

## CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

### FIRE AND POLICE DEPARTMENT BUDGETS

April 27, 2011 – 6:30 p.m.

Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers

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City Council Present: Mayor Ferrini, Councilors Lister, Hejtmanek, Coviello, Dwyer, Kennedy and Smith

City Council Absent: Assistant Mayor Novelline Clayburgh and Councilor Spear

Staff Present: City Manager John Bohenko, Fire Chief Chris LeClaire, Assistant Fire Chief Steve Achilles, Police Chief Dave “Lou” Ferland, Deputy Police Chief Stephen Dubois, Frank Warchol, Police Financial Officer, Finance Director Judie Belanger, and Valerie French, Deputy City Clerk I

Also Present: Fire Commissioners Richard Gamester, Chair, Paul Wentworth and Michael Hughes and Police Commissioners, Gerald Howe, Chair, John Golumb and John Russo.

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#### **I. Call to Order – Mayor Ferrini**

Mayor Ferrini called the Work Session to order at 6:30 p.m.

#### **II. Introduction – John P. Bohenko, City Manager**

City Manager Bohenko stated the Fire Department presented a budget that complies with the Council Request of a zero increase budget and introduced Fire Chief Chris LeClaire.

#### **III. Presentation – Fire Commission/Fire Chief**

Fire Commission Chairman Gamester gave an opening statement explaining that they are here to answer the Council’s questions and address any concerns. He continued that this is the third consecutive year that they are providing a budget without an increase which is presenting a significant challenge to provide equal coverage to all areas of the city as there are insufficient funds to fund all positions in all three stations during all shifts. He concluded by addressing the April 4, 2011 City Council meeting stating that during the discussion on the resolution for supplemental funding for the FY11 Fire Department budget, the Chief was subjected to questions regarding the FY12 budget and feels that he took a beating, but still tried to answer questions he was unprepared for. He apologized to the Chief for not having stood up at that time.

Chief LeClaire began by giving the backgrounds, qualifications and credentials of the Fire Commissioners stating that they are all very qualified and dedicated. Next he stated that he has no power point presentation for this year’s budget as they have already presented the budget which does not allow them to fully provide services. He stated that his men and women continue to make him proud despite the political environment at both the State and

local levels. He stated there is a culture of a can-do attitude and when people call, they will respond and are committed to their mission to protect life and property. He continued that the firefighters want to provide for their families but also understand they need to help the city save money and try to do their part. He stated that there is a misconception regarding overtime and feels it should be called shift coverage. He then listed the various responsibilities of the officers including administrative duties. He stated that the FY12 Budget is greatly reduced in order to meet the Council's request.

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

Councilor Coviello stated that this request was not unique to the Fire Department and wonders if the Chief feels that it would be okay to raise taxes in order to fully fund his budget. Chief LeClaire stated he recommends funding the department and it already represents a budget leveled to zero, but if we want the same services, then yes. Councilor Coviello stated that he agrees that there is no where else to cut in the Fire Department and feels it is running as efficiently as it can. He stated he doesn't agree with hiring more people to artificially lower the overtime. He stated we could raise taxes and use fund balance to fund the budget but eventually we would run out of fund balance too and asked if there are any long-term goals in place to address this issue. Commissioner Gamester stated that the 2 unions have indicated they are willing to work with them.

Councilor Hejtmanek asked for clarification regarding the coverage from Station 3 stating that if they respond within 4 minutes, but it still takes the other trucks 8 minutes to get there, then the first responders can't do anything until the others arrive anyway according to the regulations. Chief LeClaire stated they can do everything except enter the building but in some cases, they enter the building out of necessity. Councilor Hejtmanek asked how many structural fires occur a year. Chief LeClaire stated 80, but only the bigger events are in the newspaper.

