

NMFR Joint Finance & Personnel Committee Meeting Minutes
October 27, 2020 – 5:30 p.m.
Virtual Meeting

Present: Ald. Borchardt, Ald. Grade, Ald. Sevenich, Ald. Boyette, Ald. Stevenson and Ald. Ropella.

Also Present: Chief Kloehn, DC Voss, Director Easker, Director Sassman and MA Ellis

Public: Amos Mikkelson, Ald. Nichols, Deputy Chief Voss and Director Kehl

Ald. Boyette called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

Public Forum: Ald. Nichols said hello to the group.

Minutes: The Committee reviewed the October 6, 2020. Ald. Sevenich noted one correction for the minutes. **MSC Sevenich/Grade approve the October 6, 2020, with the correction, all voting aye.**

Ald. Ropella joined the meeting at 5:36 p.m.

Activity Report: The Committee reviewed the September activity report. **MSC Ald. Stevenson/Sevenich to approve the September activity report, and place on file, all voting aye.**

Assistant Chief/Fire Marshal Position: The Committee reviewed the information from Chief Kloehn for consideration of filling the vacant Assistant Chief/Fire Marshal position. Chief Kloehn reviewed the job duties on this position. He also noted other departments in our area have this split between two different positions. One Assistant Chief and one Fire Marshal. Our department is the only one that has both positions into one. The average salary for the Fire Marshal position is in the \$80,000. The salary range starts at \$10,000 less than what the previous person in this position made. However, the salary is negotiable. Chief Kloehn reviewed the statistical data and explained how this has grown since the merger. Information included inspections, public education, plan reviews, etc. Chief Kloehn noted if there is a request to eliminate this position from the department he didn't know what process would need to be taken with the merger agreement in place. Both City Attorneys would need to be consulted.

Ald. Borchardt asked if this position was two positions or one at the time of the merger. Chief Kloehn noted that this was one position at the merger. Ald. Borchardt asked if there has been discussion on splitting this position into two positions due to the increased duties this position has taken on over the years. Chief Kloehn said they have looked at adding a position for the Management Team. We try to adapt with what we have and feels this can be done with one person. However, he doesn't feel eliminating this position is the right thing for the department due to the amount of work that is done with this position and with the upcoming turnover next year. Managing without this position, and having up to 10 new firefighters who need to be trained in inspections, prevention, etc., would be extremely difficult.

Ald. Grade asked if this was a union position. Chief Kloehn said it isn't. It's a non-union, management position. Ald. Grade feels this is a key position for both Cities to have and is not looking to eliminate this

position due to the intangibles and what the need is in the future, especially with this being a job that covers two cities. The proposed 2021 budget is only a 1% increase. He thanked Chief Kloehn for his efforts and feels we can work something out with replacing this position.

Ald. Sevenich said at the last Menasha Council Meeting, Ald. Taylor felt this position should be eliminated and consolidated with the Deputy Chief's position. He said there are members on the Menasha Council that feel there should be further study on this and not jump into filling this position. He said we should check with the City Attorneys but if one Council says yes and one says no then we stick with what we have.

Ald. Ropella said he appreciates Chief Kloehn's work on this. He feels the duties from this position should be split between the three remaining chiefs and feels they should have learned something over the years on how to do his job and it will save money. If we replace this position it will cost more money.

Discussion was held on the table of organization of the department. Ald. Stevenson said according to the organizational chart there is one Chief, one Deputy and two Assistant Chief Positions. Exhibit A of the original merger agreement shows an organizational chart of one Chief and three Deputy Chiefs. To say this organizational chart was not reviewed is untrue as it was reviewed at least 10 years ago where it was changed to one Chief, one Deputy Chief, one Assistant Chief/Fire Marshal and a second Assistant Chief. He is supportive in keeping this position as we will see savings in the next few years with turnover of firefighters who will be hired at a lesser pay and we will need this position to train new firefighters. It's one thing to say I want to eliminate a position. It's another thing to say that and state how the duties should be divided up and what the ramifications are. Ald. Sevenich said he agreed with Ald. Stevenson and said this was one Alderman in Menasha who didn't attend this meeting to find out more information but appreciates Ald. Nichols attending this meeting to hear the information.

Ald. Boyette feels Ald. Taylor is late to the game on trying to do this. She appreciates his thoughts but this should have been looked at earlier before the budgets so it was in place for when a retirement happens. For future, she thinks a plan should be put together to plan for upcoming retirements in the administrative positions. That way we can see the impact of the department and services if we do not replace these positions. She is all about cutting costs but doesn't agree with cutting this position without doing research on how this affects the department's services, can existing staff handle the additional responsibilities, etc.

Ald. Ropella said he agrees with Ald. Boyette and felt they are stuck between a rock and hard place. He feels this may have been by design by doing this in October, versus when the budgets started, and is forcing us to approve this position versus doing due diligence. Ald. Boyette said it's also the Committee's fault for not doing diligence in planning ahead of time. Chief Kloehn said this wasn't done at the last minute by design. AC Green only gave us two weeks' notice of his retirement. He had no idea this was happening when budget planning began. Ald. Grade said he agrees with Chief Kloehn that you cannot speculate on what ifs. You can't ask for a replacement with a position until someone actually gives notice.

