

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

9:00 a.m., Monday, November 4, 2013

The regular meeting of the Personnel Committee was held at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, November 4, 2013 in the City Hall Conference Room, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Councilmember Stone and Bettelli, 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 Bettelli moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of October 3, 2013 as submitted; Councilmember Stone seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. Citizens' Comments – None

4. Old Business

Further analysis of regional Fire Department salary and benefit comparisons

As the discussions began, Administrator Tucker distributed again the salary comparison data that was presented at the October meeting, and Chief Graham distributed a more detailed analysis prepared for this meeting; copies of the handouts are attached to the historical record of the meeting. In the new handout, the schedule on the first page compared Isle of Palms' entry level wages for firefighter, engineer, captain and battalion chief with the City of Charleston, St. John's Fire District, Sullivan's Island, North Charleston, Mount Pleasant and Charleston County EMTs; it also indicated whether the local governments give cost of living, merit and/or longevity increases. Since both Mount Pleasant and North Charleston offer EMT bonuses and since most IOP firefighters are EMTs as well, the bonuses were added into the starting wage for those two (2) local departments. Administrator Tucker noted that efforts had been made to make this comparison as equitable as possible, for example all wages have been converted to reflect the two thousand nine hundred twenty hours (2,920 hrs.) that IOP personnel work in a year. Chief Graham stated that, of the local governments that pay a cost of living (COLA) increase "sometimes," the decision is made on a year-to-year basis; the last cost of living increase at the Isle of Palms was in 2009. When the IOP entry level firefighter pay is compared to the average for other departments in the area, the City's wage for a firefighter is ten percent (10%) less.

In the subsequent pages of the handout, each municipality that was contacted is individually compared to the Isle of Palms and the health insurance benefit is added to the equation. The City of Isle of Palms pays one hundred percent (100%) of the health insurance premium for employees and fifty percent (50%) for dependents.

In the comparison to the City of Charleston, Administrator Tucker pointed out that Charleston provides seven (7) annual five percent (5%) "step" raises that occur on an employee's anniversary date and are not merit based; in addition, the "steps" follow an employee if they are

promoted, i.e. a firefighter with three (3) steps promoted to engineer would be paid the starting salary for an engineer plus three (3) five percent (5%) steps. Although the insurance plans offered are comparable in benefits offered, Isle of Palms' fire personnel pay more for dependent health insurance than City of Charleston fire personnel because the City of Charleston makes a larger contribution toward dependent health insurance coverage than the Isle of Palms.

At the moment, St. John's Fire District is not only paying its fire personnel higher wages, but it also offers COLA, merit and longevity increases. A firefighter at the Isle of Palms will contribute approximately twenty-one hundred dollars (\$2,100) more for family health insurance coverage than employees of St. John's Fire District.

Starting firefighter salary at Sullivan's Island is more than four thousand dollars (\$4,000) per year higher than the Isle of Palms; Sullivan's Island also has both COLA and merit increases. Sullivan's Island also provides its employees with a wellness benefit of three hundred dollars (\$300) for an individual and six hundred dollars (\$600) for a family; although few employees take advantage of the program, employees do like having the benefit.

The City of North Charleston's entry level wages exceed those of the Isle of Palms from thirty-two hundred dollars (\$3,200) for a firefighter to eight thousand dollars (\$8,000) for a battalion chief. Isle of Palms' fire personnel pay eight hundred dollars (\$800) per year more for employee/spouse health insurance and two thousand dollars (\$2,000) per year for family health insurance than employees of the North Charleston Fire Department.

Items of note for Mount Pleasant include the fact that employees receive a three percent (3%) increase upon the successful completion of the six (6) month probationary period; entry level wages are very comparable to those of the Isle of Palms and only family health insurance coverage is considerably less than that of the Isle of Palms. Administrator Tucker commented that the City does not often lose personnel to Mount Pleasant.

Since the majority of Isle of Palms' firefighters are also EMTs, the starting salary for Charleston County EMTs was determined to be relevant to the discussion. Of note at Charleston County is the fact that they provide a longevity increase of three percent (3%) in years one (1), three (3), five (5), seven (7) and ten (10); the longevity increase moves to six percent (6%) every five (5) years after ten (10). Isle of Palms' fire department personnel pay less for health insurance coverage at every level except family where there is a difference of only one hundred sixty-three dollars (\$163).

The last page of the handout is, in the Administrator's opinion, the most telling of all; it is here that a firefighter's wages are projected out five (5) years in each local government identified and the average is compared to the Isle of Palms. The assumptions on which this data is based are as follows:

- Employer starts 1/1/13 as a firefighter.
- Employee works for 3 years as a firefighter and is then promoted to engineer for years 4 and 5.
- Employee performs at a high level.

- Wage ranges are the amount listed on page 1 with no increase in ranges over the 5-year period.
- For agencies that give merits, the merits are 3% per year.
- For agencies that give COLAs, the COLAs are 2% per year in years 1, 3 and 5.
- For agencies that give longevity increases, these are included in the computations.

After one (1) year, the Isle of Palms firefighter is making an average of twelve percent (12%) less than his or her counterpart across the area; the difference increases to fourteen percent (14%) after three (3) years.

Administrator Tucker pointed out that the merit pool is not large enough to compensate for the loss of the COLA and for the increases employees are seeing in retirement contributions, taxes and insurance premiums.

There was some discussion on morale issues in the department, and Chief Graham expressed the opinion that some of the causes of poor morale have been resolved. One component of the morale concerns relates directly to the lack of training and experience that Department now has; Battalion Chief Smith stated that he feels much more anxiety when responding to a call with his crew of inexperienced firefighters – Is everyone safe? Is someone going to make a mistake? Is someone going to get injured?

Chief Graham added that the move to Consolidated Dispatch has brought its own set of issues as personnel become more acquainted with and accustomed to the new operations. At this time, a call is received and immediately transferred to another channel; the senior person on the call must go to that new channel in order to get the details of the call while still listening for the possibility of another call coming in. The Police Department is not required to do this level of multi-tasking with the radios in the performance of their jobs. Administrator Tucker stated that the City is working with Consolidated Dispatch and hopes to have a couple of dedicated channels for all IOP calls before the season begins in 2014.

One (1) additional schedule was distributed that listed, by position, Fire Department personnel who have left beginning in 2010; a copy is attached to the historical record of the meeting. Included are the dates of hire and termination, salary progression over most current five (5) years and the reason for leaving.

Councilmember Stone suggested that good information to provide to members of the Ways and Means Committee would be the dollars spent by the City on training for an employee who has been with the City five (5), ten (10) or more years, attained rank and then left for another department. Councilmember Stone added that there are also the “soft” costs associated with the supervision required for the training. He concluded his comments by voicing his deep concern that the island will suffer a serious incident due to Council's inaction on this matter.

5. New Business

Consideration of 2014 Floating Holiday

Administrator Tucker reported that all Departments had been polled on what the 2014 floating holiday should be, and the date with the highest vote total was Friday, December 26, 2014.

MOTION: Councilmember Bettelli moved to name Friday, December 26, 2014 as the 2014 floating holiday; Councilmember Stone seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

6. Miscellaneous Business

Next Meeting Date: 9:00 a.m., Thursday, January 9, 2014 in the Conference Room.

7. Executive Session – not needed

8. Adjourn

MOTION: Councilmember Bettelli moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:05 a.m.; Councilmember Stone seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted:

Marie Copeland
City Clerk