



City of Cambridge

5.

IN CITY COUNCIL

VICE-MAYOR WOLF

JANUARY 25, 1988

ORDERED:

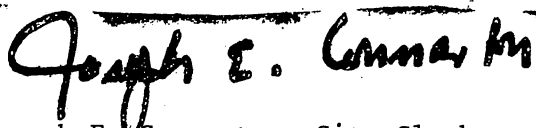
That the attached letter sent to City Councillors with regard to the Fire Alarm operators be referred to the City Manager for a complete report on:

- (1) The function and operation of the Fire Alarm Operators Department.
- (2) Changes that have taken place in working conditions and administration.
- (3) Responses to the charges in the letter.
- (4) Recommendations for dealing with complaints and charges.

In City Council, January 25, 1988.
Adopted by the affirmative vote of 8 members.
Attest:- Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-


Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

This is an open letter to the members of the Cambridge City Council. It is hoped that, after reading what is written here, you will take the appropriate action to bring about effective changes.

The Cambridge Electrical Department should be investigated with regard to their policies and their treatment of employees.

The Fire Alarm Operators (the people who handle 911 calls and dispatch apparatus) operate under this department. The Chief Operator, the City Electrician, and the Fire Chief all appear to have authority over them. Yet there is confusion when an administrative decision is required; someone always has to check with someone else. In addition, the Fire Department does not always share data with the Electrical Department, making the Operators' jobs even more difficult. The Operators claim there is no clear-cut line of authority, and that neither the Electrical Department or the Fire Department has a written manual of procedure.

The department is in continual violation of Article X, Section 2 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. When overtime shifts occur, the department has used randomly selected personnel, and in some cases, the Chief Operator, to fill shifts.

The department continues to garner large sums of money from fees charged to businesses that possess auxiliarized fire alarm systems. Yet for just a few minutes work, a Signal Maintainer receives four hours of pay at the rate of time-and-one-half per hour. Fire Alarm Operators are denied this.

The Electrical Department continues to permit its employees to operate unsafe motor vehicles. These trucks have major defects, such as brakes, engine and transmission, that not only present a threat to the public but a danger to the personnel. In 1980, two new vehicles were purchased by the City for the department's use, but assigned to management.

Since 1987, the Fire Alarm Operators have been subject to abuses in management and welfare. Kitchen and washing facilities have been removed. Heating and air conditioning were maintained only after the Department was ordered to do so by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Telephone and radio systems continue to function on a day-to-day basis, despite the on-going construction of a new multi-million dollar emergency dispatch center.

This center, incidentally, is six weeks behind scheduled completion. Fire Alarm Operators have received no training in theory or operation of the new equipment. A new IBM computer system was installed for the operators' use, but was then removed by the Chief Operator after complaints by two men that the device was detrimental to the function of the office.

The Chief Operator, Tom Cahill, was installed in his position formally by City Manager Robert Healy in 1985.

This, despite repeated claims by departmental employees and others, that he was and is unfit for the job. A request by departmental employees for a Civil Service examination to fill the position was refused. Mr. Cahill now connects himself less and less with the day-to-day operations of the Fire Alarm Office, and more with the administration of the auxiliarized box system. This job should be done by Fred O'Connor, the Day Superintendent.

Mr. Cahill has also taken overtime pay for restoring disconnected auxiliarized fire alarm systems; this is a job for Signal Maintainers. He has also used himself as an operator on day shifts when an operator was out sick, on vacation or administrative leave. He is required to call back an operator for this shift. As a management person, he is not permitted to fill such a shift himself.

The Fire Alarm Operators enjoy few of the benefits received by other city employees. There is no education incentive, no night or weekend differential, no seniority classification.

The paid holiday plan is less than that received by the rest of the city employees.

There is no Senior Operator. Operators are left to decide between themselves what action to take at a given incident.

Both operators on a shift share the responsibility for a good or bad decision. The City does not provide Fire Alarm Operators with any formal training. As a result, the quality of service provided by the department varies wildly depending on who is on duty.

The union representing them, Local 195 IPEA, has continually refused to bargain equitably with the Fire Alarm Office; as a result, the Fire Alarm Operators have been continually denied requested benefits and improvements. President Cassidy has been quoted as saying, "We will not slow the progress of achieving a contract simply because it may inconvenience a few members." Because the operators are only ten in number, out of a union of a thousand members, they are not given equivalent representation by the union. This is a violation of Massachusetts Labor Relations law.

There are four openings for new operators in the Fire Alarm Office; they have existed since 1965. Yet the department refuses to hire. There are two provisional operators currently employed, who should have been terminated when the new Operators' Civil Service list came out in 1960. That is required by Civil Service law. Yet these people continue to work, denying work to persons qualified for the jobs.

What can be done to improve these conditions?

1. The Fire Alarm office should be removed from the Electrical department and placed under the Fire Department. This will permit better discipline and encourage better performance, as well as to give the personnel a clear line of authority under which to operate. It will also permit them better union representation under local 30 IAF.
2. The positions of Senior Fire Alarm Operator and Chief Fire Alarm Operator should be filled from a list of persons who successfully pass the appropriate Civil Service examination; these positions are too sensitive to be filled by political appointees. Candidates should be carefully screened, so that only persons with applicable background, training and/or experience can be appointed. The public has a right to be served by people who know what they are doing.
3. Four new Fire Alarm Operators should be immediately hired from the current Civil Service list, and the current provisional operators terminated. Candidates should be screened as outlined above. The City is leaving itself open to legal action if it fails to comply with this.
4. The Fire Alarm Office should be given back its kitchen and sanitation equipment. Heating and air conditioning should be restored to former acceptable levels.
5. Departmental management should be ordered to comply with the Collective Bargaining Agreement by organizing and administering an overtime plan that properly circulates work opportunities among the employees. Signal Maintenance and Electrical workers should be paid for time used to work, not time spent doing nothing.
6. The Chief Fire Alarm Operator should be removed from involvement in the auxiliarized box system, and assigned duties more applicable to the position: the day-to-day supervision of the Fire Alarm Office. If he refuses, he should be terminated. The Chief Operator should also be prohibited from taking overtime pay for restoring auxiliarized boxes; that is a job for Signal Maintenance personnel.
7. A thorough investigation should be commenced to determine and correct

improprieties within the Electrical Department.

If appropriate and corrective action is not taken by you, other agencies will be contacted for their involvement.

Rather than wondering who sent you this letter, you should use the information it contains, and go forward.

Order #5 F-18

VM Wolf order re: that the attached letter sent to City Councillors regarding Fire Alarm operators be referred to the City Manager for a complete report on four items listed in the text of this order.

In City Council,

January 25, 1988

VM Wolf
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