

After weeks of discussion, board names interim chief

BY JAY HATHAWAY
For Bedford Now

The Bedford Township Board of Trustees officially appointed James Neorr as interim fire chief Tuesday night.

Mr. Neorr, the assistant chief of Bedford's Fire Department, has been the acting chief since John Bofia retired from the position on April 1. Mr. Neorr was originally expected to be named the interim chief at that time, but the board voted to table the issue until details like compensation and duties could be settled.

Disputes that were made by former Bedford firefighter Dennis Steinman were brought to the board several times since Mr. Bofia's retirement. However, Township Supervisor Greg Stewart and Trustee Paul Francis said that Mr. Neorr came highly recommended for

the interim position by the township's Fire Commission, and the board voted 6-1 to approve the appointment.

Trustee Nancy Tienvieri voted against the appointment, citing ambiguity in the description of responsibilities for the position, but she did express her overall support of Mr. Neorr.

"I totally back him as the authorized leader (of the fire department)," Mrs. Tienvieri said. "It's just confusing that he will be both the assistant chief and the interim chief. How are those duties divided?"

Mr. Stewart replied by describing some of the duties of an acting chief and an interim chief, such as signing legal documents that may only be signed by the chief, but also acknowledged the need to revise the official job description.

"There is a draft job description that was put together by the Fire Commission," Mr. Stewart said. "It was not up to par, and it needed some adjustments, and there was an older version that was discovered, but outdated. I'm not going to accept something that is not right."

Mr. Stewart also noted that Mr. Neorr has expressed that he does not wish to become the permanent fire chief.

"We want to be able to interview people with a vision of what the future (of the fire department) is," Mr. Stewart said. "There will be a lot of changes in the future of what our volunteer fire department is and what it's going to be, and my charge to the fire commission was, we need to look at what direction we want to go. What we need as an interim is a man

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or woman who keeps the fire department going and things operating smoothly, until the right person is put in place."

"The interim is a placeholder for a new chief," he added.

During the public commentary time of the meeting, Bedford firefighter Todd Bruning, who also owns Todd's Guns in Lambertville, expressed his support of Neorr's appointment as interim fire chief. However, he emphasized the

need for strong new leadership to step in for the permanent position.

"The department, as a whole, is a disaster," Mr. Bruning said as he addressed the board. "Something needs to be done, for sure."

After the meeting, Mr. Bruning elaborated his

concerns about the department, citing power struggles as one of the primary issues that need to be addressed by a new chief.

"It's a free-for-all," he said. "Everyone is trying to burn each other. We need someone brand new to come in, who has never been with the department, and not part of the 'Old Boys Club' to be chief."

Mr. Bruning added that despite the problems, he enjoys the work he has done with the Fire Department during his two years of service.

"I like doing it. It's part of what I can give back to Bedford. I support Bedford as much as I can."