



HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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City of Portland, Maine

Public Safety / Health & Human Services Committee May 14, 2013 Meeting Minutes

Committee Attendance: Chair Suslovic, Councilor Duson and Councilor Coyne.
Co-Chair Leeman was unable to attend.

City Staff Attendance: Doug Gardner; HHS, Jerome LaMoria; Chief PFD.

AGENDA ITEM 1 – Meeting Called to Order and Minutes from April Meeting Reviewed:

Meeting was called to order at approximately 6:00 PM by Chair Suslovic and a Motion was made to accept Minutes as written. 2nd and all in favor. Passed.

Councilor Duson formally requested a review by Corporation Counsel – she would like documents provided in the Executive Session re: Street Artists memo – made public.

AGEND ITEM 2 – Workshop Session on Fire Department Consultant Report:

Chief LaMoria was called to present an overview of the Fire Department's Consultant Report. Chair Suslovic explained that there will be no public comment allowed after the presentation. Councilor Duson questioned why the Chief was giving an update so soon after presenting to the full Council. Chief explained that he was asked to come back and provide an update at this time.

The Chief presented the "Review, Assessment, Planning and Implementation of the Performance and Management Study" by reviewing the time line, work in progress, action, accomplishments and next steps in the process.

Since the report was released the Department has been addressing a number of issues and changes. They have addressed the Facility Life Safety issues and carbon and smoke detectors have been provided to the majority of fire houses with this process being completed on April 19th. The Facility Life Safety improvements plans for each station to ensure compliance with fire safety codes will be completed by September 1st.

The Chief explained the reorganization of administrative staff and department functions. He stressed the importance of these changes in order to implement including reorganization of the department to reflect an additional layer of supervision and to develop duty and classification position descriptions.

Part of the work in progress involves a change in the way units are dispatched. Currently all responses are considered “hot” (lights and sirens) and multiple units are dispatched to a call. With changes it will mean priority dispatch – with some ‘cold’ responses and some single unit dispatched to calls.

The Chief then reviewed the work in progress including community involvement. He explained the recent homeless campfire safety outreach following the deaths of 2 individuals as well as a new program with Portland High School through the Pathways Program for a Fire Certification Program which will begin in September. The certificate program will continue at SMCC resulting in an Associate’s Degree and Paramedic Certificate.

The Chief also explained that 70% of these recommendations will need collaboration with outside agencies. July 1st the 90 day review session ends and he will be back for an update at the September 10th Public Safety/HHS Committee meeting.

The presentation concluded at approximately 6:30 PM and opened to questions and answers by the Committee.

Chair Suslovic thanked the Chief and indicated he would leave the next update to him.

Councilor Duson was happy to see the safety of our staff as being near the top of the list of priorities the department is looking at. She questioned if the department is planning to adopt all of the recommendations and she would like to be alerted to anything that will not be implemented. She also questioned the systems data for planning purposes and wondered if the Fire Department was utilizing their data the way the Police Department does. The Chief indicated he was not familiar with the Police software system but is very interested in utilizing software data for long- term planning.

Councilor Coyne appreciates the department coming in and admits he is still reading and digesting the initial report. He is happy to hear of the High School program and has faith in the leadership of the Department and would like to be more hands off as a Committee.

Chair Suslovic questioned who is responsible for compliance of building codes and who is accountable? He is concerned there are people living in these buildings.

The Chief clarified that most infractions were known to the Department but were cut out of the budget over the years. A plan will be in place by September 1st. He also clarified that the Fire boat facility at Casco Bay Lines is undergoing renovations and the operations have been moved over to the Ocean Gateway facility. Crew members are expected to sleep on the ship until renovations are completed.

Chair Suslovic requested an overview of the roles of the Deputy Chiefs. The Chief indicated that the Deputy Chiefs would be doing administrative duty and the Captains would take over their positions which would result in an increase in staffing. One area the Dep. Chief would be in charge of is Fire Prevention & Inspections.

The Chief also outlined the Emergency Medical Dispatch System and the elimination of the hardwired call box system which will be converted to wireless. Chief indicated he will need Council support when it comes time to dismantle as it will require an ordinance change.

Chair Suslovic indicated he would like to see an update from the Fire Department in September.

Deputy City Manager Sheila Hill-Christian addressed the Committee about the Questions and Answers memo which was compiled by her. She indicated the Fire Department Report has been posted to the City's website for 1 month and will continue to be monitored for public comment.

Chair Suslovic questioned why does the City of Portland have so many firefighters?

Sheila responded that the question was posed to the consultant who tried to answer (Page 5 question 4) She stressed it is not an apples for apples situation. The consultant was asked to study Portland, not these other towns. She explained that no one is more concerned with budget issues but we also want to ensure we have a department that is running as efficiently as possible.

Chief LaMoria referred the Committee to pages 14-15 of the report and explained that there are 28 reasons why listed. He further explained that expectations of services are high in Portland and that is not necessarily true in every location nationwide. It is a local choice of what the citizens want and what they are willing to support. 8.4 million people visited Portland last year and we need to stop comparing ourselves to other cities.

Chair Suslovic does agree on some of these comparisons and pointed out the Police Department size emphasizing that Police is barely at the minimum staffing levels and yet can still protect all of these things with less people. The staffing levels in the Fire Department are over twice as high as national average. He would like to have an informed Police Discussion at the local level. He wants to know what other cities are doing.

Councilor Duson remarked that she feels he needs to stop asking staff the same question over and over and feels the answers will come with implementation of the report.

Chair Suslovic would like clarity, he is facing the public and is asked to explain the situation at the Fire Department. He also wants to know if any of these recommendations will be adding positions to the Department.

Sheila indicated she will bring this back to the next meeting.

Councilor Coyne was questioning why a comparison was being made between Police and Fire and feels Chair Suslovic is coming down hard on the Fire Department and suggested we should next study the Police Department. Councilor Coyne does not feel that reducing the number of employees is appropriate.

Item will be brought back to this Committee for an update in September.

With no further business to attend to the meeting was adjourned at 7:20 PM.