

**The Board of Fire Commissioners  
Portsmouth Fire Department**

Fire Station 2, George Pierce Training Room  
February 13, 2018

Portsmouth, NH  
1730 hours

**I. Call to Order:**

Chairwoman Matthes called the meeting to order at 1730 hours.

**II. Pledge of Allegiance with Attendance:**

Chairwoman Matthes led the pledge of allegiance.

Chairwoman Matthes, Commissioners Richard Gamester and Michael Hughes, Fire Chief Steven Achilles, Deputy Fire Chiefs Carl Roediger and James Heinz, Executive Assistant Tracy Freeman, Fire Inspector Patrick Howe, and members of the department. Meeting was taped for public viewing.

**III. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting:**

*Motion, to approve the minutes of January 9, 2018, was made by Commissioner Hughes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.*

**IV. Public Comment Session: None.**

**V. Presentation of Written Communications: None.**

**VI. Public Hearings:**

Chairwoman Matthes turned the meeting over to Chief Achilles for his presentation on the FY2019 Proposed Budget.

Chief Achilles presented the FY2019 Proposed Budget. Departmental goals outlined were to maintain and strengthen reliable delivery of essential emergency and non-emergency services, promoting the safety of employees and the community through comprehensive education and training, and provide effective, efficient and customer-centered services. Incident activity showed the overall response activity of the department similar to last year, but 6% higher than calendar year 2015. The largest revenue source for the department comes from ambulance billing which showed a collection rate up 77.5% over the past 5-years. Chief did make mention that the revenue generated from ambulance billing does not go back to the department but to the City's general fund. The position summary report showed the department continuing with 61 fulltime positions and 3 part-time positions with no new positions added.

Chief Achilles continued his presentation showing current and future impacts on service with the demand for services increasing 36% in the last 10 years, and 18%

in the last 5 years with the trend continuing upwards however, department staffing remains the same as it was back in 1998 and in 2017 at 61. Concurrent requests for service showed an increase where 28% of the call volume occurred at the same time. In 2010 it was 16% of the time and in 2014 it was 20% of the time. When multiple calls occur within the same time, units have to go out of district to cover or mutual aid is called in when all of our units are committed. Growth and development continues to rise within the city. Residential units, not including health care facilities, hotels or medical offices, has increased substantially within the city. In 2016, 56 residential units were under construction, 246 approved, 188 under review and 395 were being considered. In 2017, 313 residential units were under construction, 56 approved, 107 under review and 300 being considered. 216 units have been completed since 2010. With 3.2 million square feet of development having been added in the last 6 years, we can expect calls for service to increase as well.

The FY2019 proposed budget shows a 3.24% increase over FY18, consistent with Council guidelines. The increase shown is due to step increases, cost of living adjustments, health insurance and operational cost adjustments. The proposed budget continues to maintain current level of service, staffing, stations and resources ensuring training and education for emerging and essential service responsibilities. The Chief included a supplemental request with his proposal which includes the addition of one Fire Prevention Officer which would impact the budget by \$104K, or a 1.2% and increasing the part-time secretary to a full-time administrative grade 9 position, impacting the budget by \$30K or .34%. The supplemental request also identifies the need to increase available on-duty staffing over a 5-year period. Year 1, add 4 firefighters to provide 15 maximum per shift with 13 minimum and reduce overtime by \$80K impacting the budget by an additional \$175K or 2.04%. He noted an option to save some costs in the 1<sup>st</sup> year would be by adding 2 firefighters in July and 2 in January, reducing overtime by \$50K impacting the budget \$142K or 1.63%. Year 2 add funds to overtime to allow staffing to 14 minimum on all shifts (\$250K). Year 3 add \$300K for 4 additional firefighters (1 per shift) which would have staffing at a maximum of 16 and a minimum of 14 on all shifts. Year 4 add funds to overtime to allow staffing to 15 minimum during night shifts (\$230K) and Year 5 increase minimum staffing for day shifts, adding funds to overtime to allow staffing to 15 minimum during night shifts (\$165k) with staffing maximum at 16 with minimum of 15 on all shifts. Chief made note that the dollars proposed in the supplemental requests reflect total costs of wages and benefits.

*Commissioner Gamester made the motion to open the public hearing for comments on the proposed budget FY19. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.*

Chairwoman Matthes asked if anyone wished to speak on behalf of the proposed FY19 budget. There were no speakers.

*Commissioner Gamester made the motion to close the public hearing. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.*



Chairwoman Matthes thanked Chief Achilles for his presentation and for including a 5-year plan for the department. Chairwoman Matthes led a brief discussion regarding the increase and impacts in the demand for services and if it was more localized in a specific area or across the city. Chief Achilles answered it being generally city wide, excluding Pease, however district 4, the downtown area, was seeing the most increase. The traffic circle volume has also increased with traffic activity along the highway, and occupancies of the hotels and school. Deputy Roediger and Inspector Howe spoke of the increase in demand for services in prevention and inspection. With the amount of development and the amount of meeting participation of each of those development projects, it consumes a large amount of time Deputy Roediger stated. He went on to note that these developments are large and more complexed and each requires permitting, inspection and plan reviews. Inspector Howe added that public education is falling behind and it clearly should not be limited to 1-week a year, Fire Prevention Week. He noted that State requirements also impact our department with inspections and places of assembly required in all restaurants annually, and inspections every 3 years for foster homes, day care centers and multifamily homes. He went on to say the Prevention Bureau is having to prioritize workloads because we just can't address every area we'd like to due to time commitments. Chairwoman Matthes asked the Chief if he was looking to implement all three supplemental requests at the same time or prioritizing them. Chief stated all three have distinct value to the department. The community has not stabilized and continues to grow and has excelled in the last 3-5 years. There will be more dialog and work sessions regarding the budget proposal and City Council will ultimately approve or disapprove supplemental requests, but feels all three are needed and the general public needs to know the impacts our department is facing. Commissioner Gamester supported the Chief's request to present all three supplemental requests with the department's FY2019 budget. Commissioner Hughes also supported the Chief's request stating the Portsmouth Fire Department hasn't had a head count change in over 20 years yet the fire service has changed in those 20 years, as we have seen. Firefighters need to know a lot more than they did 20 years ago with an increase in school shootings, terrorism, water safety and rescues, protection, increased highway traffic, increased construction projects, we need to staff appropriately and using the Chief's 5-year plan is on point. He went on to say that the fire department is the first responders on the scene to whatever that hazard is.

