

February 17, 2021

Personnel Committee Meeting

February 17, 2021

4:00 p.m.

Remote Meeting – Go to Meeting

Members Present:

Chair Joan Chamberland

Reed Hillman

Joni Light

Mary Blanchard

Absent:

Sarah Terwilliger

Staff Present:

Jeff Bridges, Town Administrator

Chief Grasso, Fire Department

Mr. Bridges read the following statement: Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting law, G.L. c. 30A Section 18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Sturbridge Personnel Committee will be conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. Specific information and the general guidelines for remote participation can be found on the Town's website at <https://www.sturbridge.gov/town-administrator/pages/how-access-virtual-meeting>. For this meeting, members of the public who wish to listen and or watch the meeting either online via the Town's on demand video broadcast, on cable television on channel 191, or dial into the meeting at 774-304-1455, enter 1428# for the meeting number and 12345 for the access code. (This phone number is only active for the public during public meetings). No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted, but every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings in real time, via technological means. In the event that we are unable to do so, despite best efforts, we will post on the Town's website an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of the proceedings as soon as possible after the meeting.

Chair Chamberland called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Motion: To approve the minutes of December 28, 2020 as written.

By: Mary Blanchard

2nd: Reed Hillman

Roll Call Vote: Joan Chamberland: ABSTAINED, Reed Hillman: YES, Joni Light: YES, Mary Blanchard: YES, Sarah Terwilliger: ABSENT

Vote: 3-0 (Chair Chamberland abstained, Ms. Terwilliger absent)

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Continued discussion: Deputy Chief Position in the Sturbridge Fire Department

Mr. Bridges said that this a continued discussion from their last meeting in December providing employment for a non-union position in the Fire Department that would serve not only as a Deputy Chief, but also the Fire Inspector, Plan Reviewer, and Training Officer. Mr. Bridges said it would provide Chief Grasso with a second in command and provides the town with a professional Fire Inspector and Plan Reviewer which is an important part of the department.

Chief Grasso brought forward a few important highlights such as saying a Lieutenant in the Fire Department is an entry level supervisor and he stated that currently there is no one qualified to take his place. Chief Grasso explained how when he tested positive for COVID-19 on January 14, 2021, he was out of work for 10 days and there was no one there to take his place while he was re-cooperating as the Lieutenants are not qualified to step in the Chief's place in his absence. Chief Grasso said that the plan for the position is to become the Officer and Fire Inspector. Per Chief Grasso, he currently has one Lieutenant who is qualified for the inspections but that employee intends to retire in July 2021 and once that happens he will not have a certified Fire Inspector. Chief Grasso said the educational requirements the position of the Deputy Fire Chief will be a Bachelor's of Science Degree and preferably a Master's Degree, Fire Officer 2 certification, Fire Instructor 2 certification, and Fire Inspector 2 certification.

Chair Chamberland asked if Chief Grasso will be replacing a Lieutenant when the Lieutenant retires in July and Chief Grasso confirmed. Ms. Blanchard said in the past, the Board of Selectmen instructed the Fire Department to have more than one qualified instructor which did not happen and was she expressed concerned about the cost for a job that overlaps with the Lieutenant. Ms. Blanchard stated that she prefers to see a full-time Firefighter/EMT hired over a Deputy Chief. Chair Chamberland agreed that budget wise, it would be more beneficial to hire a few more Firefighters and asked the Chief how many times the town has had to call mutual aid because the town has such a small department and eliminated many call firefighters. Mr. Bridges said it is important to address that fact that come July, the town will not have a certified Fire Inspector. Chief Grasso stated in the Calendar Year of 2020, they called for mutual aid 70 times and provided mutual aid 108 times.

Mr. Hillman asked if Chief Grasso plans on hiring outsiders or giving the employees within the department an opportunity to apply to the position. Chief Grasso said he would give internal candidates the opportunity to apply but based on the job description of the position, there are no internal candidates that meet the minimum qualifications. Chief Grasso said last year, all of the Massachusetts Fire Academy training classes were bumped, so there were no training opportunities available. Ms. Light asked how quickly the process could be before July. Chief Grasso said if the Personnel Committee/Board of Selectmen approves it, he would leave the position open for two weeks and then start the interviews from there, anticipating a two month timeframe. Ms. Light expressed concern that there would not be enough time for overlap training with the current employee retiring but Chief Grasso said there would be opportunities with the Massachusetts Fire Academy training and the Building Officer and Fire Instructor who would be able to provide guidance.

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Chief Grasso stated that there would be a decrease in the budget because the new Lieutenant would start at the lowest pay grade as a Lieutenant and would be making less than Lieutenant Marinelli (the current employee who is set to retire in July) was making. Ms. Blanchard asked if there was a survey on what a Deputy Chief's position pays and Chief Grasso stated that in 2018, the salary range was \$62,000 – \$88,700 for a Deputy Fire Chief. Ms. Blanchard stated that he proposed a salary of \$90,000 for this position and Chief Grasso said it would be difficult to justify paying a Deputy Fire Chief less than what he is paying a Private since he has Senior Firefighters who are making \$83,000 a year.

