

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
9:00 a.m., Thursday, October 3, 2013

The regular meeting of the Personnel Committee was held at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, October 3, 2013 in the City Hall Conference Room, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Councilmembers Bettelli and Stone, Chair Thomas, Administrator Tucker, Assistant to the Administrator Dziuban and City Clerk Copeland; a quorum was present to conduct business.

1. Chair Thomas called the meeting to order and acknowledged that the press and public had been duly notified of the meeting in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

2. **Approval of Previous Meeting's Minutes**

MOTION: Councilmember Stone moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of September 5, 2013 as submitted; Councilmember Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. **Citizens' Comments – None**

MOTION: Councilmember Bettelli moved to re-order the agenda to address staffing in the Fire Department at this point in the meeting; Councilmember Stone seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. **Old Business**

B. Update on Staffing in the Fire Department

Again Battalion Chief Jason Smith accompanied Chief Graham and assisted with the presentation; after distributing the handout, the Chief noted that much of the information has been presented before. A copy of the handout is attached to the historical record of the meeting. The Chief reviewed the staffing and the equipment assigned to each station; she commented that every firefighter must be proficient with every piece of equipment. She then explained how personnel at each station respond to the various types of medical calls, to routine water missions, to structure fires and fire alarms.

Chief Graham noted that to be totally compliant with OSHA and NFPA standards, the City would need to respond to a fire in a "J.C. Long-style" home with fifteen (15) personnel; the IOP Fire Department responds with nine (9). Administrator Tucker explained, for the record, that a "J.C. Long-style" home is a modest, at-grade, two (2) bedroom one (1) bath or a small ranch-style home with three (3) bedrooms and bath-and-a-half home of approximately fifteen hundred square feet (1,500 sq. ft.).

Administrator Tucker noted that the Fire Departments for Mount Pleasant and North Charleston are accredited, which is a wonderful achievement that requires a substantial investment in personnel and equipment. A primary reason the IOP Fire Department is not looking to be accredited is the significant increase in personnel that would be necessary. The Chief stated that the national standard is four (4) persons per engine and five or six (5-6) per ladder truck.

Battalion Chief Smith reported that, between September 2012 and September 2013, the IOP Fire Department has lost eleven (11) full-time firefighters with a combined forty-four hours (44 hrs.) of "island" experience and approximately ten thousand five hundred sixty (10,560) hours of departmental training. In addition, five (5) firefighters left that were qualified for promotion to engineer; two (2) engineers left that were qualified for promotion to captain and four (4) officers left the Department. Currently the IOP Fire Department is having difficulty filling the positions within the Department.

Administrator Tucker noted that the majority has gone to departments offering higher pay, but others have resigned to take positions elsewhere with better opportunities for advancement and/or pay. The Administrator clarified that the difficulty in filling positions refers to the fact that the Department cannot promote from within its own ranks. Likely the Department could recruit from outside, but that tends to be demoralizing to existing staff.

Battalion Chief Smith stated that it is essential to the IOP Fire Department to be able to promote from within because the IOP Department is routinely presented with situations the many departments never encounter, primarily water rescues. He indicated that it is very difficult to get certified or trained firefighters who have any experience in water rescue; the Department is happy to get someone with boating experience.

According to Battalion Chief Smith, it takes three (3) years of training at the Isle of Palms for a firefighter to be considered proficient in his job. In Year 1 the focus of training is familiarization of the firefighter with the island, the waterways and the use of jet skis; Year 2 is supervised direction, hopefully with the same supervisory person, to ensure that the firefighter is successfully progressing; and, in Year 3, the firefighter is performing his job under limited supervision. Smith's crew of three (3) firefighters are all relatively new; combined they have zero water rescues and only three (3) structure fire attacks.

Currently, new hires are coming to the island right out of the academy; therefore, they have to be taught firefighting, as well as water rescues. According to Chief Graham, the new hires may have little experience, but they do have a solid foundation upon which to build.

The budgetary impact in the first year for hiring one (1) additional firefighter for three (3) shifts for Station 2 is one hundred thirty-six thousand four hundred dollars (\$136,400), which includes salaries and fringes and three (3) sets of gear, uniforms, physicals, etc. One (1) additional person per shift will reduce the number of calls that the ladder truck responds to for medical assists, reducing fuel and tire costs and the wear-and-tear on the vehicle.

