

City of Cambridge

The Committee on Public Safety held a public hearing on February 3, 1993, beginning at 4:35 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber, City Hall, for the purpose of considering police department staff issues and to receive a presentation of the fire study commissioned by City Manager Robert W. Healy. Present at the hearing were: Councillor Myers, Chair of the Committee; Councillor Alice K. Wolf; Councillor Walter J. Sullivan; Councillor Sheila T. Russell; Councillor Timothy J. Toomey, Jr.; City Manager Robert W. Healy; Police Commissioner Perry Anderson; and Fire Chief Kevin Fitzgerald.

Councillor Myers convened the meeting and explained the purpose of the hearing. Councillor Myers said that the FY93 budget allowed for additional staff positions. Staff levels are somewhat below the budgeted level and the committee is interested in an update on this issue.

Councillor Myers then introduced City Manager Robert W. Healy and Police Commissioner Perry Anderson and requested that they present information on the staffing issues. City Manager Healy said that the FY93 budget contemplated the hiring of additional staff and added that the layoffs of police officers in other towns has resulted in the creation of a Civil Service re-employment list. In addition, Cambridge does have a reserve list and there is a resident preference. These are the lists that the Cambridge Police Department will have to work with. That process is underway. There is an expectation that there will be training at the end of April. In addition, as a result of early retirements, there will be additional employment. There will be 31 slots for the April training, then a second training class of seven additional recruits in late June or early July.

Robert Healy said that he and the Police Commissioner have had several discussions about ideal staffing numbers and they both agree that an additional 38 would achieve a level they could both be satisfied with. He added that the seven additional positions would be added in July. Only one person has signed the re-employment list as an active job seeker from that list, which means that Cambridge will be able to hire some Cambridge residents.

Police Commissioner Anderson said that he believes that staff issues are being resolved. It has been necessary to carefully develop exacting job descriptions. Since some positions are new, there has had to be research into other cities and some consultant help. Although crime is decreasing, there are still over 5,000 crimes and that means 5,000 victims. There is also a goal of developing a more community-oriented method of policing.

Councillor Toomey asked for more information regarding the actual number of officers assigned to night shifts. Commissioner Anderson said that vacation time and sick time are variables that

change individual shifts. There are adequate staffing levels but he does not want to give public information as to particular shifts at specific times, such as number of narcotic officers or numbers of detectives. He would be willing to brief members of the City Council in a private session.

Councillor Toomey said that he has received numerous phone calls from citizens who have been harassed while leaving the Galleria Mall in East Cambridge. In addition, there have been fights in the mall. Commissioner Anderson said that there is an off-duty detail assigned there and there are also park and walk assignments. In addition, the gang detail people frequent that area because there is concern about youth activity there.

Councillor Wolf said that the City Council wants to do everything possible to support the police department to make it the best. She asked how Cambridge's staffing compares to other communities. Commissioner Anderson said that the level was agreed to by him and the City Manager. The recognized ideal level is about 2.9 per thousand. Councillor Wolf asked how sick leave factors into this and she asked whether there was abuse of sick leave. Commissioner Anderson said that he was seriously concerned about the amount of absenteeism. In response to a question from Councillor Wolf, Commissioner Anderson said that there is only one person currently on disability in comparison to 15 when he started. There is still a need to look at employee contracts.

Councillor Wolf asked whether Commissioner Anderson believes he has the tools and authority to deal with these issues. Commissioner Anderson said that the issues must be dealt with through the contract negotiation process and that is occurring now.

Councillor Wolf asked about the status of 22 civilian positions. Commissioner Anderson said that one-third have been hired. There have been difficulties with the Department of Personnel Administration regarding the dispatcher position and what lists are appropriate. Councillor Wolf asked whether the City Council should be considering home rule legislation to deal with this. Robert W. Healy said that if the Council wants to consider this issue, it should be done in a comprehensive city-wide manner.

