



Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Maureen T. Carney

Vice-Chair: Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge

Councilor Dennis P. Bidwell

Councilor James Nash

Meeting Minutes

Date: February 4, 2019, 4 p.m.

Location: City Council Chambers

212 Main St., Northampton, Massachusetts

Present: Councilor Maureen T. Carney, Chair
Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge, Vice Chair
Councilor Dennis P. Bidwell
Councilor James Nash

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4 p.m., Councilor Carney called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilors Bidwell, Carney, LaBarge and Nash were present.

Also present: Fire Chief Duane Nichols

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

There being no members of the public present, there was no public comment.

3. UPDATE ON FIRE/EMS OPERATIONS

Chief Nichols passed out handouts with statistics on call volume and updated members on Fire/EMS operations.

Call Volume - Northampton Fire Rescue (NFR) had its busiest year ever in 2018 with over 7,000 calls – 7,242 between EMS and Fire, Chief Nichols reported. Last year, they were eight calls shy of 7,000. He partly attributed the increase to people being more likely to call 911 but noted they continually see call volume increase every year. Fire volume seems to stay around 1,800 to 1,900 calls while EMS volume steadily increases, he clarified.

Mutual aid –NFR resources went outside the city for EMS and fire response 141 times, and the city received aid 18 times. To him, this number is significant in that it shows they are at the level of staffing they should be because they aren't calling in resources from outside the city. He keeps an eye on the number of times crews are going out of town because it pulls resources out of the city.

Overlapping calls – 51% of the time they have multiple calls going on in the city, whether it be an EMS and a Fire call, two Fire calls, etc. It shows that crews aren't sitting idle.

Response time – the average time from dispatch to arrival for all calls is six minutes, well within national standards. Police usually get there quicker because they are posted within the city. They have quite an EMS system out there and he's quite proud of it, he shared. They can probably get a 1st responder on scene within three minutes. For major calls, they dispatch a fire engine with an ambulance. For cardiac arrests, five to seven people are needed to start treatment and procedures, move the patient and transfer him or her to the hospital. They are meeting that quota really well. On a heart attack call, they can get six to seven responders there to render aid.

To corroborate the rapid response time, Councilor Bidwell related that, at a recent Narcan training he attended, participants were told they could administer the first dose of Narcan with confidence that EMS would be there by the time a second dose was needed.

The city had three overdoses a week and a half ago on a Saturday; one of which was fatal, Chief Nichols noted.

Councilor LaBarge commended Chief Nichols on the department's response time, which was of concern at one point in the past.

"On the streets, [police and fire] work seamlessly together," Chief Nichols commented.

Fire Incidence - Last year, the city had 56 fires, ranging from a pot on a stove to a fully-involved house. On a positive note, he has been in the department for 32 years and has continually seen that number drop. [Firefighters] "are teaching people how to take care of themselves," he suggested.

Unfortunately, the city still has homes without smoke detectors. 45 Carolyn Street – the site of a recent fire fatality – didn't have smoke detectors, he confirmed.

Chief Nichols encouraged councilors to inform the department of people in need of smoke detectors. Firefighters are willing to install detectors if the householder is agreeable.

Chief Nichols fielded questions and comments from members. He also presented additional statistics, including that the department's busiest month was October with 236 EMS calls and that the busiest day for calls is Thursday and busiest time of day is noon.

Councilor Bidwell noted that councilors had been talking to the police chief about retention issues and asked if the chief sees similar issues.

"I haven't lost anybody in two years to another department," Chief Nichols reported. He believes the department's compensation package is right in the middle of other communities. "We've done very well at keeping people," he advised.

All the same, "paramedics are really kind of hard to come by," he acknowledged, since so many departments are hiring them and the pool is kind of small. They are seeing a lot more candidates going on to become Physician's Assistants (PA's) since it only requires a little more school.

As far as staffing, the Fire Department is staffed 24/7 by four rotating shifts. Two shifts have 15 members and two have 16. The minimum shift strength maintained is 13.

As far as challenges, "I can't say that we really have any; it's really just trying to stay ahead of the curve as far as what's out there," Chief Nichols reported. Public employees - including firefighters - now fall under OSHA as of February 1st. As a department, he thinks they are in really good shape. As far as policies they are in really good shape, it is just a matter of record-keeping.

Facility-wise, he thinks they are really in solid shape since a major issue is having exhaust systems in firehouse bays, and NFR has had these for years.

In budget updates, Chief Nichols mentioned that the vehicle repair/maintenance line item has been hit fairly hard this year. He made a capital request for \$60,000 for the 2004 ladder truck to go to Florida for replacement of its electrical system. They had some cost overruns but probably added about 10 years to the life of the truck. (A new truck would be \$1.4 million). It should now be good out to about 2032.

