

# **CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

## **Fire Department Budget**

May 10, 2005, 6:30 p.m.

Conference Room A

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City Council Present: Mayor Sirrell, Assistant Mayor Grasso, Councilors Ferrini, Marchand, Pantelakos, Raynolds, Hynes, Whitehouse, and St. Laurent

Officials Present: City Manager Bohenko, Dianna Fogarty, Human Resources Director; Judie Belanger, Finance Director; David Moore, Community Development; Christopher LeClaire, Fire Chief; Steve Achilles, Assistant Fire Chief; Fire Commissioners, Michael Hughes, Richard Gamester, Paul Wentworth, and Deputy City Clerk Kirby

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### **I. Call to Order**

Mayor Sirrell opened the work session at 6:35 p.m. and passed the introduction to City Manager Bohenko.

### **II. Introduction**

City Manager Bohenko asked everyone to turn to page 103 of the Budget Book to review the Budget Summary of Expenditures and goals and objectives for the Fire Department. City Manager Bohenko turned the meeting over to Fire Chief LeClaire for a PowerPoint presentation on the City of Portsmouth Fire Department 2005 Department Overview and Performance Measures.

### **III. Presentation – Fire Chief Christopher LeClaire**

Chief LeClaire presented a PowerPoint presentation explaining the Fire Departments Mission Statement of Commitment to quality through planning, training, performance improvement and financial management. He went on to show the services the Portsmouth Fire Department provides as well as positioning of the current stations and response times. He went into staffing of the current stations stating that they currently staff with 13 during the day shift and 14 on the night shift. Chief LeClaire presented a short video clip that showed the time it takes for a fire to reach flashover, highlighting the need for a quick response time. He reviewed NFPA 1500 Standard on Firefighter Health and Safety highlighting the 2 in – 2 out program wherein a team of two firefighters are inside the building and two outside to act as back up. He stated that with the manpower they currently have, if they run short due to vacations, injury or sickness, they do not have the manpower to man all the vehicles. His presentation went on to show essential tasks conducted at various types of fires and the manpower needed for each. His presentation ended with their Strategy and Action Statements. Strategy I being to maintain a safe work environment, Strategy II being to aggressively provide effective life and building safety services to all customers and Strategy III to provide an effective response to all fire, emergency medical, and special hazard incidents, whether natural or man-made. Chief LeClaire passed out the Fiscal Year 2006 Budget Proposal wherein the Fire Department is asking for a 5.5% increase. Chief LeClaire stated that there is no fat in their budget and the only place they can cut would be personnel.

#### **IV. Questions and Discussion**

City Manager Bohenko stated that if the Council were to vote for a 4% increase instead of the 5.5% increase as requested, there would not be any personnel layoffs, but a reduction in overtime.

Councilor Pantelakos asked Chief LeClaire if all the added homeland security is causing financial hardships.

Chief LeClaire stated that they have perused all possible grants and that two of the new fire vehicles were in fact paid by a HLS grant.

Councilor Raynolds asked Chief LeClaire to explain what the Fire Prevention Officer's job entailed.

Chief LeClaire stated that the Fire Prevention Officer's job is to review all the licenses and permits, perform fire inspections, life safety, fire education, occupancy inspections and fire code enforcement. He stated that it is very difficult for one person to keep on top of all this with all the businesses and construction going on in Portsmouth.

Councilor Raynolds stated that he would like to see the numbers of what this entails, such as number of licenses and permits, inspection, and the number of school educational programs. He also asked why the overtime budget is so large (20-25%).

Chief LeClaire stated that it is hard to say how much overtime will be needed. They have to fill in sick, injured or vacationing personnel with overtime personnel. The earned time program has helped with this in part, but they still have to cover injuries and vacations.

Councilor Raynolds asked if it was possible to hire a person to cover in place of overtime.

City Manager Bohenko stated that the fixed costs attached to hiring a person such as insurance, training, and pay increases could be more than the overtime.

Councilor Raynolds asked if they truly need a minimum of 14 on the night shift.

Chief LeClaire stated that he doesn't want to bring staff down, he is trying to bring it up to 15. Bringing the staff down means a vehicle has to go unmanned.

Assistant Mayor Grasso stated that she received a lot of compliments on the Fire Station during Children's Day. She stated that she thought that it was suppose to be 14 at night not 14 during the day. She also stated that she supports the 5.5 budget, as it is important to man the stations with 14 at night.

Chief LeClaire stated that the manning is presently 13 during the day and 14 at night when manpower permits.

Councilor Ferrini echoed Assistant Mayor Grasso's comment and asked what would happen to our response times if we approve a 4% budget.

Chief LeClaire said that if we back off on purchasing new equipment and manpower, response times could go down.

Councilor Ferrini ask if we lower the budget to 4% will we lose manpower.

Chief LeClaire stated that we would lose overtime which in effect would cause the night shift to be manned one short.

