the items that were struck are things that are included in the Assumptions page that he showed Merit Commission earlier. He said the assumption is that a member will come out of recruit school and will have all of those items listed. He said that on the Captain and Battalion Chief position sections of the Officer Development document, they replicated the classes needed from previous positions. For example, if there was a class listed as a requirement to become a Lieutenant, that class was also listed as a required class to become a Captain and a Battalion Chief. On the Merit Promotion Path document, for simplicity's sake we only put what is specifically required for each position because the assumption is you already have the requirements needed for previous positions. He said for years of service, one of the big changes that we are proposing is for changing the time requirement as a Lieutenant from two years to three years in order to be a Captain. Chief Mitchell said one of the other big proposed changes on the Merit Promotion Path document is to move to task books that are NFD specific. Copies of the task books for Engineer, Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Chief were included in the paperwork distributed at the meeting and were also emailed prior to the meeting for review. He said the task book would have to be completed for promotion as is referenced on the Merit Promotion Path document. He said the task books are also referenced in the PDM as well.

Commission Goddard asked why the decision was made to increase from two to three years of service as a Lieutenant for the Captain. Chief Mitchell said that we believe that extra year of service is critical to serve in the role as a Captain.

Commissioner Glodowski asked about the Paramedic path. Chief Mitchell said that Paramedic is not a Merit position, but that it is included in the PDM. Other non-Merit positions are included in the PDM as well.

Commissioner Renner made a motion to approve the Noblesville Fire Department Professional Development Manual and the Merit Promotion Path document as presented by Chief Mitchell.

Commissioner Glodowski seconded the motion.

**VOTE TO APPROVE THE MOTION**

Commissioner Glodowski	Aye
Commissioner Goddard	Aye
Commissioner Renner	Aye

The motion passed.

Agenda Item 2: Merit Commission to consider an addition to the Merit Rules – Lateral Hiring Process (Chief Matt Mitchell)

Copies were distributed of the items Chief Mitchell was presenting. Copies were also emailed in advance of the meeting for review. These items were: 1) Merit Commission Rules – Table of Contents; 2) Merit Commission Rules - Section II – Applicant Requirements; and 3) Merit Commission Rules – Section VII – Lateral Hire Requirements.

Chief Mitchell said on Section II – Table of Contents, the only proposed change is adding “Section VII – Lateral Hire Requirements”.

Chief Mitchell said on Section II – Applicant Requirements, the proposed change is to add “(4) Lateral Hire Requirements differ and are located in SECTION VII of this rule.”

The proposed addition of Section VII – Lateral Hire Requirements that Chief Mitchell presented to Merit Commission reads as follows:

**“SECTION VII - LATERAL HIRE REQUIREMENTS**

**A. Policy:** The Department, with notification to the Merit Commission, may choose to fill a vacant or new position with a lateral entry firefighter/EMT-B or a lateral entry firefighter/EMT-P in any of the following instances:

- (1) A recruit academy is not scheduled

- (2) New position(s)
- (3) Retirement(s)
- (4) Disability retirement(s)
- (5) Military deployment(s) in conjunction with vacancies
- (6) Resignation(s) or Termination(s)
- (7) Any of the above in conjunction with vacancies

**B. Requirements:** The Commission requires the following criteria when this process is used:

- (1) Prior experience as a full-time/career firefighter
- (2) A current member of the 1977 Police Officers and Firefighters Retirement Fund
- (3) City of Noblesville Fire Department Employment Application
- (4) Valid State of Indiana Driver's License
- (5) Valid State of Indiana EMT-B or EMT-P certification
- (6) Valid State of Indiana Firefighter II
- (7) Pre and post-offer background checks
- (8) Department polygraph procedures
- (9) Oral Interview
- (10) Successful Completion of Work Performance Evaluation (WPE) or equivalent

