

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Police and Fire Departments Budget

May 1, 2007 – 6:30 p.m.

Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers

City Council Present: Assistant Mayor Ferrini, Councilors, Grasso, Dwyer, Raynolds (6:45), Pantelakos, Whitehouse, Smith, and Hynes

City Council Absent: Mayor Marchand

Officials Present: City Manager John P. Bohenko; Director of Finance Judie Belanger; Police Commissioners John Kelley, Gerald Howe, and John Russo; Police Chief Michael Magnant, Deputy Police Chief Len Disesa; Captain William Irving; Executive Assistant Kathe Hoyt; Budget Coordinator Karen Senecal; Fire Commissioners Richard Gamester and Paul Wentworth; Fire Chief Christopher LeClaire; Assistant Fire Chief Steven Achilles; Deputy Fire Chief Steven Griswold and Deputy City Clerk Dianne Kirby

I. Call to Order

At 6:30 p.m., Assistant Mayor Ferrini called the work session to order and advised the City Council and members of the public that he would be replacing Mayor Marchand for this meeting due to Mayor Marchand being in Concord. He stated that there would be two presentations, the first being from the Police Department with the second from the Fire Department.

II. Introduction

City Manager Bohenko advised the City Council that April 18, 2007 was the Public Hearing on the proposed budget. He stated that tonight is the first in a series of work sessions on the proposed budget. He said that tonight's work session would be on the Police and Fire Departments budgets with a work session on the School Department's budget on May 3, 2007 and the Municipal budget to be held on May 9, 2007. City Manager Bohenko stated that on May 14, 2007 the City Council will reopen the public hearing and May 15, 2007 the Council will have the final work session with a special meeting on May 22, 2007 to adopt the budget.

City Manager Bohenko stated that they have just found out that the medical insurance rate for the City has been reduced. He stated that the City's rate for 2008 will be .7% which can reduce the overall budget by \$100,000. He stated that this breaks down to approximately \$19,000 for Municipal, \$14,700 for the Police Department, \$8,000 for the Fire Department and \$57,800 for the school. Finance Director Belanger will work with the departments and make those adjustments in their budgets, but overall the taxpayer can count on a reduction of \$100,000 or about 3% on the rate.

Assistant Mayor Ferrini turned the meeting over to the Police Department for their presentation.

III. Presentation – Police Commission/Police Chief

Commissioner Howe stated that the Department is facing some unique challenges with unique types of growth. He stated that city visitors, workers and guests need to be kept safe and protected which is a responsibility of this department that we fully accept. Our police are an exceptional group of people. He stated that they are not just police in the community, they are participants. He stated that they act as coaches, mentors, volunteers and they care deeply about this community. He stated that we need to be cognizant of the fiscal constraints of the city and cognizance of the resources necessary to provide the level of public safety this community expects and deserves. He stated that the Police Department is presenting a budget that reflects a balance between departmental needs and the ability of the community to support the level of service that this community expects.

Commissioner Howe turned the meeting over to Police Chief Magnant for a PowerPoint presentation.

Chief Magnant stated that 2006/2007 was a very busy year. He reviewed his budget with the Council. He advised the City Council that the total increase to the Police Department's budget is 6.86%. He reported that 88% of the budget is salary and benefits, with overtime at 6% and other operating at 6%. He stated that overtime is a daily struggle with crime levels, natural disasters and City-wide growth. He stated that the loss of Street Sweeper Funding will impact the Special Investigations Unit as this funding presently funds salary/benefits for 1.2 Detectives, pays \$20,000 in overtime and \$3,000 in training and equipment. He further stated that the 11th dispatcher is crucial to operations in that it will cut down on overtime coverage and dispatcher "Burn Out"

IV. Questions and Discussion

Assistant Mayor Ferrini opened the meeting up to questions for the Police Department staff.

