

September 11, 2017

Fire Department Reorganization

Fire Chief Jim Wilson is proposing to reorganize his department. He also is continuing the discussion had at budget time about his belief that the department will need increased staffing levels in the years to come. The department operates out of three fully staffed stations: Central at 684 Broadway, Cash Corner at 360 Main Street, and West End located at 34 James Baka Drive. The two call companies operate out of Willard Square and Union Street.

Currently the department operates with one chief and three deputy chiefs. Each of the four chiefs is responsible for providing one week of night and weekend coverage as shift commanders. As noted in the chief's attached memo, when this system was initially adopted in 1995, a majority of the full-time members lived either in South Portland or in a neighboring community. Today, less than 12% of the current full-time officers live in South Portland or less than 30 minutes away. Some live as far as two hours away. As such, when vacancies arise in the deputy chief slots, the pool of potential candidates is narrowed considerably as those who live more than 20 minutes away would not be able to provide a timely response to a major event when it is their week to do so.

Given this challenge, and other factors detailed in his memo, the Chief is proposing a reorganization of his department via two options. His preferred option would eliminate two of the three currently vacant deputy chief positions and replace them with a new captain position (union). This would result in four total captains, who would no longer be assigned as crew supervisors on a fire truck. They would be elevated to shift commanders and assigned to a SUV. In their place, three new lieutenants would be created and all three fire trucks would have one of these lieutenants on each shift (for a total of 12).

Administratively, there would be one chief and one deputy chief. The deputy would oversee code enforcement, building plan reviews, and the fire prevention program. The emergency medical services (EMS) program would be overseen by the union EMS Coordinator. In total, the number of full-time employees would remain at 67.

Other staffing changes are also required to accommodate the chief's reorganization proposal, which would have the net effect of no longer staffing Rescue 45.

As noted by the Chief, there would be approx. \$20,000 in short-term financial savings to the City by adopting this proposal. Although the Chief does expect overtime (OT) costs to increase, he believes much or all of this can be covered within his existing OT budget. However, there will also be bargaining impacts that result from this proposal that will also lead to added costs. The long-term financial impact is that this proposal adds more cost.

As the Chief explains in greater detail in his memo, the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) Standard 1710 states that fire departments should have 15 firefighters on scene within eight minutes of turnout for 90% of fires. Currently, with only 13 members on duty at most at any given time, the City has difficulty meeting this standard. As call company numbers are decreasing, it is logical to conclude that staffing increases are the most likely way for the City to begin meeting this standard.

The Chief's first goal after restructuring would be to get each shift to 14 members, which would require one additional full-time firefighter per shift. This gets our department closer to the NFPA standard of 15. After this, the Chief has a goal of running a third ambulance. As significant growth is expected and happening in the west end of the city, it is likely that EMS calls will also increase in that area. As such, he is suggesting the addition of two staffers in FY19, two more in FY20 and up to four more in FY21 or beyond depending on call volumes. Some of these added costs can be covered by the increase in revenue that will be generated as a result of the higher call volume. But because the Chief's proposal pulls more firefighters "off the floor", more bodies are needed to meet the NFPA standard than would be under the current arrangement. Thus, the long-term costs of the proposal outweigh the short-term savings.

Although there are concerns such as added long-term costs associated with this proposal, as a manager I want to support my department directors and help provide them with the flexibility and resources they need to provide the best possible services to our community at the lowest possible cost. So while I may be lukewarm in my support of this proposal, I am hopeful that having staff look at our revenue sources for the fire department – such as ambulance fees – could help to offset some of these added costs so there is minimal impact to the taxpayers.

Chief Wilson, Finance Director Greg L'Heureux, and HR Director Don Brewer will be present at your meeting. Should four of you decide to move this item forward to an agenda for formal action, your options would be:

- 1) Accept the chief's recommendation (option 1) for the reorg
- 2) Accept option 2 instead of option 1
- 3) Reject any reorg proposal and maintain the status quo
- 4) Ask staff to take another look at the department structure and come back with a different proposal based on certain criteria to be set by Council



City Manager



**FIRE DEPARTMENT**  
*OUR JOB IS OUR LIFE, AND YOURS*

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Date: September 8, 2017

Subject: Fire Department Restructuring

Greetings:

The Fire Department is in a unique situation that has not occurred in recent history nor is it likely to in the near future. The department currently has 3 deputy chief positions open, which creates an ideal time to evaluate restructuring options. The primary reason I am proposing a restructure of the department is due to some demographic changes in the department that will make the current arrangement difficult to effectively continue. The current arrangement has the 3 deputies and the fire chief working days, M-F, but they are also required to be "on call" for 7 days where they respond from home on nights, weekends, and holidays. They each cover on a rotation of 1 week on, 3 weeks off. Prior to recent retirements this system was adequate, as Chief Guimond lived just a few miles in Cape Elizabeth, Deputy Haskell lived in South Portland, Deputy Wilson lived in South Portland, and Deputy Cavallaro began extending the "response area" by living in Portland near Ocean Ave. What has changed is that in 1995, the majority of the FT members lived in South Portland and in bordering communities, or not that much farther away. Due to many factors, most of the current FT officers do not live in or even relatively near South Portland (only 3 of the current 14 live in SP). Most live anywhere from 20 to 60, or more, minutes away. The numbers for the firefighters (future promotions) are similar, if not worse. A significant part of the "on call" chief's responsibility is to respond to and command a major event, this will not be realistic if the coverage chief lives 20, or more, minutes away. This means that the current "on call" chief coverage system will become obsolete in the next few years as candidates for promotion will not be able to provide a realistic response time from their homes when "on call".