**C. Conditions of Employment:** The following conditions will apply to all lateral entry candidates:

- (1) Candidate must have successfully completed all the requirements set forth in the policy;
- (2) Candidate must complete all required Department training and orientation;
- (3) Candidate will be a probationary employee for a period of one (1) year from the date of hire;
- (4) Candidate will receive one year of service credit for every three years of full time, sworn service from their previous organization for the purposes of vacation accrual.
- (5) Candidate will, at a maximum, be hired at the rank of First Class Firefighter, based on 3:1 years of service obtained. Merit ranks from other departments will not be recognized at Noblesville Fire Department;
- (6) For the purposes of station bid, vacation draw, and promotional consideration the Candidate's seniority begins at date of hire with Noblesville Fire Department.
- (7) If the candidate is a licensed paramedic, the candidate shall serve in that capacity for a

minimum of five (5) years.

**D. Lateral List:** The following condition(s) apply to maintaining a lateral list:

(1) NFD may maintain a list of potential lateral hires for one year with a six-month option to extend the list as approved by the Merit Commission. If necessary, NFD will advertise for a new lateral process after a respective list expires.”

Chief Mitchell said we have received a federal grant to hire 15 firefighters. We already had budgetary authority to hire 8 firefighters for 2023, so we’re looking to hire 23 new firefighters. He said Merit Commission knows the difficulty of our hiring process the past few years because of our small hiring lists. He said we have some concerns that we will not be able to get these 23 new people in the door by only using the traditional hiring model that we’ve used in the past. We have a deadline. There is a recruitment period to hire these individuals which ends on August 8, 2023, so we have to hire all of these people by August 7, 2023 at the latest in order to receive the full amount of the grant. The date of hire that we are targeting is July 24, 2023. We are very concerned with the ability to hire that many people by only going the traditional hiring route, so we are proposing an additional option that would supplement, but not replace, the traditional hiring model. We are asking approval to establish a Lateral Hiring Process. That’s where we seek existing full time firefighters who are members of the 1977 Police Officers and Firefighters Retirement Fund and see if they are interested in joining NFD. Chief Mitchell said almost all other fire departments already do this. We have occasionally lost NFD members to other departments through their lateral hiring processes, so this is our attempt to get in the game to do this as well. This would allow us to hire firefighters who are already 1) certified as Firefighter I and Firefighter II, 2) an EMT or paramedic, and 3) have a level of training already which we will supplement with additional training. Chief Mitchell said this will be another method to help us ultimately fill the 23 new hires by the grant deadline so that we can capture all of the federal dollars that have been awarded to us.

Chief Mitchell said another way this policy would be helpful to us in addition to our immediate need of hiring 23 new firefighters is for when we have replacements. For example, we have two or three firefighters retiring in 2024 and it’s difficult to have a recruit class with just a couple of people, especially when they have to go through the full recruit academy. Chief Mitchell said it’s not a great use of taxpayer money to dedicate all of those resources to hire just a couple of new people. The lateral process would work really well in situations like this. Chief Mitchell said the proposed new Rule states that we would like to have a Lateral Hiring List that would be valid for one year with a six month extension option. Chief Mitchell said the traditional Hiring List is valid for two years.

Commissioner Renner said when you come to Merit Commission for approval to hire, will the individuals be identified separately as traditional hire vs. lateral hire and Chief Mitchell said they would be.

Commissioner Goddard asked how hiring will be handled when it is being made from the two lists in tandem. Chief Mitchell said for now, we would like to hire up to eight individuals from a Lateral Hiring List and hire fifteen individuals from the 2023 Hiring List [traditional hiring]. He said that might change since we don’t know how many lateral applicants we might get. Right now, we’ve been working the 2023 Hiring List since November 2022 and so far we only have two individuals who have been approved by INPRS. Chief Mitchell said that’s part of why we have anxiety over hiring 23

individuals using only the traditional hiring list. Chief Mitchell said getting applicants through the hiring process is very long. He said many candidates on the traditional hiring list have moved on and have joined other departments or taken another job.

