

MANAGER’S CONFERENCE MINUTES
Portsmouth City Council Meeting on
September 23, 2019 – 7:32 p.m.

Members present:

Sean Dunne	1 st Ward
Charlotte Gordon	2 nd Ward
Kevin E. Johnson	3 rd Ward
Jerrold Albrecht	4 th Ward
Gene Meadows	5 th Ward (Absent)
Thomas K. Lowe	6 th Ward

Also present was City Manager Sam Sutherland, Solicitor John Haas, Auditor M. Trent Williams and City Clerk Diana Ratliff.

1. **Floodwall Project Resolution** **CM-19-67**

Removed item and added to City Council Agenda due to time restraints.

2. **Utility Rate Study** **CM-19-68**

Manager Sutherland asked Council if they would like to move forward with the utility rate study and if so, he requested to authorize legislation for the funding, this would be for storm water fees and utility rates. He said that over the past 30 years whether to raise the rates had been based on political decisions and the city needed to move away from that mentality. He added that this would allow an extra set of eyes looking at the rates to get us where we need to be.

Councilman Lowe motioned to adopt alternative #1 and move forward with the study.

There were no questions or comments: **VOTE: 5 Ayes – 0 Nays**

3. **Seasonal Help Leaf Control** **CM-19-69**

Manager Sutherland requested two additional seasonal workers to help with the leaf control this fall because this was the time of year when employees take vacation, deer hunt etc. These two extra people would help keep leaf pick up on schedule. Acting Mayor Johnson asked how long they would be working, Mr. Sutherland stated that it equaled out to be around 500 hours each. He added that the main thing they would be working on was leaf pick up but they could be used in other areas if the need arose to cover other employees’ vacations.

Councilman Meadows moved to adopt alternative #1.

There were no questions or comments: **VOTE: 5 Ayes – 0 Nays**

4. **Parks & Recreation position** **Discussion**

Councilman Dunne stated that he had narrowed down the diversity of tasks, the first document was kind of like a department and was not more specific. He spoke about trying to coordinate different sports camps and tournaments in Portsmouth, and believed that they could partner with Shawnee State University for them to run tournaments and camps during the summer break when the coaching staff was not coaching. He said that as a kid he went to a local private high school and they used sport camps to scout for talent in kids as young as 4th grade. This included basketball, tennis and baseball programs, but also for kids like him, he was able to get tips from high school coaches on his jump shot and how to swing a bat. He believed that we have something to offer as a city, where kids could come to these camps and receive tips from college coaches and this would be something that a Parks & Recreation Employee could help provide the over-all logistics. He said with the discussions of catching up salaries with different departments, he wasn’t sure what Council had in mind as a realistic salary for this position. Solicitor Haas suggested that he call

around or email similar sized cities to inquire of the salary that each city pays to their Parks and Recreation employee. Mr. Dunne asked Manager Sutherland if he was able to get the general job description and the average salary if it could go on Council's agenda for a first reading at the next meeting? Acting Mayor Johnson reminded that Manager Sutherland would be doing a salary study while working on the budget to determine whether it's feasible financially. Councilwoman Gordon asked Mr. Dunne if he saw this as an ongoing position or just one annual position, Mr. Dunne replied that it would be ongoing. Mrs. Gordon felt that working it into the annual budget would behoove the chances of the position remaining long-term. Mr. Dunne ask Manager Sutherland if he would have those numbers within the next two week and Mr. Sutherland replied that he hoped to have the budget cranked out very soon. He had a meeting with the State Auditor on Thursday and he will be getting better insight on what they're looking at and should be able to start putting it together so that Council would have the budget by November 15th as the Charter requires.

5. **Accepting SAFER Grant Funds for 6 additional firefighters**

Discussion

He said Chief Raison was present to answer any questions Council may have with regard to adding 6 additional firefighters and being awarded the SAFER (*Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response*) grant funded through FEMA and that they were under a time restraint to either accept it or reject the grant. Acting Mayor Johnson said that it always seemed there was a timing issue.

Chief Raison said that the 30-day stipulation was on all grants and this grant was over \$1,000,000 spread over 3 years. Councilman Dunne asked if the people being hired would receive a 3-year contract or if there were stipulations as to what happens when the money runs out. Chief Raison said that nobody gets a contract because Council could decide tomorrow to cut staffing in the Fire Department and people would be laid off. The grant pays 75% for the first and second years and then 35% the third year and after that the responsibility would fall on the city. He commented that in the email he sent, it detailed the cost for 6 employees was roughly \$570,000 per year. He reviewed with Council the staffing restraints as they pass off an estimate of 1,000 calls per year because they could not cover the staff. He said the average cost per run was \$227.00 which meant they were passing up potentially \$100,000 in revenue, as well as better emergency response and service to the community. He said there would be an increase in revenue and believed they would see a reduction in overtime, because the amount of calls coming in was taking a toll on the staff.

