



# *Town of Wilmington*

## *Finance Committee*

Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, August 14, 2018

Finance Committee Chairman, John F. Doherty III, called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm in Room 9 of Town Hall. Members present were Neal Couture, Marianne Gallezzo, Michele Kincaid, Leigh Martinson, Theresa M. Manganelli, Bernard P. Nally, and Hirak Shah. Excused: Kevin Stokes.

### **FIRE DEPARTMENT: BUDGET AND STAFFING**

PRESENT IN INTEREST: Joseph T. McMahon, Fire Chief; William Cavanaugh, Deputy Fire Chief; Jeffrey M. Hull, Town Manager; Denise Y. Casey, Assistant Town Manager; Michael Morris, Town Accountant.

Town Manager Hull stated that the purpose for the meeting is to discuss concerns expressed by the Finance Committee regarding overtime in the Fire Department, which arose during the FY 2019 budget discussions. He noted that the use of overtime in the Police and Fire departments is necessary, as there is a minimum staffing requirement in order to perform their services, and personnel are entitled to use personal, vacation and sick time. Long term sick time and injuries cannot be anticipated, and these are key factors driving the increase of overtime, which is in excess of the \$900,000 budgeted for overtime. This does not include the \$40,000 training overtime budget, which is allotted for specific training when firefighters are needed to train outside of his/her normal shift, when a trainer or instructor is available.

Current staffing for the Fire Department is nine Firefighter/EMTs in each group. The last time there was an increase in the staffing level was 2009, however there have been significant increases in the number of calls since then.

Fire Chief, Joseph McMahon stated that though he has been Chief since February of this year, he has been with the Wilmington Fire Department since 1982, and served as Lieutenant from 1987 until he was named Chief in 2018. He stated that even though the department members are avid gym users and in healthy shape, there are six firefighters out on injury, four of whom may be out for an extended period. The types of injuries are back and shoulder injuries, which are a direct result of the frequency of runs, mostly on the ambulance. At the current staffing level, it is difficult to prevent such injuries because of the way firefighters need to lift and maneuver the stretchers.

The total department staff is comprised of one Chief, one Deputy Chief, one daytime Fire Prevention Lieutenant, one daytime Operations Lieutenant, and four nine-person shifts comprised of one Shift Lieutenant and eight Firefighter/EMTs. Due to the current injury situation, as many as two firefighter/EMTs are required to backfill with overtime per 24-hour shift.

Mr. Doherty asked whether an eight-hour shift might be reasonable. Chief McMahon stated that because the department provides 24-hour service, this is the most fiscally responsible way to ensure the department is able to provide its service. Most Fire Departments in other communities have a similar 24-hour shift rotation.

Chief McMahon explained the procedure for responses and stated that if two calls come in at the same time, the station is left empty. If a third call comes in, and a unit cannot leave one of the previous calls, mutual aid from the nearest neighboring community is called to handle the call. Ms. Manganelli asked if there is any financial cost to the Town for calling upon mutual aid. Chief McMahon stated that the Town has agreements with and provides support to all neighboring communities, and there is no cost to the Town. Ms. Gallezzo asked how often the Department needs to call upon mutual aid. Chief McMahon stated that the department sends on average between five and ten calls for mutual aid per month.

Chief McMahon stated that in July of this year, in an effort to curb overtime spending and to free up the crew on shift, he tested a plan to callback firefighters to cover additional calls. Out of 148 pages sent out during this experiment, Firefighters were only able to come back six times. Due to the amount of overtime already being asked of the Firefighter/EMT staff, the department cannot rely on off-duty staff to come in anymore. Not only did this experiment show that the department is not getting the callbacks it needs, but it also shows how frequently the station is left empty.

This past year, the legislature adopted the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) as the regulatory body for safety throughout the Commonwealth. In the next year, the Fire Department, along with all Town departments, will no longer be exempt from OSHA standards. A significant OSHA standard by which the Fire Department will need to adhere is the “2-in, 2-out rule.” This rule mandates that upon arriving at a fire, no one may enter a burning structure unless there is a minimum of four firefighters (excluding the pump operator): two to go in, and two waiting for them to exit before they may enter, unless a rescue is imminent. However, even with the need for an imminent rescue, by not having the minimum staff on scene, the Town may still be subject to OSHA fines.