Ald. Borchardt asked what the responsibilities of this committee were. He said this is Chief Kloehn's budget and we have to trust him on what the department needs and we have to trust that he is doing what is needed. Ald. Sevenich asked if there was a job description for this position and asked that be shared. He said he feels more time needs to be spent on this but agrees with Ald. Borchardt and that this

is Chief Kloehn's department and his job to manage the department and will respect him for that. He has to do his job to see if there is a way for the taxpayers to save money.

Chief Kloehn noted each City receives 2% dues from the State of Wisconsin. Per the State's requirements, this money has to be used towards public education, public safety, a Fire Marshal position, fire related equipment, etc. Neenah receives \$94,000 and Menasha receives \$50,000.

Ald. Stevenson said the comment about being manipulated into approving this position was not appropriate. He did his diligence in researching the replacement of this position before the meeting by talking to the Chief, Mayor Kaufert and AC Green before he left. There was no motivation by AC Green to manipulate anyone with only a two weeks' notice. Implication that this was a staged thing is not the case. Per the merger agreement, the role of this committee is the oversight of the day-to-day operations and budgetary matters. They shall review budgetary issues, labor contracts, position vacancies, proposed new positions, capital outlay items and expenses of \$5,000 or more and make recommendations to both Common Councils of the Cities of Neenah and Menasha. Recommendations of the Joint Finance & Personnel Committee shall be acted upon separately by the common councils of both Neenah and Menasha and shall be effective only upon concurrence of both councils. If we look back, the organizational chart has been changed since the merger and this was changed years ago from three Deputy Chief Positions to one Deputy Chief and two Assistant Chief Positions to better utilize the management dollars that were being allocated to the department. We have had ongoing review of management structure within the fire department. It's been done at least once since the merger and its working. We have responsible management and operational leadership and if we are going to investigate opportunities to improve efficiencies there are other ways to do this. We are in a unique situation with the number of new firefighters and the amount of time we were given for retirement from Vern. We have a lot of new people coming on board over the next three years. If we are going to investigate how to stream line and be more efficient it would take months to do. It's easy to just say cut a position but you have to look at what it will look at when it's done and how it affects services to both cities. Ald. Sevenich requested a roll call vote for this. He then asked Chief Kloehn if we will have a difficult time finding someone to replace this position or does he feel confident we will have someone in house. Chief Kloehn said he feels there is a potential of 4-5 in-house candidates and hopefully can fill this with either an internal or external candidate. Ald. Grade said he wants to echo Ald. Borchardt and Ald. Stevenson's comments that Chief Kloehn has done an excellent job managing the department. We could look at the organizational chart in the future but we continue to stay in line with the budget and is happy how things are working here. **Motion made by Ald. Stevenson, Seconded by Ald. Grade recommends the City of Neenah and City of Menasha Common Councils approve filling the vacate Assistant Chief Prevention/Fire Marshal position, motion carried on roll call vote,**

Proposed budget for 2021: The Committee reviewed the information regarding the proposed 2021 budget. Chief Kloehn reviewed the budget cuts that were made by both Mayors and Finance Directors. The total increase for 2021 budget is 1.09% with salaries being the largest portion of the budget.

Motion made by Sevenich, Seconded by Grade recommend the City of Menasha Common Council approve NMFR proposed 2021 budget as presented.

Discussion was held one if one motion could be done for both cities or if two motions were needed. Ald. Stevenson noted that this Committee has always only done one motion for both councils.

Motion made by Stevenson seconded by Borchardt to amend the motion to include the City of Neenah Common Council in original motion, all voting aye by voice vote.

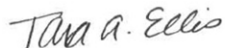
Original Motion carried as amended, all voting aye by voice vote.

Ald. Grade asked Chief Kloehn about the number of upcoming retirements. He said when someone retires, and we wait to fill the position, we will have overtime and asked if he was comfortable with this budget. Chief Kloehn said he is and does feel we have to figure out the timeline of the retirements and the recruit class and hiring as the retirements will space from January through June.

Ald. Ropella asked if there was thought on replacing with paid on call. Chief Kloehn said there is no thought on replacing full-time positions with paid on call. He noted neighboring departments who have this model cannot get people to apply and work in these positions. People have full-time jobs and employers will not allow people to leave work to respond to EMS and/or fire calls. In addition to full-time jobs, people have families, they are busy, and will have a hard time fulfilling the average of 120 hours of training each of our firefighters complete every year to maintain their skills. Grand Chute was a paid on call department and is now a full-time career department. This change was made as they couldn't get staffing. Fox Crossing is slowly implementing to a full-time career department as they cannot get staffing. Rural departments who only respond to 100 calls a year can do this. However, we average over 3,000 calls per year. If we did this we will not be able to get staffing and this will have an effect on the high quality of service we provide. In addition, there are a couple of departments in the state who closed and no longer provide service as there are no people to fill these paid on call positions. He continues to have conversations with neighboring departments to see if there is a way we can work together but it won't work unless both departments are full-time. Ald. Ropella asked if we have a hard time coming up with recruits. Chief Kloehn said there was an increase of applications this year.

MSC Sevenich/Stevenson to adjourn at 6:35 p.m. all voting aye.

Respectfully Submitted,



Tara Ellis
Management Assistant