

CITY COUNCIL BUDGET WORK SESSION RE: POLICE AND FIRE

MUNICIPAL COMPLEX – COUNCIL CHAMBERS
DATE: WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 2018

PORTSMOUTH, NH
TIME: 6:30 PM

City Council Present: Mayor Blalock, Assistant Mayor Lazenby, Councilors Roberts, Pearson, Dwyer, Perkins, Raynolds and Becksted

City Council Absent: Councilor Denton

Staff Present: City Manager John Bohenko; Finance Director Judie Belanger; Deputy Finance Director Andrew Purgiel; Fire Chief Steven Achilles; Police Chief Robert Merner; Business Administrator Karen Senecal;

Others Present: Fire Commission Chair Jennifer Mosher-Matthes; Fire Commissioner Richard Gamester; Police Commission Chair Joseph Onosko; Police Commissioner James Splaine and Policy Commissioner Arthur Hilson

Mayor Blalock called the work session to order at 6:30 p.m. He explained that staff has provided index cards and pens for the public to use to write down any questions they may have as they listen to the presentations and they will be read and answered. He stated there will be opportunity for the public to ask questions as time allows.

City Manager Bohenko stated that all department heads were given the directive to present their budgets with various versions incorporating reductions down to zero increase.

Fire Chief Achilles gave a brief power point presentation. He explained that the demand for service has consistently increased by 36% over the last 10 years with the same amount of staff. He further stated that the concurrent requests for service have also considerably increased and if it continues with no change in staffing levels it will lengthen response times. He continued that the impact of growth and development on the services including the expansion of Lonza on Pease Tradeport. He stated they have to cover square footage as well as people they can't set a policy on who to go to and not go to but must try and forecast service/coverage. He stated there is already a delay in inspections and plan reviews and people do not like having to wait.

He concluded by reviewing his proposed budget and supplemental requests for staffing.

Mayor Blalock stated that the comments regarding coverage and delayed response times should help appeal to the State legislature for the Meals tax being reinstated to the cities as it is affecting safety of our citizens and visitors.

Discussion ensued regarding the statistics of growth versus coverage.

Councilor Dwyer asked about the projected higher cost of energy than the actual spent over past budgets and is higher again this time.

Chief Achilles explained that the energy costs are compiled with other departments and they have to try and project potential cost increases and usage. He stated that energy efficiencies have helped over the last few years, but when there is a cold snap, etc. then the usage spikes.

Discussion ensued regarding service contracts and rolling stock and other opportunities for savings.

Councilor Roberts asked about calls for service and the actual amount of fire calls versus ambulance calls.

Fire Chief Achilles stated that 73% of calls are ambulance related. He explained that they are able to leverage staff but the goal is to have incidents go down.

Discussion ensued regarding the ambulance service including calls for service and billing and collection issues.

Councilor Becksted stated he wants to clarify that the ambulance brings in revenue to the general fund and can offset overtime.

Chief Achilles stated the 5-year staffing plan he previously presented allows them time to measure, reassess and adjust along the way.

Questions that were submitted from the public on index cards were reviewed.

Card #1:

Question 1: What portion of the Ambulance Revenue (\$1,100,000) that goes to the General Fund finds its way to the undesignated fund balance and if so should that change:

City Manager Bohenko stated that it is hard to say how much goes to operating surplus.

Question 2: How much ambulance revenue is lost to other private ambulance companies and with the supplemental employment request would these new employees general revenue with ambulance service:

Question 3: Are there provisional issues within the current contract that can shift any benefits resulting in a budget reduction.

Card #2:

Question 1: Was the \$1,100,000 in ambulance service billed or collected based on the statement of a 77% collection rate and what can be done to increase the collection rate:

Chief Achilles explained that it is a performance indicator and the amounts collected can be from billings from a previous calendar or fiscal year. He further explained the collection policy stating that the city tries to be equitable.

Card #3:

Question 1: What percentage of service calls were residential in 2010-2017:

Question 2: What percentage of service calls were commercial in 2010-2017:

Question 3: What is the average amount of time per call residential versus commercial:

Question 4: What percentage of available man hours are consumed in residential calls versus commercial and how has that trended 2010-2017:

Chief Achilles referred to a 2015 study which broke out these figures.

Card #4:

I was at the Sheraton Hotel during a stabbing in the middle of the day. What is the expected time for the ambulance and police to arrive at a destination during a week day around noon time, as at that time, it was over 20 minutes.

Chief Achilles stated he will review this particular situation.

Recess/Reconvened 7:50 – 8:00 p.m.

Police Chief Merner gave a brief power point presentation.

Councilor Dwyer stated she understands accreditation and CALEA but it often can sound like busy work and feels that Chief Merner had the same assessment when he was being interviewed. She asked how much value is achieved versus labor spent during this process.

Chief Merner stated he remembers that question during the interview and clarified that if it is just a matter of checking off boxes it is not worth it, but if the department is putting it into practice, then it is and this department does.

Discussion ensued regarding shift differential and overtime issues.

Councilor Becksted stated that the presentation explained how the increase in development and housing have associated costs and wonders if there are any performance measures showing the calls for visitors versus residents.

Chief Merner stated he can get those figures.

Questions that were submitted from the public on index cards were reviewed.

Card #1: I was at the Sheraton Hotel during a stabbing in the middle of the day. What is the expected time for the ambulance and police to arrive at a destination during a week day around noon time, as at that time, it was over 20 minutes.

Chief Merner stated that during the Sheraton Hotel stabbing incident the police were there within 3 minutes and the perpetrator was arrested in the lobby. He stated most response times are 5-7 minutes.

Card #2:

Question 1: Why did vehicle stops increase 46% in 2017; is there a departmental initiative to make more stops and what is the cost/benefit of this and is it an effective use of officer's time:

Chief Merner explained that most complaints they receive are regarding speeding so they are responding to what the citizens are asking them to do. He stated that visibility is a deterrent as well.

Question #2: Regarding service calls, what cause the 26% increase in 2017 and did certain types of calls increase and did certain areas of the city drive the increase:

Chief Merner stated it is opioids.

Question #3: Regarding Arrests, to what do you attribute the 16% increase in 2017:

Chief Merner stated traffic stops.

Councilor Dwyer asked if they are anticipating more property crime due to opioids.

Chief Merner stated they are making it very unpopular to sell drugs in the City of Portsmouth with numerous arrests and they are working very closely with Safe Harbor and other social services. He stated that he still does expect crimes to increase due to opioids.

Question #4: What percentage of patrol/service time is related to downtown and has that increased as commercial development has increased:

Chief Merner stated it is increasing especially seasonally and they do step up the patrols downtown to help prevent fights, etc.

Card #3: It seems to be a disconnect between the 911 call time and when they get it, what would be the cost to fix this:

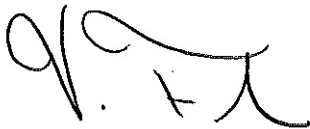
Chief Merner explained that the call goes to Concord first and doesn't know what the cost would be to fix it although they are looking at it in the long term with a CAD upgrade.

Question from the audience: Have we received any money from the government to fight the opioid crisis:

Chief Merner stated not yet but the new State Drug Czar, David Mara, is working on grants. He stated the lack of bed space in rehabs is problematic. He stated they will be going after every dime available.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. French', written in a cursive style.

Valerie A. French
Deputy City Clerk