

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
Town Hall Council Chambers
January 24, 2006 - Tuesday

Present: Patrick O'Connor, Chairperson
Susan Kay
Gregory Shanahan
Arthur Mathews
Michael Smart

Also Present: Councilor Kevin Whitaker
James Wilson, Chief Financial Officer
Robert Leary, Chief, Weymouth Fire Department
Kevin Dawyskiba, President, Firefighters Union, Local 1616

Recording Secretary: Mary Briggs

Chairman Patrick O'Connor called the Public Safety Committee Meeting to order at 7 PM.

Staffing Levels/Equipment – Fire Department

Councilor O'Connor requested the meeting to discuss concerns brought to his attention by residents, and the concerns regarding staffing levels, public safety concerns and the condition of the Fire Department in general in the town. He invited Chief Leary and Firefighter Union local 1616 President Kevin Dawyskiba to the table, and asked them to give a brief rundown of the department as a whole- staffing and equipment, station houses, etc.

Chief Leary reported that there currently are 4 fire stations operating in town, with 104 of 109 budgeted positions filled. There are 5 openings. He has a minimum staffing level of 18 per shift, which varies the number of apparatus per shift from 3 engines and 2 ladder trucks to 4 engines and 1 ladder to 4 engines and 2 ladders per shift, and which can also vary from day to night shifts.

Councilor O'Connor advised that many of the concerns were a result of a leaflet that was circulated, and asked what the concerns in the Fire Department are at this time.

Mr. Dawyskiba addressed the Council, and expressed his appreciation for the meeting being called. He gave a history of the department since his hiring in 1978 and how staffing/equipment levels have changed over the years. At that time the department was running 5 engines, 3 ladders and 1 rescue squad out of 4 stations. After Proposition 2 ½, the department started losing

apparatus, as well as closing stations. Reductions resulting in 3 engines and 2 ladders after Prop. 2 ½ , dropping at one point to 3 engines and 1 ladder. Through his tenure there have been 4-5 Fire Chiefs, and when Mayor Madden began his position as Chief, the department was running with 3 engines and 1 ladder. Mayor Madden advocated strongly for the Fire Department at that time, and brought up staffing levels and brought apparatus back into service to a level of 3 engines and 2 ladders. The one factor which played into this was the fact that NAS had 2 engines always at their disposal as well as the availability of mutual aid when needed. When the air base closed they lost the availability of the 2 engines. Chief Madden advocated for the department with the navy and they were able to put an engine back in service at the air base. Weymouth's ladder 5 was moved there so there was a presence at the base, which stayed in service about 2 years. Once the engine came out of service, the station on base was maintained for a short time. Since then the town has invested in the department, building two new fire stations, replacing Station 5 in Columbian Square and the new station on Winter Street. Today, those in the Fire Department believe the minimum standard should be 4 engines and 2 ladders.

Now, depending on the manpower in an effort to control overtime budgets, pieces of apparatus get taken out of service, and a lot of times the department is running 3 engines/2 ladders. Station 2 in East Weymouth is being manned with 2 firefighters and 1(1999) ladder truck that cannot carry water, which also is the ladder truck on call for other parts of town, so if it's dispatched to a call in N. Weymouth, and a call comes in for Thicket St., it has to travel across town, in traffic. He is concerned that service is not going to be provided in reasonable time. His opinion is that with additional staffing/equipment, Old South Union Church may not have burned down, but didn't feel it would have made much difference in the outcome of the Sacred Heart Church fire in the landing. It would have made a difference however in firefighter safety. Engine 3, which was the first responding company, lost 3 members to injuries at the Sacred Heart fire.

Understanding budgets, Mr. Dawyskiba has called the State House and Representative Mariano, and asked the state to give back the \$3 million in local aid stolen from the cities and towns, while flaunting a \$1 billion surplus. If the town had the \$3 million in local aid (asking Mr. Wilson in the audience for clarification on the amount), Mr. Dawyskiba said he would not be sitting here now having this conversation. He took no pleasure in being part of crafting the flyer that went out, but the department felt they needed to. They have talked to the Mayor about it. Mr. Dawyskiba feels that priorities need to be made but that running 3 engines and 2 ladders is a recipe for disaster. He believes it puts the firefighters and the public at risk. Mr. Dawyskiba reported that firefighters will do whatever they have to including putting themselves at risk to do their jobs, which is not a position they should be put in due to the fact that not all equipment or staff is in service. The Council has passed a resolution that there would be an engine company in each station. Mr. Dawyskiba said that he personally would close a station if it couldn't be operated properly, but that he didn't believe that was an option.