Dan Routhier resigned and the department now has Jeff Bates as its mechanic.

They had a couple of accidents this winter with some ambulances and fire engines. Engine One - a 2013 engine - had some bubbling of paint with only a 50% warranty. The mechanic sent it to Greenwood for repair and, on its way back from Greenwood, it blew its turbo and so had to have some unexpected repairs.

Councilor Bidwell mentioned the murder/suicide incident at Village Hill and asked about the incidence of PTSD type problems in the department.

They have a chaplain trained in PTSD, and officers will take firefighters off shift to debrief them, Chief Nichols volunteered. That's the first line of defense. They have been fortunate in that this has been very successful in reducing distress. He mentioned the recent death of a firefighter's wife (33 years old) on Christmas Day as an incident that had shaken the department. He encourages officers to try to take care of personnel as soon as possible.

The fire at 45 Carolyn Street was caused by careless disposal of smoking materials, while a porch fire at 22 Finn Street started when an occupant disposed of material in a waste basket that later ignited.

Members thanked Chief Nichols for his presentation.

4. **MINUTES OF JANUARY 7, 2019 AND JANUARY 17, 2019**

Councilor Bidwell moved to approve the minutes of January 7, 2019 and January 17, 2019 as a group. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed with 4 Yes, 0 No.

5. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE**A. 18.230 Appointments to Arts Council and CBAC - referred 1/17/2019****Arts Council**

Freeman Stein, 27 Fairfield Avenue, Florence

Term: February 1, 2019 - June 30, 2021

To fill a vacancy on the Arts Council

Central Business Architecture Committee

Pauline Fogel, 16 Forbes Avenue, Northampton

Term: February 1, 2019 - June 30, 2019

To replace the unexpired term of Bruce Kriviskey as the Historical Commission representative

When they spoke, Freeman Stein told her that, since he retired in November of 2013, he had explored ways to contribute to the quality of life in their wonderful city, Councilor LaBarge reported. "My appreciation for those who have worked to maintain and improve the quality of life for all of us... is deep," she quoted him as saying.

Based on his experience working with artists, funding sources and related institutions, he felt it would be a privilege and a joy for him to contribute to the work of the Arts Council. In addition to working with councilors to sustain activities already supported and coordinated by the council, he looks forward to helping in areas where there might be a need.

Professionally, he has spent years working on committees, supervising and coaching others, facilitating committee work, grant writing and assessing programs. He knows how to work collaboratively as well as independently. Recently, he has considered new projects the Arts Council might explore and thought about ways to bring the arts to all neighborhoods of the city, Councilor LaBarge continued. As a resident of Florence who lives on a dead end street abutting the bike path, he had been thinking about possibilities for using areas along the bike path for a variety of artistic projects, from community landscaping projects to installations to performances. Providing opportunities for folks to interact with the arts in small neighborhood venues might complement the larger, whole-community Arts Council-sponsored events like the Silver Chord Bowl and First Night.

Councilor LaBarge moved to recommend forwarding Mr. Stein's appointment to the Arts Council to the full City Council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Bidwell seconded. The motion passed unanimously with 4 Yes, 0 No.

Pauline Fogel currently sits on the Historical Commission and, if appointed, would become the new appointee from the Historical Commission to the Central Business Architecture Committee (CBAC), Councilor Bidwell explained. She is willing to take on both assignments. Ms. Fogel has been a tremendously valuable member of the Historical Commission and looks forward to bringing her experience as a realtor to the CBAC. She thinks it is important to have the perspective of an individual working in the real estate market along with the views of architects and downtown business owners. He thinks she would be a good addition to the committee.

Councilor Bidwell moved to positively recommend the appointment of Pauline Fogel to the CBAC. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed unanimously with 4 Yes, 0 No.

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

Members discussed ideas for departmental presentations for the March meeting. Councilor Nash suggested bringing in someone from Human Resources (HR) to talk about hiring practices since they have heard from police and fire about challenges in recruiting and retaining personnel. He proposed asking an HR representative what activities and initiatives the department has undertaken to address challenges like long-term absences due to IOD and FMLA and competition with other entities for qualified candidates.

Other ideas mentioned were hearing from the Building Commissioner or Senior Center Director.

Mrs. Krutzler mentioned the possibility of meeting the second Monday of September instead of the first due to the Labor Day Holiday.

7. **Adjourn**

Upon motion made by Councilor LaBarge and seconded by Councilor Bidwell, the meeting was adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Prepared By:

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