

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Police and Fire Department Budgets

May 2, 2012 – 6:30 p.m.

Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers

City Council Present: Mayor Spear, Assistant Mayor Lister, Councilors Coviello, Kennedy, Novelline Clayburgh, Lown, Dwyer, Smith and Thorsen

Staff Present: City Manager Bohenko, Finance Director Judie Belanger, Chief of Police David “Lou” Ferland, Fire Chief Chris LeClaire

Police Commissioners Present: Jerry Howe, Chair, John Golumb and John Russo

Fire Commissioners Present: Richard Gamester, Chair, and Paul Wentworth

I. Call to Order – Mayor Spear

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

II. Introduction – John P. Bohenko, City Manager

City Manager Bohenko stated that he has worked with the department heads to bring forth a budget with no higher than a 2.9% increase.

III. Presentation – Police Commission/Police Chief

Police Commission Chair Golumb thanked the Council for the opportunity to present their budget and introduced Chief Ferland.

Chief Ferland gave a brief history of the changes occurring with the City of Portsmouth and the police department over the last 30+ years. He gave a brief presentation outlining the changes since FY09 to the present through reorganization and maximizing job efficiencies. He stated the department utilizes electronics more frequently, does not allow police vehicles to idle, etc. He stated he has presented a 2.9% increase budget with a reduction of \$31,312.00 but clarified that the community wants a pro-active police force not just a reactive department. He stated that this reduction will mean reducing full time staff by 7 positions and feels that their best spent dollars are on crime prevention.

IV. Questions and Discussion

Assistant Mayor Lister referred to the police study and asked where they are in achieving some of those goals. Chief Ferland referred to a time-line that was prepared beginning in May of 2010 where the Commission decided to have an audit done and to get a better handle of the department responsibilities etc. Next, from February 2011 through September 2011,

data was collected and a 12 member committee of internal stakeholders was formed in December 2011. He continued that the stakeholders group discussed community policy philosophy and identified “model” police departments to emulate.

Councilor Dwyer stated that one of the challenging areas have been related to police officer visibility and how officers get assigned to certain areas. Chief Ferland stated that these are contractual items that need to be negotiated but they have been discussed. He stated he will not be the Chief when some of the changes are implemented and cannot speculate when it will occur.

Councilor Thorsen stated that the rates of ranking officers seem to be top heavy compared to non-ranking officers. He asked if the study found this as well. Chief Ferland stated there is a theory behind the number of ranking officers in that there are supervisors at calls which reduces the risk of liability issues. He stated we need to compare this issue apples to apples, but the report does state that there are too many ranking officers and this is being discussed as people retire as opportunities to restructure.

Commission Chair Golumb stated he is comfortable with this current proposal and will discuss it further with the new Police Chief.

Councilor Lown asked about utilizing the police auxiliary officers more as they are paid an hourly rate of \$19.60. Chief Ferland explained that these individuals have significantly less experience and are part-time and therefore not readily available.

Discussion ensued regarding the police study and the possible restructuring over the next few years.

Chief Ferland clarified that the report does underscore that the changes to the structure should come from attrition because of the risk management aspects of the job and having experienced officers on calls with rookies.

Discussion ensued regarding the funding of police functions through the State via alcohol, restaurant money as is being proposed in the State legislature or implementing a hospitality charge at the city level.

Chief Ferland stated that the City also does not collect any revenue involved in traffic fines and that all of that money goes to the State. He stated it has always been an expense to the municipalities to enforce these State laws, but it is becoming increasingly more expensive as the officers often have to travel out of district for their cases because of the revamped court system and the lessening of hearings locally.

Mayor Spear thanked the Police Commission and Police Chief for their presentation and stated that he would like to have them back when the police study has been implemented and progress can be measured.

Recess/Reconvened at 7:40 p.m.

V. Presentation – Fire Commission/Fire Chief

Fire Commission Chairman Gamester stated that this is the 14th budget he has been involved in and feels that this Fire Department has developed into one of the best in the State and maybe in New England. He stated they have brought their budget in under the requested 2.9%.

Fire Chief LeClaire reviewed the department organizational chart which involves staffing 14 per shift in all three stations. He further reviewed the staffing levels at Station 3 and discussed the recent closing of the station for 30 days after the funding issue. He stated as proposed the budget reflects a 2.6% increase, or \$181,355.00 over last year's budget. He reviewed the various activities and accomplishments of the Fire Department, Fire Prevention, Emergency Medical Services and Emergency Management.

VI. Questions and Discussion

Councilor Thorsen asked if the 2.6% increase includes the \$150,000.00 extra to fund the staffing at Station 3. Chief LeClaire stated yes.

Councilor Dywer asked if the response time has been affected due to adding New Castle and Greenland to our response area. Chief LeClaire stated that the Town of New Castle has been very happy with the service and accounted for 50-60 calls out of 3,000.

Discussion ensued regarding staffing levels and overtime costs with the suggestion being made to hire more personnel instead of paying overtime.

Chief LeClaire explained that the overtime funding was increased because of the unknowns related to sick leave, long-term illnesses, deployments and annual leave. He explained that there is always going to be overtime and hiring more firefighters would be more expensive in the long run due to the costs of health insurance, vacations, training, etc.

Discussion ensued regarding using volunteer firefighters with Chief LeClaire explaining that this isn't practical as these individuals would not be trained properly.

Mayor Spear asked if there was a way to flatten the command structure to be more efficient as there seems to be more experienced personnel compared to the police department. Chief LeClaire stated he would caution comparisons as the functions, requirements and qualifications are different.

Discussion ensued regarding ambulance billing with Chief LeClaire stating that ambulances are required to be a part of the department's responses to assess, treat and stabilize people, but if a private ambulance transports the patient to the hospital, then the city cannot bill. He stated that the ambulance services more than pays for itself. He stated that bill collection used to be an issue but they now have a handle on it.

Councilor Dwyer stated that some police calls are made by citizens unnecessarily, and wonders if the fire department experiences those types of calls. Chief LeClaire stated that with the downturn in the economy they sometimes do get calls for ambulances that turn out to be more of a “taxi” ride to the hospital and they have to make that assessment when they get the calls.

Councilor Novelline Clayburgh stated that Station 3 building is in bad shape and is in the CIP down the road, but wonders if the Pease Development Authority would be able to help with that funding. Chief LeClaire stated that this is in the CIP but it keeps getting pushed further and further out. He stated they will be doing minor improvements in the meantime which will help and feels it would complicate the issue to get the PDA to work with us.

Councilor Lown asked about the life expectancy of the SCUBA equipment listed at \$100,000.00. Chief LeClaire explained that this technology is much better now and the previous equipment can’t be used after 15 years so they are trying to spread it out over the next 3 years.

Assistant Mayor Lister asked about the Waterfront coverage and is that an additional burden. Chief LeClaire stated that all of these additional areas the waterfront, the tradeport, etc. make Portsmouth an exciting place to live and work. He stated they train for all of these things and now have a safe boat. He stated we have always had this responsibility and it is 100% paid for by a grant, although the City does pay for the upkeep with the help of the PDA.

VII. Adjournment

Mayor Spear closed the Work Session at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:



Valerie A. French,
Deputy City Clerk