

## CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

### Fire Department Budget

May 9, 2006 - 6:30 p.m.

Council Chambers

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City Council Present: Mayor Marchand, Assistant Mayor Ferrini, Councilors Grasso, Pantelakos, Whitehouse, Smith and Hynes

City Council Absent: Councilor Dwyer and Councilor Raynolds

Officials Present: John P. Bohenko, City Manager; Dianna Fogarty, Human Resources Director; Judie Belanger, Finance Director; Christopher LeClaire, Fire Chief; Steve Achilles, Assistant Fire Chief; Steven C. Griswold, Deputy Fire Chief; Fire Commissioners, Michael Hughes, Richard Gamester, Paul Wentworth, and Dianne Kirby, Deputy City Clerk

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

Assistant Mayor Ferrini called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. and passed the introduction to City Manager Bohenko.

#### **II. Introduction**

City Manager Bohenko introduced Fire Chief Christopher LeClaire and turned the meeting over to him for the Fire Department's Budget PowerPoint presentation.

#### **III. Presentation School Department**

Chief LeClaire presented a PowerPoint presentation explaining the FY07 Fire Department Budget. He stated that Strategy I was to maintain a safe work environment. He advised the City Council that in order to do this the Fire Department needed to implement new and maintain current policies, procedures, and best practices consistent with local, regional, and national industry standards. He stated that they also needed to maintain effective training programs and state-of-the-art equipment. Strategy II is to aggressively provide effective life and building safety services to all customers. He stated that in order to accomplish this, the Fire Department would need to meet 100% occupancy inspections, implement new and maintain current public education and prevention programs, continue to enforce place of assembly permits and maintain a plans review program. Strategy III is to provide an effective response to all fire, emergency medical, and special hazard incidents, whether natural or man-made by adopting national standards and seeking accreditation, implementing and maintaining resource distribution to include facilities, personnel and equipment and by maintaining effective training and state-of-the-art equipment. Chief LeClaire stated that during calendar year 2005, the Fire Department responded to 2,270 fire services, which consisted of 96 fire/explosions, 9 overpressure/rupture calls, 1097 rescue calls, 201 hazardous condition calls, 110 service calls, 212 good intent calls, 536 false calls, and 9 other/miscellaneous calls. He stated that the Fire Department also responded to 2,578 emergency medical service calls during calendar year 2005. Chief LeClaire went on to

discuss the future challenges that the Fire Department faces. He stated that the Fire Department is faced with future challengers in all hazard and flu pandemic planning, residential and retail growth in District 2, continued development of downtown, Northern Tier and Islington Street Corridor, waterfront and maritime responsibilities, community fire safety and injury prevention programs, and place of assembly permitting. Chief LeClaire stated that the main considerations that went into the FY07 Budget planning were 14/14 shift strength, which accounts for 9.736% of the overall budget and increasing maximum staffing to 15 personnel, which would be 14.313% of the overall budget. These figures do not include overtime for full coverage. Chief LeClaire stated that the Fire Commission has approved a 7.526% increase over the FY06 budget. This increase would include hiring a Fire Inspector/Captain, contractual obligations to include step increases, health insurance and worker's compensation and raising energy costs to include electric, fuel and heating. Chief LeClaire thanked the Council for their support both past and present.

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

Mayor Marchand stated that the Council needs to balance the real needs of the departments with the obvious taxpayer constraints. He stated that the Fire Department has done a good job of coming in with needs as compared to wants.

Councilor Pantelakos asked the Fire Chief why they were requesting a Captain in their Inspection Department with a salary of \$80,000.00 - \$90,000.00 that could pay for two firefighters. Chief LeClaire stated that the job is a 5-day, Monday – Friday job with no overtime allowed. Therefore, we need a competent individual who will require little to no training to come in and assist with the workload. He stated that whether we hire from inside or outside, the Department would need to have a competitive salary in order to draw someone in to take that position. Councilor Pantelakos asked Chief LeClaire if all cell phones within the Department were charged to the Department's budget. Chief LeClaire stated that they were not. Councilor Pantelakos requested to know how come the Department's cell phone bill was \$14,000.00. Chief LeClaire stated that the Department has cell phones for all the chief officers, all the ambulances, and the Department Officers. He stated that the cell phones are more effective than the radios.

Councilor Whitehouse stated that the Fire Department already has 3 key personnel – Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chief and now we want to create a Fire Prevention Officer. He stated that fast calculations bring this to over \$400,000.00 in salary and benefits. He requested to know how does Portsmouth compare with Fire Departments in the surrounding area. Chief LeClaire stated that Portsmouth is extremely light when it comes to officer personnel and administrative staff.