He asked Council to look at the call volume before EMS and the call volume now as they were taking on 800 calls per year before EMS and now, they're taking almost 4,000 calls per year. That's a tremendous increase in workload and he felt the staff was taking sick days because they were tired. There would be a cost savings in overtime because currently the overtime was approximately \$250,000 per year which would be an estimated savings in overtime around \$75,000 per year.

The original EMS plan was to increase staffing using the revenue from EMS to cover the cost of increased staffing. He added that at the end of three years once everyone was up and trained and picking up the extras calls, he estimated that it would be cost neutral to the city, if not it would be close and by close he means \$50,000-\$100,000, plus he would have 6 additional people and an increase response capability of emergency services for the community.

Auditor Williams asked about the revenue coming in so far this year, Chief Raison said they were over last year and on track because it had taken time to ramp up Medicaid and Medicare and private insurance processes. He added that they didn't have a good picture of what 12 months looked like last year, but when he did the report it came in around \$374,000.

Councilman Lowe asked about the time restraint and Chief Raison said that FEMA only gave 30 days on their grants. There was more discussion about when they received notification of the grant. Auditor Williams asked about the requirements after the 3rd year, Chief Raison said there were no requirements and the worst case scenario was that after the 3rd year, if Council felt they can't financially afford the extra employees, they could probably be attrition them out, because over the next 5 years there will probably be 8 retirements. Mr. Lowe said that it was our obligation to protect the citizens.

Acting Mayor Johnson asked about the Charter requirement of 44 firefighters, Chief Raison stated that have 38 uniformed firefighters plus an Administrative Assistant, so 39 employees in the Fire Department

and 6 would put them at 45 employees. Mr. Lowe asked about Dispatch and Chief Raison stated that in his mind Dispatch was a separate entity, albeit a very valuable entity. Historically the City of Portsmouth had used Dispatch in the Fire Departments table of organization to be in compliance with the City Charter. The Chief said he doesn't hire them, supervise them or control their budget, and in his mind they're not part of the Fire Department. Auditor Williams asked if the Fire Department used Dispatch and the reply was "yes" and that it could be argued that they were part of the Fire and Police Departments. Chief Raison added that when there were extra events around the city such as Riverdays or Winterfest, they don't have the resources.

Councilman Dunne asked if they could re-apply after the 3 years for another grant, Chief Raison replied that "yes" they could re-apply but not for the existing fund, it would be to increase again. He said currently there was no avenue for continued funding for existing positions. Manager Sutherland asked if the Fire Department could've asked for less people, Chief Raison replied that he could've asked for less, but was trying to look at what they could do that would achieve what they need to accomplish with their response capabilities. Mr. Johnson stated that by the 3rd year there should be an increase in revenue and a decrease in overtime and it should off-set the extra 65%. Chief Raison said that should be the case, but it takes about a year for the process of hiring employees, trained them to the certification levels, and trained on the how the department operates.

Councilwoman Gordon asked if these people were available within the community, Chief Raison stated that it was difficult to find quality people that want to do what they do, because it's not for everyone. He said that a person had to have a high aptitude for a whole variety of things because there were so many different circumstances. They need people that aren't afraid of the water, or afraid of heights and if you don't like sick/dead/dying people the job isn't for them. Solicitor Haas stated that candidates have to pass the Civil Service Exam.

Manager Sutherland said whether he's sitting in that seat three years from now or someone else, if this doesn't work out, he would hate to see whoever was sitting in that seat get in a struggle with the Unions over layoffs or other situations. He wanted to know if there was a way to emphasize that if the money wasn't there, these additional jobs would have to go away. Financially, if the city cannot meet the 100% number after the 3rd year, he would like to have language in the ordinance to substantiate the dismissals in case it doesn't pan out so that the city doesn't have a big legal issue. Chief Raison said that he believed what Sam wanted was something in writing so that three years from now, he can point to it and say "we told you when we did it, if it's not financially feasible at the end of the grant cycle, that we won't be keeping the positions" and he said that way no one can say they didn't know. He added that he believed that it would be successful or he wouldn't be bringing it up. Auditor Williams asked if the \$1,000,000 was tied to the 6 new employees and he replied "yes"

Councilman Dunne motioned to accept the grant for 3 years with the supplementary financial feasibility language and it will need to be passed as an emergency.

There were no further questions or comments: **VOTE: 5 Ayes – 0 Nays**

Acting Mayor Johnson's advised everyone that the 1st Council meeting in November will be moved because of Veteran's Day and the City Building is closed and due to other scheduling conflicts, the meeting will be on Monday November 18, 2019 and then the normal meeting of November 25th.

The meeting adjourned at 8:06 p.m. on a motion by Councilwoman Lowe.

Submitted by: *Diana Ratliff* – City Clerk