*Commissioner Gamester made the motion to approve and submit to the City Manager, the proposed FY2019 Budget as presented, at 3.24% along with three items of supplemental to be included. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.*

**VII. Recognition of Groups or Individuals:**

Chief Achilles extended his appreciation to department personnel for their hard work in the last couple of weeks facing several small fires along with some challenging calls on the highway and a couple tasking medical calls and wanted to say thanks. Commissioners also extended their appreciation.



**VIII. Reports:**

**A. Fire Chief's Reports:**

*Chairwoman Matthes motioned to discuss Chief's reports 18-015 through 18-018. Motion seconded by Commissioner Hughes.*

Chief Achilles reviewed reports with the Commission.

Report (015), 2018 Response Report with Service Activity and Safety message for January. The report shows the department responding to 122 Fire Calls and 314 Ambulance Calls for the month. Totals for year to date shows the department responding to 436 calls. Chief went on to outline some of the activity for the month with smoke inside a building on Suzanne Drive caused by plastic object too close to a wood stove; a vehicle fire while parked in a garage; a fire alarm activation at AAA Travel Agency due to a frozen sprinkler pipe that burst; and a structure fire on Woodbury Avenue where crews found black smoke and partially self-extinguished fire in front living room. Area of origin involved a lit Christmas tree. The Safety Message section noted February being American Heart Month. A great time to commit to a healthy lifestyle and make small changes that can lead to a lifetime of heart health. The Service Activity and Safety Message report was submitted to the Portsmouth Herald for publication in local newspapers. Report (016), Fire and EMS Call Summary Report, shows the department responded to 246 fire calls for the month of January with 62 EMS calls with injury excluding vehicle accidents, 10 calls each for Abdominal Pain, alcohol abuse and headache/migraine pain. There were 63 calls that required no transport and 3 drug overdose calls. Report (017), FY18 Budget, Chief Achilles provided status update and noted the department is 58.31% into the fiscal year and 66.34% spent however still anticipates the department with a projected surplus. He explained a few salary and overtime lines that are continuing to track high due to shift coverage for two members who are currently out on disability leave and another who is currently on temporary alternate duty. Budget projections have also been made for Firefighter Sutton who is anticipated to be deployed in April for a year. We will continue to monitor the lines closely he stated. In March/April will look at the possibility of hiring an additional firefighter to cover Sutton's military leave and do have some indications of retirements that may come about. Report (018), Overtime Analysis, provided a breakdown of how overtime was used in the month of January along with a summary of what was charged to OT-Recall for the month.

*Motion, to accept Chief's Reports 18-015 through 18-018, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hughes and passed unanimously.*

**B. Staff Reports:**

Deputy Roediger provided an overview of Prevention earlier in the public hearing comments.

Deputy Chief Heinz provided a report on Operations and Training within the department noting station 3 project almost done and punch list being created, new rescue 3 is a little ahead of schedule and should arrive April/May, Maplewood Ave traffic plan is out for review at Station 1, and had several trainings this month that focused on Alzheimer's Awareness, Advanced Cardiology, Sexual Harassment, Computer Security, Behavioral Health (cancer and PTSD), and rapid intervention.

**X. Old Business:** None.

**XI. New Business:**

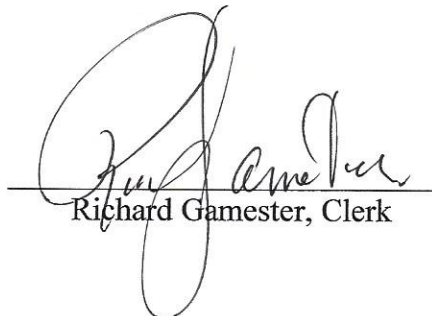
Chief Achilles spoke briefly on the request to purchase a commercial grade gear washer and dryer for station 3, which is consistent with Station 1 and Station 2, from the Webber Bequest. Because of its commercial grade, upgrades to the flooring and electrical system would be needed to support this type of equipment. It is imperative that gear gets washed regularly to remove smoke and other contaminants to protect the safety and health of our firefighters. He noted that having one at station 3 would allow members assigned to that station to have the opportunity wash their gear and not have to leave their district to do it at one of the other stations.

*Commissioner Hughes made the motion, to approve the Fire Chief to purchase a gear washer and dryer and costs associated to upgrade the floor and electrical system at station 3 to support the washer and dryer from the Webber Bequest, at a cost of no more than \$28,000. Motion on the floor was discussed further and was amended to include the need for the safety of our firefighters and their health.*

*Commissioner Hughes made the change in motion on the floor to include the amendment for the need for the safety of our firefighters and their health. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.*

**XII. Adjournment:**

*Motion, to adjourn at 1835 hours, was made by Chairwoman Matthes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.*

  
Richard Gamester, Clerk