Mr. Dawyskiba stated the reason to appear before the Committee is to educate the new members on the plight of the department. He and the executive board have met with the Mayor a number of times concerning staffing levels and the conditions of the buildings. Fire Department buildings have mold problems. Diesel exhaust and roof repairs were done but only because they made enough noise, and the Chief and committee applied for and received a grant. It hasn't solved the problems of mold or water leaking into buildings. The overhead doors in headquarters needed to

be replaced back in 1978, and are still there.

The Fire Department is looking for relief for some of the problems. He has heard that bonds will be going out for remodeling of Stations 2 and 1. He has yet to see plans, and brought in Department of Occupational Health and Safety because he felt they were backed into a corner. The Department of Occupational Health and Safety issued reports on two of the buildings, some of the problems cited have been repaired. If there are plans, he would be interested to see to what extent. There were 2 stations with heating system problems, one without hot water because it ran off the boiler. He became aware that the town appropriated money for fuel for temporary boilers in the town hall annex, while the fire stations were running space heaters.

Mr. Dawyskiba feels the department has been patient but now needs these items to be addressed. He feels absolute minimum standards should be 4 engines and 1 ladder.

Chairman O'Connor invited questions from the Committee at this point.

Councilor Mathews asked why there are 5 openings. The Chief responded that there was a disability retirement in October, 4 retirements and 1 resignation in December.

Councilor Mathews asked if anyone was on disability now, and if the light duty clause in the contract was being utilized. Chief Leary responded that there is one employee who was on disability who is now on light duty assignment. There are 7 others who are on disability, 4 who have had surgery and 3 currently in physical therapy hoping to avoid surgery. He hopes to be able to get a few of those back in the next month, but a couple of the individuals who are out have also applied for disability retirement. Currently there are 5 openings, and 7 who are out on disability, so in essence there are 12 positions that are attempting to be kept filled by overtime. He does transfer people around on a regular basis from group to group, to keep them evened off, and to maintain consistency in manpower.

Councilor Smart asked the Chief to review how frequently he needs to shift people around, if that is to cover daily absences or vacations, and what he considers adequate coverage, both in pieces of apparatus and personnel. Chief Leary responded that he details coverage within the group for vacation or short term sick leave. If there were only 3 people on at N. Weymouth, he may take someone from E. Weymouth and detail them there for the shift, or he may hire overtime for the shift, depending on the number of people coming in for the shift, which for them is a minimum of 18. If they drop below 18, they hire overtime, if the number is 19, he is allowed to hire 1 to bring the number up to 20 which allows for adequate minimum staffing of equipment. Unless the number goes below 18, he does not hire more than one person, and below 18, they hire as many as they need to reach the minimum standard.

Councilor Smart asked how frequently that happened and Chief Leary responded that it was just under 1/3 of the time. He reviewed time sheets and found that 28.7% of the time over the last 263 days, they were reduced to 3 engines and 2 ladders, or roughly one out of every three shifts. He also added that related back to Councilor Mathew's question that temporary transfers differ from details in that details are just to cover the shift. He has someone out now who is on an

extended leave for an injury received on the job, and taken someone from another group to fill that position; that is not a detail but a temporary transfer, which will be in effect for approximately 4 months. He tries to keep things as level as possible. He has spoken to Mayor Madden several times regarding minimum staffing, and he knows Kevin has also, and they are all in agreement that minimum staffing should be 4 engines and 2 ladders, which is the ideal. He checked with the Mayor, and since 2002, there has been an 8% reduction in local aid, so while it is \$3.5 million this year, reaching the ideal level will be difficult, and when the Naval Air Station starts to be developed, there will be further need. They hope to gain another station and another engine company, and hopefully provide 5 engines and 2 ladders for the town.

