

City of Gardner, Massachusetts
City Council Public Safety Committee
Minutes of the Meeting of January 11, 2018

Councillor Edward Gravel called the Public Safety Committee meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 11, 2018 in the Fire Station Conference Room, 70 City Hall Avenue. Committee members Councillors Karen Hardern and Chairman James Johnson (who arrived late due to traffic, 6:55 p.m.) were present, as well as Assistant City Clerk Titi Siriphan.

Other officials present and/or participating were Fire Chief Richard Ares; Captain Greg Lagoy; Police Chief Neil Erickson; Council President Scott Graves; Executive Aide, Michael Nicholson; and Andrew Mansfield of *The Gardner News*.

I. **Minutes of Prior Meeting(s).**

On a motion by Councillor Karen Hardern and seconded by Councillor Edward Gravel, it was voted to accept the Minutes of the December 18, 2017 Public Safety Committee Meeting, as printed.

II. **Equipment / Apparatus Report**

Chief Ares stated a new reliable ambulance is needed for a backup.

- If one ambulance is out-of-service, EMS can continue to operate.
- Unable to respond to about 41 transports since the ambulance was out-of-service, resulting in loss of revenue.
- License inspection has been renewed by the state for another two years.
- Engine 1 has pump problems - 21 years of operation and leaking water damaged the gearbox. The gearbox transfers power from the road to the pump.
- WD Perkins Company (pump specialist that does all pump testing and repairs) recommended that Engine 1 truck immediately be taken out-of-service since there could be a catastrophic failure if used.
- Engine 1 is currently parked in South Gardner. The cost to replace/repair the pump would be around \$40k – for a new pump, gearbox, and valves. New alternators, body work, brakes, steering have already been done to the truck. It's a 1996 truck and should last a few more years.
- Applying for a grant for Engine 3. It's a 1989 and no longer meets safety standards. It has open rear seats. Doesn't have 3-point seatbelts. Difficult to pass inspection because of emissions.

Councillor Gravel questioned the number of pieces of apparatus in the Department.

Chief Ares responded with 3 engines; the quint, which is an engine with an aerial ladder on it; the tower; the heavy rescue which carries all of the heavy rescue equipment; the ambulance; support vehicles, Command car; Chief' car; and, the Captain's car.

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III. **FY2018 Ambulance Budget Review.**

Chief Ares

- Does not believe this project is a failure as stated by some Councillors.

Councillor Gravel questioned asked the types of responses that the Department responds to.

Chief Ares stated BLS Calls (basic life support) - anything that doesn't require paramedic intervention. BLS - sprained ankles, sore legs, sickness, mental health evaluations - things of that nature. There are written protocols of the types of reasons that the BLS Ambulance would be dispatched. Life threatening conditions such as chest pains, cardiac arrest, strokes, or heart attacks, require ALS Calls (Advanced Life Support) and the Paramedic vehicle responds. From time-to-time when the BLS Ambulance responds, the EMTs learn that Paramedic intervention is required, so the BLS and ALS services split the transport charges.

Chief Ares submitted an attachment of his monthly review:

Report to the Safety Committee January 11, 2018

- Firefighter Benjamin Hall resigned as of August 11.
- Firefighter **Kraig** Hill resigned as of August 19.
- Firefighter Matthew McGrane resigned as of December 31.
- Lieutenant Guy Sharron, Jr. retired as of January 6.
- This makes four openings on the department.
- Firefighter Paul Cormier is going to be retiring on January 27. That will make 5 openings.
- We have three new members starting on January 29. One of them is already academy trained so he will be able to be used on the line, filling an open position relatively quickly.
- We are also in the process of hiring two additional people. Those people should be able to start work the beginning of February.
- The four new hires who are not academy trained will not be attending the academy until the end of July.
- Recently, a now former Councillor had a letter to the editor complaining about the "egregious" use of overtime in the Fire Department.
- The largest single expenditure of overtime has been to cover vacations due to vacant positions.
- When we are fully staffed, no overtime is needed to cover for a member on vacation.
- So far, this fiscal year we have had to spend \$89,483.19 from the fire budget and \$18,751.38 from the ambulance budget covering vacations.
- An additional \$13,932.17 has been used from the ambulance budget to cover a resignation.
- We have not been fully staffed since March 11, 2017.
- Our ambulance has been out of service 11.5 days since July 1st.
- We have averaged 111.6 transports per month or 3.6 per day.
- I estimate we lost approximately 41 ~~trans~~ transports while the ambulance was out of service.

