

## **PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

9:00 a.m., Thursday, August 1, 2013

The regular meeting of the Personnel Committee was held at 9:00 a.m., Thursday, August 1, 2013 in the City Hall Conference Room, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Councilmember Bettelli and Stone, Chair Thomas, Assistant to the Administrator Dziuban and City Clerk Copeland; a quorum was present to conduct business.

1. Chair Thomas called the meeting to order and acknowledged that the press and public had been duly notified of the meeting in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

### **2. Approval of Previous Meetings' Minutes**

**MOTION:** Councilmember Stone moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of May 7, 2013 and the Special Meeting of July 22, 2013 as submitted; Councilmember Bettelli seconded and the motion **PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. **Citizens' Comments** – None

4. **Old Business** – None

5. **New Business**

#### **A. Commendation for Fire Department Personnel**

Fire Chief Ann Graham read into the minutes the circumstances of June 30, 2013 that led to the commendations being awarded today; a copy of her comments is attached to the historical record of the meeting. She further explained that recognition for their actions is being made at the Personnel Committee today because today is the last day of IOP employment for one (1) recipient. The Fire Department personnel who were recognized received a standing ovation from the members of the Committee and fellow firefighters who were present. Captain Roger Eagle, Firefighters Dana McLoughlin and Tyler Richardson, Engineers Dana Burnette, Chris Puckhaber, Trevor Speelman and Chris Fassos and Paramedic Greg Samuelson were awarded Meritorious Team Commendations for their actions, and, additionally, Dana McLoughlin and Tyler Richardson were awarded Meritorious Act of Valor plaques for their actions.

Councilmember Stone thanked not only the personnel who were recognized at the meeting, but all of the fire personnel who were present for the job they do to protect the residents and visitors of the Isle of Palms.

#### **B. Discussion of Staffing in the Fire Department**

Assistant Dziuban explained that this subject was initially discussed in the Public Safety Committee and that Chief Graham had been urged to make a presentation to the Personnel Committee to begin the process to effect changes.

Chief Graham recalled that, when the presentation was made on the Quick Response Vehicle (QRV), she had pointed out that a shift for the Isle of Palms is made up of nine (9) personnel – four (4) at Station 2 and five (5) at Station 1. The Chief reported that a strain is placed on personnel at Station 2 who are required to multi-task more than Station 1 personnel; the level of

multi-tasking has led to a sense that personnel are less safe than those at Station 1. Personnel at larger departments, like the City of Charleston, North Charleston and West Ashley, are highly specialized in their job responsibilities, i.e. Hazmat, firefighter, water rescuer, EMT, etc; the IOP personnel have to serve in whatever capacity the call requires. According to NFPA standards, the IOP Fire Department is understaffed, but Chief Graham does not believe that staffing at those maximum levels would improve the safety of the island's residents or visitors. The Chief stated that she would like to see three (3) additional firefighters, one (1) per shift, to be hired for Station 2; in her opinion, that addition will take much of the strain off Station 2.

Councilmember Stone noted that the residents of the island get an insurance rate reduction based on the Fire Department's ISO rating; he asked if adding personnel would improve the island's ISO rating. He indicated that the residents would favorably view the additional personnel costs if they were to see their insurance rates decrease as a result. Chief Graham stated that she does not see that happening based on increasing personnel; the City's current rating is three (3) on a scale of one to ten (1-10) with one (1) being the best.

According to the Chief, the wear-and-tear on the ladder truck at Station 2 would be reduced, because the Captain could now ride in the pickup truck to assist with a medical call, and the added safety factor for personnel would also reduce the amount of time lost from work if someone is injured.

According to national standards, fifteen (15) personnel should respond to a J.C. Long-type structure fire; Isle of Palms' fire responds with nine (9). With the elevated houses on the island, there is an excessive overhead hazard which increases the number of firefighters expected to respond; excessive square footage increases the number needed even more.

Chief Graham stated, "We have some exceptional personnel which we are losing at a very rapid rate." She indicated that one (1) reason the Department is not keeping personnel is the safety factor, and, as the surrounding departments become more and more safe, IOP personnel are being drawn away.

The second issue that is causing fire personnel to seek employment elsewhere is the fact that the City's pay scale is not keeping up with surrounding local governments, and, where in the past the City could attract personnel from other local departments, those local departments are now recruiting our trained personnel with higher wages. Captain Jason Smith reported that City's entry level pay for a firefighter today is the same as the hourly wage of a firefighter that was hired eighteen (18) months ago and has seven (7) years of field experience. Chief Graham noted that, in many cases, the merit increase may not be equal to the increase in the cost of living for any given year.

Councilmember Stone noted that Council has approved a merit pool of three percent (3%) for the past several years and was under the impression that all employees were getting a three percent (3%) increase. Assistant Dziuban explained that Treasurer Suggs calculates three percent (3%) of a department's salary budget; the figure is communicated to the department manager, who then distributes that amount to the department's personnel as he/she deems appropriate.

The fiscal impact of adding three (3) firefighters, one (1) per shift, for Station 2 will be one hundred twenty-two thousand dollars (\$122,000) including benefits and an additional nine thousand dollars (\$9,000) for their gear for a total of one hundred thirty-one thousand dollars (\$131,000). To fully train a firefighter fresh out of the fire academy in real life firefighting, medical training and water rescues takes about three (3) years according to Captain Smith; at this moment, the City does not have a firefighter than has hit that three-year (3 yr.) benchmark.

Chief Graham stated that she believes that the City has been very fortunate with the new firefighters that have been hired; the concern now is how to keep them here.

Assistant Dziuban summarized the discussion by stating that the Fire Department has presented two (2) issues to the Committee; they are the need for one (1) additional firefighter per shift for Station 2 and the need for wage equity with neighboring municipalities. They will be coming before the Committee in future months with specific requests.

### **C. Discussion of 2014 Appointments to Boards and Commissions**

Assistant Dziuban reported that the advertisement for 2014 appointments to boards and commissions has appeared in both *The Island Eye* and *The Moultrie News*, and the notice has been added to the City's website. Included in the meeting packet was the list of boards and commissions members with the expiring terms noted in red; the ATAX Committee has four (4) expiring terms, the Board of Zoning Appeals and Code Board of Appeals each have two (2) expiring terms and the Planning Commission has three (3) expiring terms. The Assistant noted that all members with expiring terms have been asked whether they are willing to be considered for reappointment, and the people who are in the candidate pool have been asked whether they want to remain in the pool for consideration for 2014. Applications will be accepted through the month of August; if the response is less than desired, the time can be extended. Dates for interviews with new applicants will be discussed at the September meeting.

### **6. Miscellaneous Business**

**Next Meeting Date: 9:00 a.m., Thursday, September 5, 2013 in the Conference Room.**

**7. Executive Session – not needed**

**8. Adjourn**

**MOTION: Councilmember Bettelli moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:01 a.m.; Councilmember Stone seconded and the MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Respectfully submitted:

Marie B. Copeland  
City Clerk