The M-F schedule also creates a limiting effect as most senior members who would qualify for a deputy's position have been working shift work for 15 or more years and the change to days is not desired. This past winter our EMS coordinator stepped down after 5 months due to conflict with the position's schedule. The position went unfilled for over six months as working days was not a desirable option for eligible candidates. This could create a situation where our top employees choose not to be candidates for high level positions that require day schedules.

Another challenge that we are facing is the management structure. Daily, there are three supervisors (officers or firefighters in charge) that oversee the crews at the three stations. Normally they have their own work assignments and they coordinate their activities between stations as needed. They primarily report to the assigned "on call" chief for day to day issues, but only M-F as the "on call" chief is not in the station nights, weekends, and holidays. When it comes to administrative issues the officers will report to the chief in charge of that area, i.e. the chief for maintenance issues or the chief for training for example. This makes coordination a challenge as there can be overlap of responsibilities when

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there are multiple people involved. For example, let's say an ambulance has an issue, is that the chief of maintenance, the EMS chief, or the "on call" chief? When you look at our organizational chart the officers sometimes have more than one boss, which changes, depending on the circumstances. This makes span of control and unity of command concepts a challenge. This would be like having a different Mayor each month that council, staff, and citizens need to keep track of.

Option 1 is the one that I feel meets, albeit very minimally, our needs. It would eliminate two of the current open deputy positions. In their place there would be one new captain's position created (bringing the total number of captains to 4). They would no longer be assigned as station supervisors on fire trucks. They would be elevated to shift commanders and assigned to a SUV. In their place, 3 new lieutenants (Lt) would be created and each station would have a Lt on each shift, for a total of 12 Lts. They would be assigned to a fire apparatus and be crew leaders (no real change from current operations). Administratively there would still be the fire chief, but now only one deputy working M-F. The deputy would oversee code enforcement/building-plan review/fire prevention program. The union EMS coordinator would remain overseeing the EMS program. The shift commander captains would oversee their shift, which would include; responding to all significant events, handling personnel issues, coordinating all activities such as; assigned training, scheduled maintenance, work details, etc. with the 3 Lts and any other shift related workload. Additionally, they will have assigned administrative tasks that could be completed while working a rotating shift schedule. This would provide the supervisory coverage needed for all 4 shifts 24/7 that is currently lacking with the "on call" chief system.

Option 2 is to return the deputies to shifts as they were in 1995. The deputies would then fill the role of shift commander as above. This is certainly a viable option, but one that will most likely have a cost associated with it. As mentioned there are currently 3 deputy positions but 4 shifts. For this plan to be implemented it would require creating one additional deputy chiefs position. This would be done by taking one firefighter position. It would also cause additional overtime to cover their vacations and other time off events. Additionally, this plan would create a huge loss of administrative coverage. While some of the administrative work could be done by deputies while on a shift schedule; EMS, personnel issues, and code enforcement/building-plan review are positions that need to span more than one shift. For example, the public expects us to provide them timely information. Having to wait until the fire prevention chief returns to his/her shift 4 days later is probably not going to be received very well. The need for staff to be in the office M-F for this workload is significant. To meet this need I would take one additional firefighter position and use it to fill the fire prevention role that would work M-F. Realistically the fire prevention role needs some sort of rank/title, either Captain or Fire Marshal to be effective when dealing with the public and enforcing ordinances and codes. The EMS coordinator would remain unchanged.

With option 1 there is a projected savings of around \$20,000.00, but that is a rough estimate depending on which individuals end up in each position and their individual pay incentives (i.e. advanced degrees, EMS license level, etc.). An additional unknown is the cost of overtime coverage as that fluctuates, depending on vacations and staffing needs. I do not anticipate a significant increase as the plan is to remain with 13 on duty each shift.

As option 1 does involve a bargaining group, there will most likely be some additional costs from negotiations that will affect the identified savings in future years. For example, Scarborough FD is currently using a very similar system to this option and their Captains are under contract making \$32.14/hr. Currently, South Portland Captains are making around \$30.56/hr. under the current contract. The Command Unit (the bargaining group for Lieutenants and Captains) is under contract until June 30, 2018.

Option 2 would cost about \$26,000.00 to convert to a 4<sup>th</sup> deputy and \$4,000 to convert to a fire prevention/fire marshal position, so I would anticipate \$30,000.00 cost for the first year. As mentioned

there would be additional costs to cover the deputies when on approved time off (vacation/sick/etc.) but just like option 1 the on duty staffing remains at 13 so this should be offset somewhat by the additional vacation coverage.