Councilor Dwyer asked Chief Magnant what other communities are doing to address alcohol misuse by organizations and establishments. Chief Magnant stated that he has an officer in the department that spends time with local organizations and establishments and is working with them. Chief Magnant stated that this officer is training the establishments to spot abuse and refuse to serve those customers and the Liquor Commission to pull the licenses from those establishments who allow these individuals to continue to drink passed legal limits. Chief Magnant stated that we could look into a program where the City would have more power and authority in granting liquor licenses and renewing them.

Deputy Police Chief Len Disesa stated that one of the new ideas the department is also trying to put in place is to have a Police Sergeant act as a liaison with downtown business owners. Unfortunately we had to move this officer to another assignment, but we want to get back on track with being proactive with bar owners to offset these issues.

Councilor Hynes stated that we can understand that the Police Department actually deals with triple the population we have when you factor in tourists and guests. He stated that with the port and airport and the world being the way it is today, we have to be careful that we have

enough coverage. He went on to state that his only concern is that the retired people have no way to deal with an increase in taxes except to reduce their quality of life.

Councilor Raynolds asked if Chief Magnant feels that the financial benefits with the Liquor establishments are balanced. Chief Magnant stated that the City does not receive any financial benefits except property taxes. He stated that income from the liquor license goes to the State.

City Manager Bohenko stated that because we are not a home rule state, we can not change any tax except property tax. He stated that we can work with our representatives to discuss some of these issues. He stated that 80% of the establishments in Portsmouth are good and look out for the people, it is the 20% that don't, that are causing the problems. Chief Magnant stated that the City of Portsmouth has more liquor licenses that any other City in the State.

Councilor Hynes stated that Cross Roads House saves a lot of money for our Welfare Department. He stated that Cross Roads House provides mostly charitable services and works through donations and takes these people off the streets making Portsmouth safer.

Councilor Whitehouse asked how much overtime is left in this year's budget. He stated that it looks like about 98% is already spent. Chief Magnant stated that this item is probably not healthy. He stated that the Commission sent a letter to the Council to notify them that the Department may need additional monies. He said that the Commissioners and the Department staff are doing everything to finish this year in the black, but overtime cannot be predicted. Councilor Whitehouse asked if line items can be moved around to cover some of the overtime needed. Chief Magnant stated that it could.

Councilor Smith stated that last year the Police Department did a reorganization and moved people around in an attempt to save some monies, and it worked. He asked if this practice was looked at again this year. Chief Magnant stated the reorganization of last year was a comprehensive plan and will not be finalized for 3-4 years, but he cannot see the Department doing any more cuts.

Councilor Pantelakos asked about the Crime Analysis position and if it was necessary.

Chief Magnant stated that the Crime Analysis position would reduce ranking officers to one civilian staff to do the reports, coding of reports, plus working on software programs. He stated that he wants a daily, weekly and monthly crime bulletin to project trends. He stated that the Crime Analysis position is needed.

Councilor Pantelakos stated that she thinks the taxpayers of Portsmouth are getting a good bang for their buck with our Police Department.

Councilor Dwyer stated that she has great respect for the department and requested if some residents are taking police time for non-police matters. Chief Magnant said that we will always respond not matter what the situation. He stated that some people think that community policing thinking is soft on crime, but it is not. He further stated that all calls are prioritized and the most important calls are responded to first.

Councilor Grasso stated that the City gets a very high value for their money with the Police Department's Budget. She stated that the next thing that needs to be check on is fuel pricing.

Assistant Mayor Ferrini said that the Councilors will deliberate and meet back on May 15, 2007 to finalize the budget.

Assistant Mayor Ferrini called a 2 minute recess and will come back with the Fire Department's presentation.

V. Presentation – Fire Commission/Fire Chief

Commissioner Gamester stated that there is not much new in this year's budget. He stated that when he first started on the Commission he really didn't like his job very much, now the job is easy because we have the right people in the right place doing the right thing at the right time.

Fire Chief LeClaire stated that of the 2,450 calls this year, 52% were fire calls and 48% were EMS calls. He reviewed his budget with the Council with a PowerPoint presentation. He stated that the Fire Department is asking for a 6.234% increase over 2006/2007 budget. He stated that this includes 13/14 staffing and contractual increase. He stated that we have our normal fire responsibilities that involve firefighting, safety, terrorism, and rescues and then our emergency management responsibilities. He stated that he would like to thank the staff of the Portsmouth Fire Department for all the work they do throughout the year.

