



Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods

March 28, 2107– 7:03 PM - **Minutes**
Chambers of the City Council, City Hall, Room 214

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY & NEIGHBORHOODS
DATE: MARCH 28, 2017
TIME: 7:03 P.M.
PLACE: FIRE STATION #2, 868 PLEASANT STREET, NEW BEDFORD, MA

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS DEBORA COELHO, CHAIRPERSON; BRIAN GOMES, VICE-CHAIRMAN; NAOMI CARNEY; JOSEPH LOPES; STEVEN MARTINS; LINDA MORAD; DANA REBEIRO; KERRY WINTERSON

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS IAN ABREU; JAMES OLIVEIRA

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Councillor Coelho called the Public Safety Committee Meeting to order and took attendance. The Clerk read a Communication into the record from Councillor Abreu explaining his absence from the meeting. This Communication was received and placed on file by Councillor Martins and seconded by Councillor Gomes.

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Items 1 & 2 were taken up together, they were as follows:

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Winterson, Abreu, Gomes, Martins, Carney, Council President Lopes and Councillor Oliveira, requesting that Fire Chief Gomes, Representative of the Mayor's Office, CFO Sky, DFFM Commissioner Blanchard, Safety Committee Chairman Firefighter Jason Barker, and Safety Committee Co-Chairman Firefighter Kevin Cormier appear before the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods to discuss the mechanical issue with the Fire Department's apparatus and the lack of scheduled and preventative maintenance on the Fire Department's fleet (To be Referred to the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods.) (Ref'd 2/23/17) was received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Winterson. (1)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Coelho, requesting, that Fire Chief Gomes be invited to appear before the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods regarding mechanical issues with the Fire Department's apparatus, per New Bedford Firefighters Local 841, also to be invited; Jason Barker, Safety Committee Chairman and Kevin Cormier, Safety Committee Co-Chairman, New Bedford Firefighters IAFF Local 841 (To be Referred to the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods.) (Ref'd 2/23/17) was received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Winterson. (2)

Steven Peixoto, Union President New Bedford Fire Department was present and submitted a packet for the Committee. Councillor Martins made a motion to receive and place on file the packet from Mr. Peixoto, which was seconded by Councillor Lopes.

Mr. Peixoto explained that the Union is concerned with the turnaround time for repairs when they are needed on fire apparatus as well as lack of preventive maintenance steps being taken by DFFM mechanics to prevent dramatic breakdowns of the engines, etc. He stated that this is not a negotiation tactic by the Union, but a real concern for timely maintenance and repairs of fire apparatus. He stated the Union does not fault the mechanics that are currently working on

their vehicles, but would like to see two dedicated mechanics to do fire apparatus, much like the Police Department has. The Fire Department, at one time, had a dedicated mechanic, who left for a better paying job but his position was never filled and was absorbed into the DFFM group of mechanics. He expressed concern that equipment is being taken out of service during blackouts and that it is returned once repaired with little or no information on what was done to a unit or if the repairs have been tested to see if the unit is working properly.

Jason Barker, New Bedford Fire Department Safety Co-Chair, expressed his concern that the rigs are getting less attention, due to a lack of manpower that is certified in repairing the newer engines. They would like to see a return of a Fleet Manager, who would keep track on repairs and what is being done to each unit and be able to test the units once repaired, much like they had before, but the position was eliminated from the Fire Department.

Councillor Lopes asked how long ago the position was eliminated. The Chief told him it was eliminated in 2006 when the Fire Department repair facility was absorbed into DPW and then in 2013 they still had a standalone repair facility but there were management issues and Ken Blanchard consolidated all mechanics into a single garage in 2015.

Fire Chief Gomes explained that mechanics need to be trained to adapt to the sophistication of new fire equipment. The complexity of the repairs has changed over the years. The financial cuts over the years have affected support services. It has been 10 years since the New Bedford Fire Department had a master mechanic dedicated to the Fire Department. To employ a fully certified mechanic is hard today, and they garner up to \$80,000. According to Commissioner Blanchard, if the city was to hire a mechanic at \$80,000 they would have a Union issue and all senior mechanics would need to be bumped up. A senior mechanic in the city currently makes \$50,000. The Chief explained that the new equipment is being repaired in Foxboro and new equipment is not being purchased with extended warranties.

Councillor Gomes expressed his frustration that this lack of repairs and preventive maintenance has been going on for so long and that firefighters deserve better than this, it becomes a safety issue.

Councillor Carney expressed her concern about the lack of manpower able to handle fire apparatus. Commissioner Blanchard explained that five of the mechanics on staff are able to repair apparatus, but they are not dedicated mechanics. Meaning, if a fire engine is in for a repair that is their top priority, but if there isn't any fire equipment at the yard to be worked on, the mechanics are given other jobs to do. The Chief did state that they are splitting the costs to train the mechanics on fire apparatus with DFFM. The training is taking place though it is gradually happening. They have included funding in their next budget to continue training. The Chief explained the reason they do not have a fleet manager in the New Bedford Fire Department is not for not asking for one, but per his discussions with CFO Sky, the Department is running in a deficit and rather than create a new position they would use the money to remove another firefighter from the Safer Grant payroll and make that position permanent under the department's normal budget.

Councillor Morad brought up the two mechanic vacancies in DFFM now and asked when and if they would be filled. Commissioner Blanchard stated they would be filled but that they were looking for mechanics that were diesel capable and be a good fit within DFFM. Unfortunately a mechanics starting salary is \$17,000 and once many find out the starting salary they can make much more in the private sector. The Chief also told the Committee that to be totally certified on the new apparatus consists of nine levels of certification, twenty-seven different courses and a ten year commitment to be certified. Commissioner Blanchard explained that in their past experience when a person reaches this mark, they leave the city for a higher paying job, and the city paid for their certification.

It was agreed by all that a Fleet Manager would be helpful in resolving the issues discussed.

On motion by Councillor Winterson and seconded by Councillor Rebeiro, the Committee VOTED: To table item number one (1) for sixty (60) days. This motion passed on a voice vote.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Rebeiro, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council to take "No Further Action" on the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Coelho, requesting, that Fire Chief Gomes be invited to appear before the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods regarding mechanical issues with

the Fire Department's apparatus, per New Bedford Firefighters Local 841, also to be invited; Jason Barker, Safety Committee Chairman and Kevin Cormier, Safety Committee Co-Chairman, New Bedford Firefighters IAFF Local 841. This motion passed on a voice vote.

Councillor Lopes made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Rebeiro.

This meeting adjourned @ 8:51 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.,
Clerk of Committees