The following pages are overviews of our FT staffing. Currently, we can have 2 firefighters and 1 officer off each day on vacation (for a total of 3). As depicted in the current arrangement there are 2 shifts that currently do not have enough FT staff assigned to cover those vacations, so we need to hire OT almost every day when those shifts are on duty. This is just for approved vacations, not the other reasons for time off (personal days, sick, training, FMLA, injury) which adds additional OT expense. Both restructuring plans provide for all shifts to have vacations covered, which will also reduce overall OT costs to some extent.

# Current Arrangement

Fire Chief/EMA Director
Deputy (Training)
Deputy (Fire Prevention)
Deputy (Personnel)
FF (EMS Coordinator)

Shift 1	Shift 2	Shift 3	Shift 4
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## CENTRAL STATION

1	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Captain
2	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
3	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
4	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
5	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
V	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter

## CASH CORNER

6	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Captain	Lieutenant
7	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
8	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
V	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter

## WESTERN AVENUE

9	Lieutenant	Captain	Lieutenant	Lieutenant
10	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
11	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
12	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
13	Firefighter	Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter
V	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	OVERTIME FF	OVERTIME FF

Total On Duty Staffing 13 (Plus Duty Chief: On Call)
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# Restructuring Plan Option 1

Fire Chief/EMA Director
Deputy Chief (Fire Prevention)
Firefighter (EMS Coordinator)

Shift 1	Shift 2	Shift 3	Shift 4
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1	Captain (Training)	Captain (Vehicles)	Captain (Special Ops)	<b>Captain (Logistics)</b>
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### CENTRAL STATION

2	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Lieutenant
3	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
4	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
5	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
6	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
V	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter

### CASH CORNER

7	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Lieutenant
8	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
9	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
V	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter

### WESTERN AVENUE

10	Lieutenant	<b>Lieutenant</b>	<b>Lieutenant</b>	<b>Lieutenant</b>
11	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
12	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
13	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
V	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter

Total On Duty Staffing 13
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# Restructuring Plan Option 2

Fire Chief/EMA Director
<b>(Fire Marshall)</b>
(EMS Coordinator)

Shift 1	Shift 2	Shift 3	Shift 4
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1	Deputy (Training)	Deputy (Vehicles)	Deputy (Special Ops)	<b>Deputy (Logistics)</b>
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### CENTRAL STATION

2	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Captain
3	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
4	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
5	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
6	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
V	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter

### CASH CORNER

7	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Captain	Lieutenant
8	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
9	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
V	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter

### WESTERN AVENUE

10	Lieutenant	Captain	Lieutenant	Lieutenant
11	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
12	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
13	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter	Firefighter
V	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter	Vacation Firefighter

Total On Duty Staffing 13
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Over the long term, there is a need to increase on shift staffing. NFPA 1710 states that fire departments should have 4 firefighters on scene within 5 minutes for 90% of responses and 15 firefighters within 9 minutes for 90% of responses. Unfortunately, with only 13 members on duty (and in a lot of cases not all 13 are always available as they are on other calls) we do not meet the percentages. With our decreasing call company members, it is almost inconceivable that this will improve without staffing increases. Keep in mind that this is only for the initial stage of an emergency and is considered the bare minimum for a small fire in a single family house. After 30 minutes, if the fire is not under control additional firefighters are needed as the first group needs to change out and be substituted for while they rehab and change air bottles.

If the call companies continue to decline, even to the point of disbanding, without additional staffing we would have to increase our reliance on mutual aid to ensure the required number of firefighters respond. While this is a common reality for all departments, it is not a long term solution. Most fire departments in Maine are at best, "right sized" for their daily events, but more likely they are in need of more staff. Cumberland County has very little surge capacity to handle more than the daily individual needs as the area departments are all busy. If we begin relying on mutual aid as our primary response plan, I would expect the administrators and/or taxpayers of those other municipalities, who we would now be using more often, not to be excited about subsidizing South Portland's responsibilities forever.

The first of our staffing goals (after the restructure) would be to get each shift to 14 on duty (requiring one new FT person per shift). This would get us closer to the NFPA 1710 goal of 15 as well as fire companies staffed with crews of 3 and still cover the 3 daily vacations slots.

The next staffing goal that we will need to start planning for is to staff a 3rd ambulance. With the significant anticipated growth in the west end of the city in the next few years, it is very likely that emergency calls will increase with EMS calls seeing the bulk of the increase. My recommendation would be to hire 2 FT employees to staff a third ambulance M-F days, for 8.4 hours each day (42 hrs. a week). Then the next year, hire 2 more FT employees and staff the ambulance 7 days a week for 10.5 hour days (each employee working 4 10.5 days for 42 hours and then 4 days off). This would cover the bulk of our busy period. The final stage would require hiring 4 FT employees to go to full 24/7 coverage and could be implemented once call volume requires it. At this point daily on duty staffing would be at 16 (+ 3 for vacations), which would significantly improve our NFPA 1710 responses as well as provide 3 staffed ambulances. The additional ambulance has the capability to generate additional revenue both in South Portland and when covering mutual aid calls. The flexibility of this system is that it can increase over time as demand dictates.