City Manager Bohenko stated that the basic salary with step 1 would be approximately \$59,000.00 a year with benefits around \$86,000.00. Councilor Pantelakos stated that a Captain's salary would be approximately \$64,000.00. City Manager Bohenko stated that would be the top step. Chief LeClaire stated that he expects one of his junior lieutenants to be interested in this position. City Manager Bohenko stated that this would probably make the position, with benefits approximately \$86,000.00. Fire

Commissioner Hughes stated that this is not a new position; this position has been vacant since 2000.

Assistant Mayor Ferrini stated that one of the Fire Department objectives was to improve ISO standards. He asked what would it take to get the Fire Department to a higher standing. Chief LeClaire stated that it is a complex issue and would require more staffing and equipment as well as two more stations for the City. Assistant Mayor Ferrini asked where other areas such as Dover, Rochester, etc. stand. Chief LeClaire stated that he believes they are lower than Portsmouth in line staff.

Councilor Pantelakos stated that the Fire Department budget stated that they pay their part time maintenance \$28,000.00 and their part time alarm service \$22,000.00 a year. She requested if Public Works could do any of these repairs. Chief LeClaire stated that it would depend on what repairs were needed. He stated that oil changes, etc. are presently being done in house, major repairs are being done outside to take some of the liability off the City. Councilor Pantelakos requested if we have specialized mechanics on staff. City Manager Bohenko stated that we do, but our mechanics do not have the training required to work on the technical trucks. Councilor Pantelakos asked if it was possible for our maintenance to do minor repairs and oil changes. City Manager Bohenko stated that we could take a look at that. Councilor Pantelakos stated that lowering this figure could give the Fire Department funds needed to hire another firefighter. Chief LeClaire stated that the Fire Department does not overspend their accounts. City Manager Bohenko stated that we could look into Public Works maintenance personnel doing the Fire Departments minor vehicle repairs and oil changes over the next few months and report back.

Councilor Whitehouse requested how many shifts have 14 men. Chief LeClaire stated that there are 14 names on the daily roster for day and night shifts. He stated that if someone calls out on day shift, the shift would run with 13. He stated that if someone calls out on the night shift, that man would be replaced maintaining a 14 man shift.

Councilor Smith agreed with the importance of the additional Fire Prevention Officer in the Fire Department. He requested how long the inspector position has been vacant. Chief LeClaire stated that it has been vacant since January 1, 2000. Councilor Smith requested if the Chief could hold off filling that position for 6 months, therefore, cutting their budget for the first six months. Chief LeClaire stated that could probably be worked out.

Councilor Hynes stated that in all his years on the Council he has never told a Commission how to spend their budget money. He stated that for the first time, he has never heard from so many low, middle, and upper class Portsmouth residents requesting that the Council cut back. He stated that as a Council they have a responsibility to the people.

Councilor Smith stated that he has received 76 phone calls and only one was in favor of any increase. He stated that the Fire Department has done a terrific job in holding the line and he has found nothing unreasonable in their budget request. He stated that

although he feels the inspector position is very important, he would like to see the position held off for 6 months in order to hold the budget down.

City Manager Bohenko stated that the Charter is clear. He stated that the Charter says “the Fire Commission shall appoint such permanent firefighters, Lieutenants, Captains, Deputy Chiefs, a Fire Chief and any call firefighters as they may deem necessary subject to the approval of the City Council.” The City Council could literally say that they want the Department to have a sworn force of a number as agreed upon by the Council.

Mayor Marchand stated that, from the talk tonight, it seems that the main issues are:

- a. Contractual Issues
- b. Staffing Levels
- c. The Inspector Position
- d. Overtime
- e. Utility Costs

City Manager Bohenko stated that there has been an increase of 45% in utility costs and we have talked at length of the short fall. He stated that he recognized that the departments have chipped in together and given up things in their budget in order to cover these increases.

Councilor Grasso stated that she would like to commend the Fire Department on submitting a good budget. She commended Chief LeClaire for his dedication to safety for not only the Community but his staff as well.

Councilor Pantelakos stated that she does not want to see the Inspector position filled by a Captain. She would like to see the position filled by a firefighter on a lower pay scale.