Deputy Chief William Cavanaugh stated that the department reviewed the call volume from the last nine years and noted the drastic increase. In (calendar year) 2009, there were 3,426 calls for service, and in 2017 there were 4,549 calls for service. In 2009, the average was 83 runs per member, and in 2017 the average was 113 runs per member, an increase of approximately 33%. Mr. Couture asked what the cause is for the increase in calls and whether there were trends or a shift in the types of calls the department receives. Deputy Chief Cavanaugh stated that there has been a large spike nationwide in the amount of mental health and substance abuse calls received by Public Safety departments. Chief McMahon noted that in addition to the increased number of calls for opiate related injuries, there has been an increase in population since 2009 including two nursing homes along West Street, as well as high-density developments such as Avalon Oaks and Ten Burlington Avenue, that have contributed to an increase in calls. The most increased types of calls include: calls for the elderly population, diabetics, and obesity related issues. Mr. Doherty asked why a nursing home would call the Fire Department and not an ambulance company. Chief McMahon explained that one nursing home would call the Department for routine falls because they were understaffed, but that practice was quickly stopped. Nursing homes only call the Fire Department for emergencies. The nursing homes have contracts with ambulance companies and the Fire Department does not handle routine transfers.

Deputy Chief Cavanaugh provided an overview of the increase of overtime expenditures since FY 2009. The amounts increased to over \$900,000 in FY 2014 and FY 2015, followed by a reduction in FY 2016 and FY 2017. However, the amount increased again in FY 2018 to over \$999,000 due to injuries and vacancies. In FY 2018, 66% of the appropriation was based on actual overtime including vacation,

personal, and routine sick time. 29% of the overtime budget was because of injury or long term sick and 5% was expended on manning two daytime personnel on the ambulance. The daytime ambulance service was halted due to the clear impact it had on the overtime budget.

Injuries and long-term illness in 2015 amounted to 3,448 hours in (calendar year) 2015, 2,448 hours in 2016, 3,124.5 hours in 2017, and 3,521.5 hours of overtime due to injury/long-term illness and 2,552 hours filling vacancies through July 7<sup>th</sup> of 2018. In seven months, the department has already surpassed the previous three years with injuries. This equates to \$159,814 on injuries and long-term sick in 2015, \$113,464 in 2016, \$144,820 in 2017, and \$163,221 as of July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

Assistant Town Manager, Denise Casey, provided an overview of the new firefighter timeline to manpower. In February of 2018, the Town requested certification from the state Human Resources Division of Civil Service and approval was received in mid-March. At the end of March, eight individuals were interviewed, six of whom were selected to complete the extensive Fire Department application process. On April 20<sup>th</sup>, a conditional offer of employment was sent to four firefighters, who went for their Physical Ability Tests and psychological exams. Final employment confirmation letters were issued in June. Though the four individuals are currently working for the Department, they are performing as EMTs until they can complete the Fire Academy. The next available Fire Academy is in November, which will take the new firefighters approximately nine weeks to complete. Following the Academy, it will still be another couple of weeks on-shift before they can be counted towards staff manning. Mr. Hull noted that if a firefighter provides short notice of his/her retirement, the position will remain vacant until this lengthy recruitment process can be completed. Chief McMahon stated that just because there is a vacancy, the Town must have the name of an individual to fill that vacancy before the Fire Department can even apply for a position in the Academy. Everything must be approved by Civil Service before an individual can be placed in an Academy class.

Ms. Gallezzo asked if the department will be fully staffed on March 1, 2019, and whether any members of the Department are eligible for retirement. Chief McMahon stated that the department would be fully staffed once the new firefighters complete the Academy, provided no one else retires before then. He also noted that he is the only member of the department eligible for retirement, but that he has no plans to retire any time soon.