Commissioner Goddard asked Chief Mitchell if there was a model or template used to create this proposed NFD Lateral Hiring Process and he said yes. He said Captain Jim Butts and Local 4416 have been great partners with this.

Commissioner Glodowski asked about the proposed policy that [a lateral hire] “candidate will receive one year of service for every three years of full time, sworn service from their previous organization for the purposes of vacation accrual.” He asked if the “one year for three years” would count also for promotion purposes as referenced in the previous agenda item regarding the NFD Professional Development Manual. Chief Mitchell said lateral candidates would not get credit as it relates to promotion. One of the conditions of employment listed in the proposed Lateral Hiring Process states that the candidate’s seniority would begin at the date of hire with NFD and that is what would be considered for promotional purposes. Chief Mitchell said that if there is a special situation with a candidate, he believes that person would be able to come before the Merit Commission to ask for a waiver. An example of this is if there is a lateral candidate who currently is a Captain at another fire department, that person could potentially come before the Merit Commission to ask for a waiver of the Merit Rule requirement that he or she must serve seven years at NFD before being eligible to become a Lieutenant and then serve three years as Lieutenant before being eligible to become a Captain. Chief Mitchell asked Mr. Wohlford if that was correct that a lateral candidate could come before Merit Commission in certain cases (such as this one) to request a waiver. Mr. Wohlford said he didn’t know the answer to that without looking further.

Commissioner Renner asked if the Noblesville Police Department does this. Chief Mitchell said NPD uses a lateral model for hiring and Director Knecht said they also use a traditional model and they normally alternate. Chief Mitchell said since we need to hire so many firefighters in a quick timeframe, we will run the traditional and lateral models concurrently.

Commissioner Renner made a motion to approve the Lateral Hiring Process as presented by Chief Mitchell.

Commissioner Glodowski seconded the motion.

**VOTE TO APPROVE THE MOTION**

Commissioner Glodowski	Aye
Commissioner Goddard	Aye
Commissioner Renner	Aye

The motion passed.

Agenda Item 3: Merit Commission to consider the hiring of two new recruits (both already approved by INPRS) from the 2023 Hiring List (Chief Matt Mitchell)

Chief Mitchell said Jacob Mills and Matthew Pirrone are the next two applicants on the 2023 Hiring List [traditional hiring list] and they have both been approved by INPRS. We are asking your permission to hire them with a tentative start date of July 24, 2023.

Commissioner Glodowski made a motion to approve the hiring of Jacob Mills and Matthew Pirrone.

Commissioner Renner seconded the motion.

**VOTE TO APPROVE THE MOTION**

Commissioner Glodowski	Aye
Commissioner Goddard	Aye
Commissioner Renner	Aye

The motion passed.

Agenda Item 4: Merit Commission to consider the hiring of eight new recruits from the 2023 Hiring List [traditional hiring list], all pending INPRS approval (Chief Matt Mitchell)

Chief Mitchell said these eight individuals are all pending INPRS approval. They are:

- a. Aaron Adams
- b. Heather Baker
- c. Brantley Springmeyer
- d. Jack Parker
- e. Joshua Clark
- f. Grant Meyers
- g. Albert White
- h. Taylor Kerr

Commissioner Glodowski made a motion to approve the hiring of the eight people requested by Chief Mitchell.

Commissioner Renner seconded the motion.

**VOTE TO APPROVE THE MOTION**

Commissioner Glodowski	Aye
Commissioner Goddard	Aye
Commissioner Renner	Aye

The motion passed.

Chief Mitchell introduced Murry Dixon, NFD’s new Deputy Chief. Chief Dixon replaced Deputy Chief Chris Gellinger who retired.

Commissioner Renner made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Glodowski seconded the motion.

**VOTE TO ADJOURN MEETING**

Commissioner Glodowski	Aye
Commissioner Goddard	Aye
Commissioner Renner	Aye

The meeting was adjourned.