Councilor Shanahan asked the Chief about the deficit of 5 due to retirement and when could the department expect to make it up. The Chief responded that the department was under a hiring freeze, he does not foresee the availability of hiring this fiscal year. He hopes to July 1st, and anticipates several other changes before then, in more retirements. Councilor Shanahan asked best case scenario, how long does it take from identifying an opening to realizing a fully trained and ready firefighter, and the Chief responded that it varies based on the retirement process. Accrued time earned while a firefighter is out on a leave would be paid out to him upon a retirement, and until that is exhausted, the opening cannot be created. The payout for the October retirement dissolved in December, the 3 retirements and 1 resignation in December will all run out in March. Basically, the end of March will be when the department has 5 openings they could hire for. Councilor Shanahan asked if there would be candidates available from the last test, and the Chief responded that there is a list available from the last civil service exam. Oral interview, physical, physical agility test, background tests, will bring the process to another month and a half beyond that time. If he were to start on April 1st for the hiring process, he wouldn't expect them to be on the rolls until end of June, early July, and then there would be the training time. Depending on where the training is done, (local 9-10 weeks, Boston-12-15 weeks, or Mass. fire academy-12 weeks), they could be looking at another 3 months from the point of hire to trained and ready to man trucks.

Councilor Shanahan also questioned while the recommended ideal of 4/2 was agreed upon if there was a formula that the town requires for a total number of firefighters to meet the daily staffing requirement. Chief Leary responded that prior to July 1, 2002, they could function consistently with 117, and that was with the full complement of 4 engines, 2 ladders. Contractually, through the Collective Bargaining Agreement- there is a minimum 1 officer and 3 firefighters in an engine company, and a minimum of 2 firefighters on a ladder company, which totals up to 22 per shift; 4 shifts brings it to 88, and factor in for every 4 firefighters, that a 5th one is needed. The ideal is 28 per shift.

Councilor Shanahan asked if either the Chief or Mr. Dawyskiba could point out a time where an understaffed shift resulted in injury. The Chief responded that there are national statistics regarding the efficiency of fire companies and likelihood of injury if companies are manned differently. He did not know the specific statistics, but referred the committee to the National Fire Protection's website, nfp.org as a resource.

Councilor Kay reminded the Chief that there was a late supplemental budget this year, in which the first quarter's activity was reviewed, and she was particularly concerned about the

department's overtime, which at that time was 50% spent. At that time, the Chief felt the department would make it through the year, based on what was happening at the time. The budget is now spent at about 80%. She asked what has happened between then and now to change his opinion, and the Chief responded that the 2nd quarter there was a significant reduction in overtime spending. The first quarter was higher than he anticipated, although less than last year. Four positions were added a year ago, which brought the overtime spending level down. The next quarter, \$86,000 of \$100,000 budgeted overtime was spent. Injuries were down to 6 long-term, but was at 14 prior. Current openings now mean salary monies are being used to fill in the gap in overtime. The hiring freeze is also a factor in that he will be requesting to transfer 4 month salaries for the 4 positions and 6 months for the 5th position to fill the overtime gap. He has learned from the Mayor how to budget these items.

Councilor Kay asked if they were able to hire, when they would be able to draw salary. Chief Leary would like to be able to do what some states do, which is to have people trained to the firefighter1-2 level before they can be hired for the job, but it is not an option with Massachusetts under the civil service system. He himself was trained through the air force prior to joining Weymouth, but still had the same training as every firefighter does, and there is a considerable amount of time invested. He responded that as he said to Councilor Shanahan, if he were to start April 1st, they would be ready to go to academy by July 1st, although the academies are not readily available. It doesn't make sense for the town to do the training themselves without enough trainees. They could wait for another town to offer training, and there is a year wait for the state academy.

Councilor Kay asked if the capital repair items which Mr. Dawyskiba mentioned were on the capital plan or were slated to be funded within a year. The Chief responded that he was unsure, and Mr. Wilson advised they were included on the Capital Budget request

Councilor Whitaker thanked the committee for allowing him to attend and asked if they were all in agreement with the 4 engine 2 ladder ideal for Weymouth currently-- what will be the ideal when the base is developed. The Chief responded that the development of the base is similar in size and scope to the Town of Cohasset, so he would expect to have another Cohasset Fire Department here, but that he would like to see a minimum of 1 engine, if not 1 engine and 1 ladder truck. The need will be there. It will be far too draining for Weymouth as it stands today.