Ms. Manganelli asked how the Town would qualify to start the Civil Service process if seeking to expand the department. Ms. Casey stated that if the Town has the vacancies, she can begin the process to request certification. However, Civil Service will not provide a list unless a retirement has been announced, or unless there is a clear vacancy. The Town could request certification by stating there are four new positions. She also noted that the process to fill the recent promotions was truncated because they were filled internally through an assessment center. In an assessment center, the Town has more control over the process by scheduling the assessor, and HRD has less of a role. Transfers from another Fire Department would also be truncated because the individual would not have to attend an Academy class, however a request must still be submitted through HRD.

Ms. Casey stated that an approximate cost of adding an additional firefighter, considering the comprehensive cost of the employee, including health care, and factoring in incentives, such as college degrees, would be approximately \$102,000. Mr. Hull noted that span of control must be carefully considered, as when adding personnel, adding supervisory personnel must also be considered. With the

prospect of adding a substation, it would be a sudden burden on the budget to try and staff an entire substation. However, by increasing the department staffing now, not only are the current issues addressed, but also has less of an impact upon staffing the new substation if, and when, it is built. Mr. Couture asked if more equipment would be needed to operate a new substation. Chief McMahon stated that the Department already has an engine and an ambulance to place in a North Wilmington substation. The substation would be manned with a staff of five firefighters: three on the engine and two on the ambulance.

Mr. Hull stated that the staffing level of nine per shift has been in effect since the last staff increase in 2009. Because of staffing, when one person is out, the shift needs to be filled to nine. If adding an additional person per shift, the department could operate with one person out without having to staff it with overtime. Adding shift superiors will not address the overtime issue, but it will help with span of control issue. Ideally, each shift would consist of one Captain, one Lieutenant, and eight Firefighters.

Ms. Gallezzo asked if the Department could rely more on mutual aid. Chief McMahon stated that it would be an abuse of mutual aid because many Massachusetts cities and towns are also having to add staff to meet OSHA minimums. The OSHA minimums might not help with medical mutual aid because some towns only operate one ambulance. OSHA does not mandate the number of ambulances a town must operate, but does mandate the manpower to staff an apparatus or ambulance.

Mr. Doherty asked if the Department offers ongoing safety training classes to try and prevent injuries. Chief McMahon stated that one firefighter is working with a trainer to do stretching, and the department has worked with MIIA and engaged in classes, such as yoga, in the past. The issue is with the positions in which the firefighters need to maneuver and the lifting they must perform. The Department has some new equipment which is rated for 750 pounds and alleviates some of the lifting.

Mr. Hull stated that he will work with Chief McMahon, Deputy Chief Cavanaugh and the Department on how and when to phase in new staff while not overburdening the budget, and will come up with a reasonable approach to recommend personnel funding in the next budget cycle. Ms. Manganelli noted that it makes more sense to begin the process of adding staff now than delaying it until the next budget season and continuing to accrue overtime.

Chief McMahon expressed his gratitude to the members of the Fire Department, thanked the many Firefighters in attendance for taking their spare time to attend the meeting, and for the selfless work they perform day in and day out.

The Finance Committee expressed their appreciation for the work of everyone in the Fire Department. Mr. Doherty stated that it might take a year or two to get the Department up to full staff with respect to phasing in additional personnel within the budget. Chief McMahon noted that is what he expected.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The Finance Committee reviewed the Minutes from June 26, 2018. A motion was made by Ms. Gallezzo, seconded by Mr. Nally, and by the affirmative vote of all, with Mr. Martinson abstaining, it was:

VOTED: To approve the minutes from June 26, 2018.

**NEW BUSINESS**

No new business.

**OLD BUSINESS**

No old business.

At the conclusion of the discussion, and there being no further business to come before the Committee, a motion was made by Ms. Gallezzo, seconded by Ms. Kincaid, and by the affirmative vote of all, it was

VOTED: That the Finance Committee adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 8:19 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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Recording Secretary