

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
MEETING
OF JULY 5, 2005
THIRD FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM
WEYMOUTH TOWN HALL**

PRESENT: Gregory Hargadon-Chair
Thomas J. Lacey-Co-Chair
Susan Kay
Gregory Shanahan
Joseph Connolly

ALSO PRESENT: James Wilson, Chief Financial Officer
Denise Coleman, Human Resource Director
Fire Chief Leary
Kevin Dawyskiba, President-Local 1616

REC. SECRETARY: Diane T. Hachey

Chairman Hargadon called the Town Council/Public Safety Committee Meeting to order at 6:45 PM. He explained that this meeting was called at the request of Mr. Dawyskiba in order to discuss staffing levels of the Fire Department.

It was noted that the May and June overtime fund has been depleted, which results in many issues. Chief Leary referenced the fact that overtime is less than \$10,000 each week as a result of the recent addition of four new positions.

Chairman Hargadon asked the Chief if he has any plans on adding additional staff to the department, to which the Chief replied that they have applied for ten positions through the Safer Grant-he is currently working with the Mayor on this.

Chairman Hargadon went on to ask the Chief what the ideal figure is for properly staffing the Fire Department. The Chief responded that a complement of 117 staff would be the minimum he would like to employ. This figure would allow for him to staff with 4 engines and 2 ladders.

Councilor Kay stated that the department is obviously not staffed correctly since the Council has been asked on several occasions for reserve fund transfers to handle the overtime expenditure.

Councilor Connolly questioned if it would be more beneficial to add staff in an effort to reduce/eliminate overtime.

Mr. Dawyskiba stated that unfortunately this would not resolve the situation in its entirety. He explained that it is necessary to factor in the cost of training and benefits for new hires. He further stated that the department is currently running with 4 ladders and 1 truck. The firemen are stretched out thin everyday. He stressed that when the firemen are working with insufficient coverage, the results are increases in overtime, injuries and possible increase in disability claims.

Councilor Connolly requested clarification on the exact figure as related to total staffing. Chief Leary confirmed that currently there are 108 employees, factoring in those out on disability, this figure decreases to 100.

Councilor Connolly asked if there are incentives in place to encourage early retirement in the department-adding that this would allow for replacement of those individuals. The Chief stated that it is difficult to offer incentives for early retirement for illness.

Councilor Lacey asked how our ladder versus truck figures compare with other communities. Mr. Dawyskiba stated that it is difficult to make such comparisons as there are numerous contributing factors, and it depends upon the town. Brockton, Quincy and Boston currently staff for 4 ladders and 4 trucks. It was cited that Malden, Medford and Framingham could possibly be compared equitably to Weymouth. The Chief offered to investigate this and report back to the Committee. He stated that the philosophy of the town has a great impact on staffing levels, in addition to the actual population.

Chief Leary further explained that ladder trucks are responsible for ventilation, in addition to search and rescue, and a single truck cannot handle both of these functions.

Councilor Shanahan requested clarification on whether, for purposes of this discussion, we are basing assumptions on staffing for 4 ladders and 2 trucks, or 2 ladders and 2 trucks. He expressed his concern that discussions may be based on minimum versus ideal staffing levels.

Mr. Dawyskiba stated that he is concerned about the mentality that the fire department is mismanaged and reiterated that less staff equates to firemen working harder, resulting in additional injuries.

Denise Coleman stated that the Mayor's initiative is for people to work in a safe environment and return to work as soon as is safely possible. They are performing training courses in an effort to increase safety awareness. She would like to perform a trend analysis in an effort to compare injuries and the return to work.

Councilor Kay stated that she is uncomfortable with the overtime budgeted for the department for the past 4 years, and strongly feels that it is grossly underfunded. She stated that we need additional money in the departmental budget and is uncomfortable that we have staffing levels which are not able to sufficiently meet the needs of the town. She then excused herself in order to attend another meeting.

Mr. Dawyskiba interjected that he personally feels that the Fire Department is purposefully underfunded each year. He further questioned why the Council voted in the past to maintain 4 ladders and 1 engine.

Councilor Lacey responded that this was a recommendation made by the Council to Administration and clarified that the Council is not able to dictate policy and/or increase budget figures.

Mr. Dawyskiba stated that he feels that Administration is not placing priority on the safety of the public and reiterated that by decreasing manpower, you ultimately add to injuries and in turn, overtime. In his opinion, the absolute minimum staffing should be 4 ladders and 1 engine-since the firemen are on the firing line and are not only responsible for their regular duties but also terrorism prevention –which is so prevalent today.

Chief Leary mentioned that he has implemented a program to track employees who are out on sickness or disability. This system mandated that employees sign-in and list the details of their absence. This has allowed the Chief to more effectively track the overall situation. The Chief went on to thank Chairman Hargadon for calling this meeting.

Councilor Connolly stated that he is glad to hear that overtime is down-resultant from the recent hiring of firemen.

At 7:25 PM, there being no further business to conduct, Councilor Connolly motioned to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Shanahan, and voted unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Diane T. Hachey

Approved By,

Chairman Hargadon