Councilor Whitaker asked if there had been any discussion between either the Chief or Mr. Dawyskiba and Tri-Town as far as fire safety. Mr. Dawyskiba responded no, but that he's talked to Terry Fancher and others. No one yet has informed them what will be there and when. He feels that rather than discussing the width of the roads, and the density of the development, that the public safety issues need to be addressed. First phase of building will begin and no one has discussed the public safety issues. He understands it's being worked on. He feels making crisis decisions is wrong. Weymouth provides the protection now, without remuneration. When the old station was closing, Tri-Town wrote to the town, offering the station at \$246-265,000. He feels it would be a good faith effort on the part of Tri-Town or LNR to put the ladder company in service, even if were run out of the South Weymouth building. Knowing how difficult it is to

drive through Gaslight when residents are home, he would like to see that type of situation avoided on the base.

Chief Leary reported that he was invited with the Chiefs from Rockland and Abington to a meeting Tri-town held with fire departments and DPW regarding road widths. Discussion of roadways led to an enlightening discussion on the part of all six departments in attendance on other collective concerns, such as snow plowing and public safety concerns. They made some suggestions on roadways and were invited back 2 weeks later for further discussion. Discussion continued concerning public safety issues, and contractual obligations. He will be attending future meetings.

Councilor Smart remarked that he did not want to turn this into an air base development discussion, but that he did need to object to the remarks that public safety issues had not come up previously. There are members on the committee who spent 28 months reviewing the project. There were hundreds of meetings and public hearings, which included many discussions on public safety.

Councilor Smart asked if the town were to hire, could they take advantage of the state layoff list. The Chief responded that the last time he checked, the list was down to 3, all of whom were from Worcester or further west, and who showed no interest in coming to the Boston area. Councilor Smart asked if he was surprised the list was so low, considering all towns are struggling with budget constraints. The Chief responded that he was not since the list has been in effect since 2002, when it was at its high of 75. Weymouth had hired 8 from the list previously, and 5 of those went back to their old positions. Weymouth has retained a few of those hires.

Councilor Shanahan asked if the hiring freeze were removed, would there be sufficient apparatus in place to run 4 engines and 2 ladders. The Chief responded yes, but there is no spare ladder truck. Two spare engines are in place.

Councilor Mathews asked if there was a ladder truck in Capital Request Planning and during which year it is scheduled to be funded. The Chief responded yes, and is in this year's plan.

Councilor Smart asked Mr. Dawyskiba to explain, based on the handout he provided to members, the types and frequency of calls responded to. Mr. Dawyskiba responded that the department responds to structure fires, assist public calls (leaks, frozen pipes), medical emergencies, motor vehicle accidents, assist police, welfare checks, motor vehicle lockouts, CO detectors, which are now in the news, standby for Medflights, etc. The graph in the handout shows 7,055 calls in 2005 for assistance. These also include inspections of buildings, smoke detector inspections; and will include carbon monoxide detector inspections after March, and regular in-service training. He explained that the officers in the department each take on several roles, such as grant writing, inspections, procurement, training, etc.

Mr. Dawyskiba explained the members will give 110% even when there is the risk of injury. He does not feel the Mayor was comfortable with the 3/2 staffing ratio when he was Chief, and thinks the current Chief is in agreement. Mr. Dawyskiba feels somehow the town needs to find a way to staff with the minimum 4/2. Although he knows development of the air base will result in

additional fire protection, the question is where, when, and what for coverage.

Councilor Smart asked the Chief to explain why the number of calls has almost doubled in the last 25 years. The Chief responded that smoke detector calls have contributed. Under Chief Madden, the department has standardized responses especially with EMS calls which currently account for over 50% of all calls. Run volume will increase to 7,000-9,000 with the addition of carbon monoxide detectors. Technology changes and the aging population of the town will also be driving factors in increasing run volume.

Chairman O'Connor thanked the two members of the fire department. He appreciates what the department does on a daily basis, and as long as he is a member of the Council he will be advocating for public safety. In looking for a solution to the problem, he finds that what may be best is just not feasible, given the economic state in the town. Looking through the budget, he does not see where funding could be reduced from any other department, and there are many one time revenues in the budget already this year, and does not see where it could be found.

Mr. Dawyskiba would not advocate reducing any other town department's revenue to fund. He realizes the reduction of local aid is significantly affecting the budgets and that if Governor Romney comes through with the proposed 17% increase in local aid, it will help.