Councilor Whitehouse asked if the new fireboat would be fully equipped. Chief LeClaire stated that it would. Councilor Whitehouse asked if we were going to keep the old fireboat. Chief LeClaire stated that the old fireboat is beyond repair and will be condemned. Councilor Whitehouse requested if there was a cost factor for more personnel and training. Chief LeClaire stated that it will require the same number of personnel to run and that they had an educational stipend as well as the US Coast Guard has offered to assist them with training, therefore, they anticipate little to no cost. Councilor Whitehouse asked if the new fireboat would be in the water year round. Chief LeClaire stated that unlike the old boat, it would be in the water year round.

Mayor Marchand stated that there has been a high amount of calls from the Community to hold the budget. He stated that the Fire Department has set the tone for coming in with minimum requests. He stated that he could get behind hiring the Inspector in six months.

Assistant Mayor Ferrini stated that there have been a large number of calls on holding the line on the budget and the Fire Department has set the tone and brought in a good

budget. He stated that if postponing the Fire Inspector position for 6 months would work for everyone, he would get behind it. He stated that he feels that prevention is key.

Councilor Pantelkos stated that in her eight years on the Council, this is the hardest budget year she has experienced. She stated that she is having a very hard time with this budget and although she would hate to see it, she doesn't see it being approved without layoffs. She stated that the Fire Department did a good job at setting a good budget, but the people out there just can't pay anymore.

Mayor Marchand stated that the goal of the Council is to look down the road 5-10 years and make gradual changes as we go. He suggested against calling a straw vote as the Council has only heard from one of the four departments and he feels that the Council should hear from all four departments, then make any cuts after looking at the big picture.

City Manager Bohenko stated that the Council does have a work session on June 13, 2006. He stated that at that time, the Council could formulate the overall budget.

Mayor Marchand stated that we want to try to minimize uncertainty to the departments, but we need to review what the residents have said as well as what the department need.

Chief LeClaire stated that the City Council has always supported the Fire Department and as the Fire Chief, it is his job to set the standard of what coverage should be and inform the Council what he feels the City needs for safety. He stated that the Council and the Fire Department all have to work together to achieve this goal. Mayor Marchand stated that there has been a positive relationship between the Fire Department and the City Council.

Councilor Pantelakos requested if retirements are going to double next year. City Manager Bohenko stated that there would be a 20% increase in retirements. He stated that the retirement board is working on this. Councilor Pantelakos stated that retirements are the big topic in Concord.

Councilor Whitehouse requested if firefighters are allowed to switch shifts. Chief LeClaire stated that they are.

Mayor Marchand thanked the Fire Commission and Chief LeClaire for their presentation and requested that the Council stay for a few minutes to discuss some housekeeping issues.

City Manager Bohenko provided a copy of last year's approved resolutions. Councilor Whitehouse requested to know what the motion would be to separate the budget into four departments. City Manager Bohenko stated that City Attorney Sullivan would have to get back to him with that information. He further stated that the Council should have a meeting to discuss how the Council wants to handle the voting process prior to the meeting in June and their final adoption.

Assistant Mayor Ferrini stated that he feels that the Council needs a work session to discuss how to vote before they have the final adoption.

Mayor Marchand stated that each department is very different. He stated that Police, Fire and Municipal may not need a straw vote, but the School Department may need some direction on the Council's vote in order to prepare their teachers if some of their contracts are not going to be renewed for next year.

Councilor Grasso stated that she agreed with Assistant Mayor Ferrini that the last meeting should be the final adoption and the Councilors should have a meeting prior to that meeting to discuss their positions.

Councilor Pantelakos stated that she hoped that by the end of these work sessions, we would be able to come to an agreement that will benefit all parties. She stated that years ago City employees were not paid very well and therefore, benefits were added to attract good employees. She stated that our employees are now paid a very good salary and all the added benefits are no longer needed to secure good employees.

City Manager Bohenko stated that at the June 13, 2006 work session he would have copies of all the Resolutions available for the Councilors to review and make changes and on June 19, 2006, the Councilors would adopt the budget. He stated that if the Councilors do not adopt the budget on June 19, 2006, they would have until the end of June. He advised the Council that if they do not adopt a budget by the end of June, the budget drafted by the City Manager would become law.

Assistant Mayor Ferrini asked which budget would be adopted. City Manager Bohenko stated that the budget submitted today is what would be adopted and he would put a freeze on everything on July 1, 2006. Mayor Marchand stated that there are not any wide gaps between the Council members and that they should be able to come to a decision.

Councilor Pantelakos asked if on June 19, 2006 they do not reach a decision would they have until June 26, 2006 to adopt the budget. City Manager Bohenko stated that they would have until June 30, 2006.

### **VIII. Adjournment**

At 8:45 p.m., Mayor Marchand closed the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by:

Dianne M. Kirby, Deputy City Clerk