Councilor Lister thanked Chief LeClaire for answering their questions and being accessible to do so. He continued that there are 3 areas that need to be addressed; reform of overtime, State retirement and health insurance. He asked if there had been any efforts to investigate alternative programs for the Department that would also be in line with the City. Chief LeClaire explained that currently there are 2 choices available; Anthem and Matthew Thornton. He continued that Matthew Thornton plan was unknown when first offered, but more people are choosing that option now. He stated there is a committee that is investigating other options and feels that there needs to be more communication as even minor adjustments in the health care choices will result in savings. Councilor Lister asked City Manager Bohenko for an update on what is being done on the City side. City Manager Bohenko stated that the LGC evaluates the plans offered but there has not been a lot of Fire Department input as of yet. He reviewed the premium costs for both of the plans offered and that they have lined up conversations with the Fire and Teachers unions regarding the Matthew Thornton option. He stated a lot of municipal employees choose that already, but he understands that health insurance is a very personal issue. He stated this is all part of collective bargaining and the key to savings is the premium share and deductibles, but clarified that the choices available in New Hampshire are limited.

Councilor Smith stated that the statistics given state there are 80 fires a years and asked what makes up the majority of the calls. Chief LeClaire stated that they are prepared for every call that comes in and the staff is cross-trained for all situations, which include hazardous materials, motor vehicle accidents, water rescues, animals in weird places, flooding, tree damage, etc. He stated their trucks run all day long from all 3 stations. Councilor Smith stated that a majority of the calls need to be responded to in a timely manner. Chief LeClaire stated that they respond in real time of approximately 4-7 minutes, although people think that it takes longer when they are waiting.

Councilor Kennedy asked about the FEMA reimbursement. Chief LeClaire explained that during major events we can recover a percentage of our costs for dealing with those. City Manager Bohenko explained that when there is a major event, the Departments work together to coordinate the efforts and then we get a percentage of that money back which the Council redirects as unanticipated revenue.

Councilor Hejtmanek asked about ambulance revenue collections in FY10. Assistant Fire Achilles stated that collections are up to 80-90%. Councilor Kennedy asked how much the revenue has increased over the last 2 years. Finance Director Belanger explained that they give a projected revenue figure based on the averages, but the actual amount can fluctuate because of billing cycles, etc.

Councilor Kennedy stated she commends the Chief for meeting with the Councilors to discuss ideas as she feels communication is crucial. She stated that the \$285,000.00 shortfall in the FY12 Fire Budget proposal equals one bad winter storm. She stated she didn't like the question posed to Chief LeClaire regarding raising taxes to fund his budget because it is the Council's decision how to fund the budget. She stated that people have made it clear that they want their ambulance service.

Councilor Lister asked how much revenue was lost by the closing of Station 3 recently. Assistant Chief Achilles stated it was closed for 3-4 weeks.

Councilor Dwyer asked for clarification that the calls were still responded to when that was off the road. Chief LeClaire stated that they were handled through mutual aid but explained that only the transporting agency gets the money. Assistant Chief Achilles explained the billing for ambulance calls and Chief LeClaire explained how the Mutual Aid contract works.

Mayor Ferrini thanked the Chief for his presentation but stated that we need to work towards creative solutions and asked if the Chief has heard of any ideas nationwide as everyone is facing the same challenges. Chief LeClaire stated that many departments resort to layoffs, closing districts, having brown-outs, etc. He stated that he is in favor of regionalization and feels it would help bridge the gap in smaller towns when volunteers aren't available. Discussion ensued regarding regionalization and the resistance to do so in the Northeast region.

A 10 minute recess was called at 7:20 p.m. Meeting reconvened at 7:30 p.m.

## **V. Presentation – Police Commission/Police Chief**

Commissioner Howe gave a brief statement explaining that this budget is the Commissions' budget and not Chief Ferlands'.

Chief Ferland gave a power point presentation touching on the following areas: Safety, Police Department History, Community Profile, Events, Community Issues, "Broken Window" Theory, Crime Preventions, Critical Infrastructure, Emergency Evacuation Plan, Patrol Zones, Sex Offenders, Detectives, Prostitution, Drugs and Gambling, Alcohol, Unique Portsmouth, Collaborating with Organizations, Crime Stoppers, People behind the scenes, Diversity, Training and Staffing, Supporting City Functions, Phone Calls, Improving Services through feedback, Community Involvement of Staff, Court appearances, Alternatives to jailing, Funding, streamlining services, Quality of Life, Prevention efforts, Awards, What's around the Bend, Budget Comparison to other cities, and concluded with the Mission Statement highlighted with Community, Commitment and Compassion.