Chairman O'Connor asked if there were any more retirements anticipated in next 12 months and the Chief responded that he was expecting 10 total by July 1st. Chairman O'Connor asked if the Chief believed additional staffing will alleviate overtime costs and Chief Leary responded that in July 2002 when the department lost the second ladder truck, it also lost 8 of 12 positions; 4 remained to maintain level staffing service. That was identified last year as potential reduction of overtime by hiring 4 firefighters. Chairman O'Connor asked if the department would be able to maintain services if annual runs increased to 9,000. The Chief responded that an increase in runs will tie up equipment, and time on calls.

Councilor Mathews noted that as Councilors, they cannot add to the budget by appropriation. The two factors that impacted the budget last year, and which will need to be watched this year are snow removal and rising energy costs. Based on last year's figures, and \$1.2 million spent on snow removal and the rising cost utilities, maybe the committee could revisit the subject in the spring if the winter were an unusually warm one. Mr. Dawyskiba asked how much of the \$1.2 million was returned back to the town from the state, and Mr. Wilson responded \$200,000. Mr. Dawyskiba then noted that he would be calling the Governor's office tomorrow morning demanding money be given back. He thanked the committee for listening to the department's concerns.

Chairman O'Connor thanked the Chief, Mr. Dawyskiba and the firefighters in attendance for appearing.

Road Paving

Councilor Kay asked if Chief Leary could remain at the table for the next item on the agenda, a

discussion she requested on road paving. She has been receiving many calls from residents questioning the order in which paving is done. She would like to look at the process. She asked the Chief if he had a list of streets that were of particular concern to him with regards to public safety, or if there were streets he was hesitant to bring apparatus down, and as example she cited Glines Ave., which had a downed live wire recently, and is an unpaved narrow street. Chief Leary responded that each group in town is expected to learn their streets. Peculiarities in streets are noted, such as the bridge in Idlewell. The members of the department are always maintaining a level of knowledge regarding streets in town. Councilor Kay asked if the department took it a step further by requesting that streets are paved, and the Chief responded that they may bring particular issues to the director of the DPW, but generally do not make recommendations on paving.

Councilor Mathews noted that the department might know about peculiarities, but that he could speak to Councilor Kay regarding conducting a future meeting to discuss with the Director of DPW, Mr. O'Connor. Councilor Kay thanked the committee for allowing her to bring it up since she feels it is a public safety issue and has fielded calls from residents. She would like to find out what the paving process is through Administration, and for this Committee to follow up accordingly.

At this point, Mr. Dawyskiba asked if the committee would indulge him to address one thing that he forgot to bring up earlier. There has been discussion with the Chief, the Mayor and Mr. Wilson regarding fire-based ambulance service for the town. He believes it is an avenue which should be considered, and hiring dual-role cross-trained firefighter/paramedics to man the ambulance service. He believes the service would be more consistent, and could also generate a positive revenue stream within two years.

Councilor Smart asked if the Chief endorses this and the he responded that he does, and recognized firefighter Brian Evangelista in the audience, who has conducted the majority of the research. Fire-based EMS would help to provide a more cohesive service by reducing emergency services in Town to two agencies. He would like to continue exploring that avenue.

Councilor Smart noted he also agreed and had conversations previously with Mr. Dawyskiba. He asked how many communities of the 351 in Massachusetts currently have fire-based EMS and Chief Leary responded that it was about 300. Mr. Dawyskiba noted that most surrounding towns on the south shore are moving in that direction and noted that Weymouth lost 2 paramedics to the City of Cambridge for that reason. He also said that if any members of the Committee have questions, he would refer them to Mr. Evangelista.

Councilor Whitaker noted that he sent a memo to the Mayor's office recently looking to increase the various inspection fees as a way to bring in revenue. He has not heard back officially yet on whether any increases will be implemented.

Chief Leary thanked the committee for listening to the department's concerns. He noted that the men on the department were some of the best people he has ever been associated with and he would trust his life with them. He appreciates the committee's support. He is planning to invite his department personnel to a state program on "Creative Customer Service", and notes that is

what the department is involved with. Chairman O'Connor thanked them again.

Adjournment

At 8:30 PM, Councilor Smart made a MOTION to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Councilor Mathews. **Unanimously voted.**

Approved by: _____
Patrick O'Connor, Chairman