VI. Questions and Discussion

Assistant Mayor Ferrini opened the meeting up to questions for the Fire Department staff.

Councilor Whitehouse stated that now that defibrillators are down in price and available for homeowners to have, he asked how safe they are for home use. Assistant Fire Chief Steven Achilles stated that you are not going to see a lot of home use of defibrillators unless they are prescribed by their doctors. He stated that you might see some businesses having them, but he did not think they would become a normal household item. Councilor Whitehouse asked if Assistant Chief Achilles saw this happening in the future. Assistant Chief Achilles said that he did.

Councilor Dwyer stated that on the ambulance billable rate the decrease in the percentage of collection is about half of the increase. She asked what factors reduce collection. Assistant Chief Achilles stated that there is a balance. He stated that there is what we can charge and then the rate that Medicare pays. He stated that Medicare pays about 80% of what we charge. He stated that a lot of people will not pay the total amount and most of our population is elderly and we will not aggressively go after people who cannot pay. He stated that the Fire Department is trying to come up with a plan to collect from those with an ability to pay. City Manager Bohenko stated that in the past we charged the Medicare rate. He stated that we have raised our rates, but when Medicare is involved we can only collect what Medicare pays. Assistant Mayor Ferrini asked if it was like a Health Choice Provider that does the same. Chief LeClaire stated that if the Fire Department transports we bill in or out of the City.

Councilor Hynes asked if the quality and ability of Portsmouth's Fire Department impact insurance rates on property. Chief LeClaire stated that it does. He stated that we are now a 4 rating. He further stated that the City does not have the physical ability to get a 2 or 1 rating.

Councilor Reynolds stated that he was glad to see a request in funding for prevention. He requested if revenues on some services like plan reviews and consultations should be increased. He asked if the companies should pay more for these services. City Manager Bohenko said that we already charge for that. Councilor Reynolds asked if we can raise these fees. City Manager Bohenko stated that we could look into this. Chief LeClaire stated that when there is an insurance company who calls for a report, or HAZMAT Assessment, we charge them.

Councilor Pantelakos asked how many places have to be inspected for the State. Deputy Fire Chief Griswold stated that he did not have a good number available, but they have to inspect all childcare facilities, home health care facilities, places of assembly that sell liquor and restaurants. He stated that a lot of these inspections are yearly and he cannot always get these done on a yearly basis and therefore he will get a call from a company stating that he has to come down and do an inspection or the State will pull their liquor license. Councilor Pantelakos stated that she agrees that this extra person is needed in order to ensure these inspections are done in a timely manner.

Councilor Smith stated that this is the first budget he has seen where operating expenses have gone down. He commended the Fire Department on this. Chief LeClaire stated that he has tried to present real numbers.

Councilor Whitehouse asked if the height of buildings is becoming an issue and are we still going to be able to handle these building during a fire. Chief LeClaire stated that he has been working with City Manager Bohenko and the Fire Commission in improving the department's vehicles.

Councilor Dwyer asked if there is a possibility to have a contracted person. Chief LeClaire stated that anything is possible, but the person should be available for face to face contact with the public when the public needs them.

Councilor Reynolds asked Chief LeClaire to describe the Heavy Rescue Unit issue. Chief LeClaire stated that they will reduce their fleet by two vehicles in order to procure this vehicle. He further stated that this Heavy Rescue Unit is basically a huge rolling tool box.

Assistant Mayor Ferrini thanked the Police Department and Fire Department for their presentations. Assistant Mayor Ferrini reminded everyone that the next work session would be to review the School Department budget and would be held on Thursday, May 3, 2007 at 6:30 in the Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers with the final budget review to be held on May 15, 2007.

VII. Adjournment

At 8:05 p.m., Assistant Mayor Ferrini closed the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by:

Dianne M. Kirby, Deputy City Clerk