Chief Graham reported that nine (9) personnel have resigned in 2013, multiple personnel have been interviewed by both the City of Charleston and North Charleston, and Mount Pleasant is planning to add twenty (20) people to open a new station.

Chief Graham distributed a comparison of salaries for multiple positions in surrounding departments, i.e. City of Charleston, John's Island, Sullivan's island, North Charleston, Mount Pleasant and the Isle of Palms, showing that the City offers the lowest entry level firefighter salary in the area.

The Chief noted that the Isle of Palms Fire Department was the third department in the state to obtain a license for EMT/First Responder/Non-transport through DHEC; the City puts a strong emphasis on medical training because of the high number of medical assistance calls the department receives. Unlike three (3) other local governments in the area, the Isle of Palms does not provide any kind of financial incentive or reward EMT training.

Administrator Tucker clarified that the incentives offered at local departments is in addition to the salary figure that continues.

Responding to Councilmember Stone's query about the department's payroll budget, the Administrator explained that the budget each year is based on the census of the population at the time the budget is prepared and applying a percentage to anticipate the overtime and the merit pool. The Administrator informed the Councilmember that there was no "wobble-room" in the FY14 budget to accommodate the proposed three (3) new firefighters; the budget would have to be amended.

Councilmember Stone noted that Chief Graham is bringing two (2) issues before the Personnel Committee, and they are [1] that wages are not comparable to other local departments and [2] that there is a need for one (1) additional firefighter per shift at Fire Station 2.

An additional handout illustrates the total of the cost of living increases applied to wage ranges based on the Consumer Price Index to be six and eighty-seven one hundredths percent (6.87%); according to Chief Graham, an employee who has been with the City since 2009 has lost a nearly six and nine tenths percent (6.9%) increase since the COLA was eliminated. The merit increases are not keeping pace with the cost of living increases employees are seeing.

Battalion Chief Smith reviewed the actual paycheck of one (1) of the firefighters who has left the City. This person came to the City with a bachelor's degree and seven (7) years' experience; after nearly two (2) years with the IOP Fire Department, his net pay for two (2) weeks was seven hundred thirty-six dollars (\$736). If he were to have health insurance for a family, he would also have to absorb the pre-tax impact of a per-paycheck premium of one hundred eighty-eight dollars (\$188). Battalion Chief Smith also spoke of a member of his crew who does not participate in the departmental "dinner rotation" because he simply cannot afford to do so and who is anticipating a move due to a fifty dollar (\$50) increase in his monthly rent.

An additional handout for the Committee was the call report for August 2013, showing a total of one hundred thirty-nine (139) calls – eighty-five (85) calls in District 1 and fifty-three (53) calls in District 2. Information on accreditation and NFPA regulations relative to personnel requirements was provided, as well as the job description for the entry level firefighter. Chief Graham stated that she has been told that future ISO inspections will be more closely based on NFPA and accreditation; the City has just had an ISO inspection, but, if it were to be held today, the City's rating might have gone up, which is a negative move.

Although the Fire Department has put two (2) issues before the Committee, Battalion Chief Smith believes that they go hand-in-hand; without a change in the way that the City rewards its employees, retention remains a major problem.

Administrator Tucker asked Chief Graham to clarify what they are proposing for the pay ranges for the various positions in the Department, so that the Committee will know what kind of budgetary impact to consider. The Administrator stated that the Committee only knows what the costs will be to add three (3) new firefighters for Station 2.

Chief Graham noted that part of the concern is that, if the salaries are again in synch with other local departments, without an annual increase that is meaningful, this situation will come up again and again. It is the Chief's opinion that an adjustment can be made now, but without reinstating the COLA or an increased merit pool, the parity is not sustainable.

Based on that, Administrator Tucker stated that the Fire Department is advocating three (3) issues, i.e. the need for an additional firefighter per shift at Station 2, an alteration to the wage ranges and either increasing the amount of the merit pool or reinstating the cost of living adjustments and leaving the pool as it is. The Chief indicated that the salary increase is likely needed in other departments because the Fire Department is not the only department losing experienced personnel.