Mr. Hillman asked if this new position will respond to 9-1-1 calls and asked if he would be looking at more positions and more money. Chief Grasso said one of the requirements for this new position is that they are an active Firefighter with the Town's Fire Department. Per Chief Grasso, the Deputy Chief would be expected to do the appropriate action based on their job description if a fire occurred. Chief Grasso said there is currently no one in the Fire Department who is interested in performing these functions and the only other option would be to negotiate with the union, separate this position from the Fire Department, and make it an appointed position by the Town Administrator.

Mr. Bridges stated the importance of this position and how it would be helpful to both the Fire and Police Departments and asked the Personnel Committee to consider the position.

Motion: Accept the position of the Deputy Chief in the Fire Department.

By: Ms. Light

2nd: Mr. Hillman

Roll Call Vote: Joan Chamberland: ABSTAINED, Reed Hillman: YES, Joni Light: YES, Mary Blanchard: NO, Sarah Terwilliger: ABSENT

Vote: 2-1-1 (Chair Chamberland abstained, Ms. Terwilliger absent)

Chair Chamberland explained that she abstained from the motion because she has a history with the Fire Department with her husband who is a retired call Firefighter and has concerns about the budget. Mr. Bridges expressed concern with the failed motion and asked Chair Chamberland her advice on what to do on this issue since he needs an Inspector come July 1. Chair Chamberland suggested replacing the Lieutenant and to get another Firefighter since Sturbridge is low in these companies. Mr. Bridges asked if he should put a Fire Inspector in the Town Administrators budget. Ms. Blanchard said Chair Chamberland does not have to abstain since there is no conflict of interest for Chair Chamberland's past experience with the Fire Department.

Ms. Blanchard suggested continuing this until they have a five-member Board present. Ms. Light mentioned that it was her understanding that if the Fire Department cannot fund it, that it could go under the Town Administrator's budget. Chief Grasso clarified that it will cost the town more money to go under the Town Administrator's budget since he will have to fill the Private spot that is open now and pay that salary as well as Mr. Bridges paying the salary of the Fire Inspector. Chair Blanchard said regarding the vote, you do need a majority and in this case, you need 3 votes since abstention is not a vote.

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Chair Chamberland expressed reservations about Chief Grasso's stated directions, responsibilities, and essential duties but in the interest of trying to keep with state laws, changed her vote to yes.

Ms. Light withdrew her original motion.

Motion: Accept the description as written and to vote yes for the position of Deputy Fire Chief including the acceptance of the description.

By: Ms. Light

2nd: Mr. Hillman

Roll Call Vote: Joan Chamberland: YES, Reed Hillman: YES, Joni Light: YES, Mary Blanchard: NO, Sarah Terwilliger: ABSENT

Vote: 3-1 (Ms. Terwilliger absent)

Ms. Blanchard asked if Chief Grasso could email the pay range and a list of communities where he got the numbers from and Chief Grasso confirmed.

Discussion: Adjustments to the proposed salary plan

Mr. Bridges said as the Town works towards implementing the new pay plan, one of the main goals of this process was to look at the employee with a salary and move them away from a grade-and-step plan and back to a merit-based plan. Mr. Bridges said the concern is grades 7 and 8, which are the middle managers and technical people who historically been on salary. Per Mr. Bridges, the Town would like to keep the employees in grades 7 and 8 on a grade-and-step plan and have the 9's, 10's, and 11's move to a merit-based plan. Ms. Blanchard asked Mr. Bridges if he foresees any slack by having two compensation plans. Mr. Bridges said no, for he has already spoken with most of the employees in Grade 11, the Chiefs and Lieutenants have their own separate contract, and the Library Director does whatever the Library Board decides. Mr. Bridges said several employees in grades 7 and 8 were hired under the step-and-grade plan.

Mr. Bridges said the Town created a blended plan and that the consultant worked out the numbers and said the Town is providing internal equity amongst the employees between those two systems. Mr. Bridges encouraged all of the policy makers that once this is adopted, to be untouched for at least five years.

Mr. Bridges said under the Personnel rules, the Personnel Committee adopts pay plans and the plan that the committee endorsed from the consultant prior, included employees in grades 7 and 8 in the merit-based plan similar to the employees in grades 11, 10, and 9. Mr. Bridges asked the Personnel Committee if they would amend their endorsement to allow for grades 7 and 8 to remain in a grading-and-step plan in the pay plan.

Motion: Take the folks in grades 7 and 8 and put them in a step-and-grade plan that Mr. Bridges is advocating.

By: Reed Hillman

2nd: Ms. Blanchard

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Roll Call Vote: Joan Chamberland: YES, Reed Hillman: YES, Joni Light: YES, Mary Blanchard: YES, Sarah Terwilliger: ABSENT
Vote: 4-0 (Ms. Terwilliger absent)

Other Business

NONE.

Motion: Motion to adjourn at 5:01 p.m.

By: Ms. Blanchard

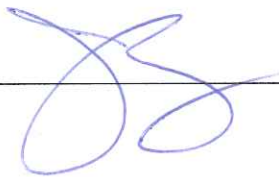
2nd: Reed Hillman

Roll Call Vote: Joan Chamberland: YES, Reed Hillman: YES, Joni Light: YES, Mary Blanchard: YES, Sarah Terwilliger: YES

Vote: 4-0 (Ms. Terwilliger absent)

Minutes prepared by: Alex McConnon

Signed: _____



Date approved: March 24, 2021