Councilor Hynes stated that if it means a lack of a 14<sup>th</sup> person he will support a 5.5% budget.

Councilor Pantelakos asked if it was possible to hire a retired firefighter who could work on a part-time, as needed basis.

Chief LeClaire stated he was unsure if once retired they were allowed to work as a part time firefighter and that what he really need is a 40-hour person. He stated that we need to maintain 14 people and he would like to have 15 people or 5 people per shift.

Councilor St. Laurent asked where is the saving of earned time?

City Manager Bohenko stated that the overtime has been figured in with the earned time. He also stated that there have been wage increases, which distorts the figures.

Councilor St. Laurent asked if we know a firefighter is going to be off, can you have him available to be called in for emergencies.

Commissioner Hughes stated that not all his firefighter's live in Portsmouth, some live as much as one hour away, which would be crucial to our response time.

Chief LeClaire stated that we do pull assistance from surrounding fire stations in emergencies and in like manner, assist them.

Councilor St. Laurent asked how the mutual aid comes into effect and can we use them more.

Chief LeClaire stated that the smaller town fire stations are made up of volunteers. Their response time is longer and you don't know what type of training they have.

Councilor Marchand stated that he is not surprised that the Fire Department has come in with a tight line budget. He asked if an extra \$80,000 to \$82,000 would get us 14 people for both day and night shifts most of the year.

Chief LeClaire stated that when their overtime budget decreases they have to cut that 14<sup>th</sup> person.

Councilor Marchand stated that he knows that fire is less predictable, but is there a time that is slower and you could cut back to 13 and increase back to 14 when it gets busier.

Chief LeClaire stated that there is no peaks and valleys.

Councilor Marchand asked the Fire Chief if you had to guess, how far into the year is overtime depleted to the point that you have to cut to 13.

City Manager Bohenko stated that it is usually the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

Chief LeClaire stated that they try to maintain 14 on as long as possible.

Councilor Marchand asked if there are some places that response time is less than 7 minutes.

Chief LeClaire stated that the outer limits are and that they try with other stations to respond as quickly as possible.

Councilor Marchand ask if there is one station that could move to a different place that would increase response time.

Chief LeClaire stated that all the stations are positioned in the best places.

Assistant Chief Achilles stated that the supplemental crews are the lower response times.

Councilor Raynolds ask if we give mutual aid more than we get it.

Chief LeClaire stated that we assist the smaller towns more often, but when we call in the smaller towns to assist us, it is usually for a large fire and they are assisting us for hours.

Councilor Hynes stated that we need to have a properly staffed department.

Councilor Pantelakos thanked the Fire Chief for getting the sick leave under control.

Chief LeClaire stated that it was Dianna Fogarty and Judie Belanger that got the earned time program implemented.

Councilor Whitehouse stated that some fire departments are having their vehicles refurbished rather than buying new.

City Manager Bohenko stated that over the last 15 years quality of equipment has decreased and vehicles today do not last like they use to.

Mayor Sirrell asked City Manager Bohenko to put together some options with the tax rates so she can see how the numbers equate. She stated that she is all about the tax rate.

City Manager Bohenko stated that operating is fixed and that we need to look at the non-operating side.

Councilor Pantelakos stated that the Joint Budget Committee recommended 5.5% increase and all departments should get the same percentage across the board. It will cause less animosity between departments.

Councilor Ferrini stated he would like to see some options.

Councilor Marchand stated that he disagreed with Councilor Pantelakos. Some departments can do with less and some need more. We should look at each department carefully and set their budget at what is needed.

Councilor Raynolds stated that he too felt that we need to review each budget and approve each on its own need.

Councilor Pantelakos stated that because the school says they need a higher percentage than the rest, we shouldn't just give it to them.

Councilor Whitehouse stated that Councilor Pantelakos made a point. If you grant one department more, they will all want more.

City Manager Bohenko stated that he thought we needed another work session after everything is done to work out a clean budget prior to the final budget review on June 8, 2005.

Councilor St. Laurent asked the City Manager what type of options he was going to give them.

City Manager Bohenko stated that his first thought was to the taxpayers, second is there a set rate that will work and lastly, no department should operate without safe people.

Councilor Raynolds stated that he thinks it is time to make a judgement call and give each department what they need and not an across the board rate.

City Manager Bohenko asked the Councilors if May 24, 2005 at 6:30 was acceptable with everyone for another work session.

The City Council agreed to schedule a budget review work session on Tuesday, May 24, 2005 at 6:30 p.m. in Conference Room A.

City Manager Bohenko asked the City Council if it was acceptable for the Council packet to go out on Friday rather than Thursday this week for Monday's meeting. The City Council agreed to have the Council packet go out on Friday for the May 16, 2005 meeting.

## **V. Adjournment**

At 8:20 p.m., Mayor Sirrell closed the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by:

Dianne M. Kirby, Deputy City Clerk