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- On January 3, 2018 we passed our ambulance re-licensing inspection from the state. We are now licensed for two years.
- The purchase of a new ambulance now before the Council would allow us to use the existing ambulance as a back-up for those times the new one needs service or has to transport out of town. We would be able to capture those transports we have missed as listed above.
- There has been some discussion among Councilors that our ambulance service is a failure. I feel that nothing is further from the truth.
- In the first six months of the fiscal year, we have generated \$261,974.23.
- If we continue the same trend, we will generate \$523,948.46. This is \$2,470.54 less than budgeted.
- While we would hope in the future to bring in at least enough to break even, and hopefully more, I don't in any way view this project as a failure. Even if we were to come out at ten times that amount, or \$24,700.00, we are getting 8 firefighters salary and benefits for less than half the cost of one. I don't view that as a fail. On another than financial view of things, I feel we are also providing a much more seamless, and better, delivery of EMS services to the city.
- I have requested \$40, 960.79 from the Mayor to replace the pump on Engine 1. Engine 1 is our primary pumper. It is currently out of service due to a pump leak which has caused damage to the gear box. It cannot be used until repaired. It is imperative we get Engine 1 back in service as soon as possible, however our pump repair specialist has told me it will take approximately two months to get the pump delivered.

Councillor Gravel questioned if any of the EMTs assigned to the Ambulance are able to fill in for our regular firefighters.

Chief Ares responded and said that all are considered firefighters.

- The biggest drive with the overtime budget is because they are down 5 positions.
- When they are fully staffed, there are 9 people on shift. The minimum is 8 and there are 4 shifts. If someone is on vacation, there is no overtime to fill that slot. Unfortunately, being down 5 positions, none of the shifts have 9 guys. Anytime someone is on vacation, that slot needs to be filled with overtime.
- 4 out of the 5 guys that they hired last September of 2016 have resigned and gone elsewhere. Had a retirement last week, and another one coming up in a few weeks.
- The reason for all the overtime is because we don't have enough bodies to cover a shift.

Councillor Hardern questioned the reasons for the resignations.

Chief Ares said that the majority of resignations are for financial reasons. The GFD does not have new employees sign a document that states that if they leave within 2 years, that they have to pay back the City's expenses for physicals, PAT, or psychological exams. He said that there is nothing that the City can do to prevent Firefighters from leaving.

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IV. **#9873 An Order Appropriating \$245,000.00 from Free Cash to Fire/EMT Department – New Vehicle.**

Chief Ares stated that project started with purchasing a used Ambulance from Westminster.

- The price has gone up \$10,000.00 after December 31 of 2017 to \$255,000.00 for a new one.
- The used ambulance they purchased from Westminster was only \$8,000.00, then an additional \$25,000.00 for equipment.
- Before transportation started, they had to spend \$12,000.00 for the engine. Since then, had to spend another \$8,000.00 for repair. It was still cheaper than having to purchase a new ambulance.
- It was planned with the mayor that after a year, they had hoped to purchase a new one and use the other one as a reserved backup.
- Everyone on the shift are considered firefighter. On a shift, there's a lieutenant, a firefighter on the car, 2 firefighters on an engine, 2 firefighters on the ambulance, 1 firefighter on the tower, and one in dispatch.
- If the ambulance is out of service on a shift, one firefighter will work on the tower, the other goes on the engine.
- Once the department has a full staff, hopefully by October, there will be a decrease in overtime expenditures, as long as no one's resigns, leaves or gets hurt.
- It takes up to 6 months to receive a new ambulance once the order has been placed. Payment is due when ambulance is delivered.

Councillor Hardern stated that if we have the Free Cash for an ambulance, we should use it rather than take out a loan and pay interest.

Councillor Gravel stated that he's not in favor of borrowing, but that Free Cash should be used.

Motion made by Councillor Hardern, seconded by Councillor Gravel, all in favor to approve an order appropriating \$245,000.00 of Free Cash to Fire/EMT Department – New Vehicle, with an amendment to \$255,000.00.

V. **Discussion of Special Stabilization Fund for Fire Department Vehicles.**

Councillor Johnson is in favor of the new ambulance and using Free Cash to purchase a new one. He is also in favor of setting up a stabilization account so that if and when the new ambulance system starts to produce revenue, then an enterprise fund can be used for other things and not just for the ambulance account. He would like to prompt the

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Mayor about setting up this specific account. It could be used for other things such as dispatch, Fire Department, equipment, repairs, and vehicles. Would like to table this discussion for now.

Councillor Graves believes this stabilization fund needs to be set up from the Executive Branch.

VI. Other Business - Police Chief Erickson update.

Chief Erickson stated that they couldn't replace the vehicles. Had to refurbish engines because of budget constraints.

- There were about 7 cars that were refurbished.
- They try to receive 2 vehicles one year, and 3 every other year, works good for their fleet.
- There is a \$12,000.00, 5-year agreement, for maintenance program. It saves the city \$5,000.00 over 5 years. One year is \$3,400, two years is \$8,000.00, and a little over \$12,000.00 for 5 years.
- Getting upgrades to security system.
- Grant to join with fire department dispatch and enhancing their security system.
- 3 in Police Academy and will graduate April 10th. They will be ready to work on the streets mid-June, after field training.

Adjournment.

On a motion Councillor Gravel and seconded by Karen Hardern, it was voted to adjourn at 7:32 p.m.