Battalion Chief Smith stated that he and Chief Graham had started discussing the retention problem and had hoped to bring it to the Personnel Committee before the problem reached crisis proportions. He noted that, ultimately, the people who will suffer will be the residents and visitors to the island.

Responding to Councilmember Stone's question about the next step, Administrator Tucker recalled that the Committee took an action at the last meeting to hiring the additional personnel for Station 2. Assuming the Committee is in agreement about the identified problem and a possible recommendation, the Committee could entertain a motion to restore the cost of living increase City-wide in future budgets or to make appropriate adjustments to the salary ranges within the Fire Department. All of the suggestions have numbers associated with them that need to be quantified. If the Committee is in agreement with the arguments that have been made and that something needs to be done, it would be appropriate for this Committee to take an action indicating its support in order to take the information and recommendation to other committees.

Councilmember Stone stated that he would not support increases based solely on longevity, but wholeheartedly supports employees having to strive to achieve and being rewarded for their efforts.

The Administrator stated that, if there is no support for a cost of living and a merit, the other option would be a recommendation to increase the merit pool percentage City-wide.

Councilmember Stone commented that two (2) issues are before the Committee, and they are (1) adjusting the merit system and (2) adjusting the salary ranges for the Fire Department personnel.

MOTION: Councilmember Stone moved to bring the salary consideration and the merit adjustment to the Ways and Means Committee; Councilmember Bettelli seconded.

In the interim, staff will compute the appropriate numbers for consideration.

VOTE: The motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

A. Discussion of 2014 Appointments to Boards and Commissions

The Committee decided to take each commission separately beginning with the ATAX Committee that has two (2) positions to be filled. Councilmember Stone recalled that the Committee had voted to retain Malcolm Burgis, Jim Covington and David Nelson; Mary Alice Kreusi, cultural seat, opted not to be re-appointed, and Sandy Ferencz, at-large seat, will be elected to City Council. The Committee agreed that Carol Rice's association with the Charleston Tea Plantation qualified her for the Cultural seat.

MOTION: Councilmember Stone nominated Carol Rice for the ATAX Cultural seat; Councilmember Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

MOTION: Chair Thomas nominated Susan Haynie to fill the ATAX at-large seat; Councilmember Stone seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

For the Board of Zoning Appeals (BOZA), Scott Davidson has indicated that he no longer wants to serve. Administrator Tucker noted that the Committee had unanimously approved reappointing Frances Anderson to BOZA at the September meeting; since then, staff has been told that she has missed four (4) meetings and that the Committee may want to reconsider.

Assistant Dziuban left the meeting to get more information on Ms. Anderson's absences from Planning Director Kerr.

Councilmember Stone commented that Jay Leigh has indicated that he wants to serve on any committee, and he stated that Mr. Leigh has been an asset to the community in multiple ways.

MOTION: Councilmember Stone nominated Jay Leigh to the Board of Zoning Appeals to replace Scott Davidson; Councilmember Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

MOTION: Councilmember Stone nominated Lisa Safford to the Planning Commission; Councilmember Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Assistant Dziuban reported that Director Kerr checked his email records, and he has one (1) email from Ms. Anderson stating that she could not attend a particular meeting, but did not provide a reason why. He recalls that for another meeting he had a verbal interaction with her saying that she could not attend because she was traveling; Director Kerr does not recall having any communication from her regarding the other two (2) meetings she missed.

MOTION: Councilmember Stone moved to replace Frances Anderson on BOZA; Councilmember Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Personnel Committee
October 3, 2013
Page 6 of 6

MOTION: Councilmember Bettelli moved to appoint Carolyn Holscher to BOZA; Councilmember Stone seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

5. **New Business**
6. **Miscellaneous Business**

Next Meeting Date: 9:00 a.m., Monday, November 4th in the Conference Room.

7. **Executive Session – not needed**
8. **Adjourn**

MOTION: Councilmember Bettelli moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:28 a.m.; Councilmember Stone seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted:

Marie Copeland
City Clerk