Chief Ferland then further explained the budget proposal and stated that the police department doesn't have the same opportunities to increase revenue sources because court fines all go to the State. He reviewed a chart showing the reductions from the period of 2001-2010 and the fixed cost breakdown resulting in a \$323,153 deficit. He stated he was instructed by the Police Commission to present a 0 increase budget and as this is solely an operating budget, it is achieved by salary/position reductions.

## **VI. Questions and Discussion**

Councilor Coviello asked the Commissioners if they feel this proposed budget allows the Chief to accomplish everything that he has outlined or do they need additional funding.

Commissioner Howe stated they would like to not lay off additional personnel and reduce by not filling vacated positions so they would need their budget funded at \$8,660,000.00 to maintain current staffing levels. Councilor Coviello stated that he is sorry that people don't like his asking the question, but he asked if Commissioner Howe agrees that this is really a long-term issue. Commissioner Howe stated yes.

Councilor Coviello asked if there are any long-term recommendations. Commissioner Howe stated that there are opportunities for regionalization but they have also hit walls due to structural and cultural issues. He stated there are some regionalized efforts such as the Seacoast Emergency Response Team and the Regional Drug Task Force. Chief Ferland stated that Portsmouth is not the same as it was 10 years ago as there are many more restaurants, liquor licenses, events, etc. and our resources are more diminished with Federal and State funding and grants almost non-existent.

Councilor Kennedy asked about the anticipated grants on page 160 and can any of the positions scheduled for layoff be incorporated to the grants. Chief Ferland explained that the grants will continue to diminish each year and he cannot fund personnel through grants. He stated there are 2 specific grants that allow for funding of personnel, ICAC and Homeland Security.

Councilor Kennedy stated that last year the Chief was concerned about the effect the District Courts reducing hours would have on the overtime budget and asked if that has become an issue. Chief Ferland stated it has been a significant problem as not only are the courts closed more days, but when there isn't a judge available locally, they have to travel to wherever they can be heard and it ties up the officer for the full day because they can't just go over when the case is called, they have to be available. Councilor Kennedy asked for clarification of several other line items.

Councilor Lister thanked Chief Ferland for the presentation stating that he hoped people at home were watching. Next he asked about the County Sherriff's Office and do we get any benefits of their services. Chief Ferland stated they do the prisoner transport, help with DWI checkpoints, and are on-call for events if needed. Councilor Lister asked if there have been any collaborative efforts between the two departments. Chief Ferland said that there are some collaborative funding for Seacoast Response Unit and the K-9 unit but stated that they run into the same issue as the Fire Department in that towns like to have their own departments. He related an initiative by the City of Dover to regionalize their communications system with Strafford County but it didn't work out.

Councilor Dwyer asked if other towns use the Sherriff Department services more than us. Chief Ferland stated that he feels the Sherriff's Department make sure that they aren't duplicating the efforts of the cities and towns and therefore, there are already efficiencies because of that. He continued to explain the services provided by the Sherriff's Department.

Councilor Smith asked about the digital fingerprinting unit that is in a future year of the CIP and can we use this as a potential revenue source. Chief Ferland stated he doesn't think other agencies would pay and gave an example of cross-agency software for police cruisers, which is now not going to be used because departments won't pay the \$800.00 a year maintenance fee.

Councilor Kennedy asked if any police officers are EMT's and wonders if cross-training would be a good idea. Chief Ferland stated he doesn't know of any that are EMT's and feels that police officers already have enough training to keep up with and being an EMT would require so much more training, there just wouldn't be enough time.

Commissioner Howe thanked the City Manager and Finance Department for their tremendous work on the budget.

## **VI. Other Business (NONE)**

## **VIII. Adjournment**

Mayor Ferrini closed the Work Session at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Valerie A. French, Deputy City Clerk I