Councillor Wolf asked whether the reorganization is working and Commissioner Anderson responded that it is. The department has moved rapidly to make an enormous number of changes. The department is focusing on training for the mid-level supervisors. There are still some concerns regarding congregating in areas and carrying out park and walk assignments, but in general, the progress is excellent.

Councillor Wolf asked whether Commissioner Anderson believes that he has the authority needed for discipline. Commissioner Anderson said that he and the Manager are continuing to make improvements in the cooperation and communication required to carry out effective discipline. Commissioner Anderson said that, by and large, the personnel of the Cambridge Police Department are excellent.

Councillor Russell said that although the response time is very good, she is always concerned about West and North Cambridge.

Councillor Myers asked whether it is true that the department is now at 228 and plans to add 38 plus 22 civilians. Commissioner Anderson responded in the affirmative. Robert W. Healy said that 31 will be hired on April 26th and will have 17 weeks of training. Seven more will start training in late June or early July. Although there are concerns about the current level of staffing, there is no public safety emergency.

Councillor Myers asked whether there are any concerns about discipline that should be discussed. Commissioner Anderson said that he and Robert W. Healy have had good discussions about the best way to resolve disciplinary issues. Robert Healy said that there has never been a disciplinary case in which the Manager's process has not supported requests by the Commissioner for his desired outcome.

Councillor Wolf asked whether the staff outage money can go back into the Police Department for any unmet needs. City Manager Healy said that it would be possible to look at one-time non-recurring expenditures with outages but it would be necessary to look at all items in the budget. Councillor Myers said that he would be very interested in seeing what the amount of salary outage savings is. Councillor Wolf said that she hopes there will be a solid complement of women among the new recruits. Commissioner Anderson said that he agrees with the importance of adding more women but he must note that with this recruit class, there is a real effort to address the needs for a multicultural police force.

Councillor Myers then opened the meeting for public testimony.

Richard Cleary, 50 Brookford Street, said that the work of the Manager in securing and hiring Police Commissioner Anderson was very impressive and Police Commissioner Anderson's performance has also been extremely impressive. However, the Boston Globe article was troubling. It appears that there are powers that the Police Commissioner should have that he does not have. Police Commissioner Anderson should have the powers that Commissioner Roache in Boston has.

Lieutenant George Powers, President, Superior Officers Association, spoke in support of filling all of the positions as soon as possible.

Stephen Hall, President, Patrol Officers Association, said that they are pleased to have this hearing take place. However, when the new officers are hired, 20% of the force will be new. Right now, staffing levels are low when you take into account school crossings. Officer Hall also made the following points: it is very unfortunate to have to take disciplinary issues to the press; disciplinary systems are in place; there is a fourth platoon allowable; overtime should be used to supplement existing shifts; four of the thirteen police officers who were going to be replaced have now retired; Cambridge has been doing community policing for years but it just hasn't been called that; and there is no problem with community policing.

Councillor Myers said that he is concerned about the current staffing level and said that he would encourage filling these positions as soon as possible.

Councillor Wolf suggested that overtime be considered until the position are filled. Robert W. Healy and Police Commissioner Anderson said that overtime is currently being utilized.

Councillor Myers then concluded this portion of the hearing and called a recess at 5:50 p.m.

At 6:00 p.m. Councillor Myers reconvened the hearing to discuss the fire study. He requested that City Manager Healy make a presentation on the fire study. Robert W. Healy described the process for embarking upon the fire study and outlined the study process. He noted that it was a year-long process of evaluation and study. At the conclusion of the study, the consultants made many recommendations for changes. While he has included several of them in his recommendations to the Council, there are others which are not being recommended because the department is already very successful, and in as such a situation, too much change can be detrimental.

The recommendations with which the City Manager, the Fire Chief and the Task Force have concurred will result in marked improvements. One is the computer assisted dispatch system. Another is in the area of emergency medical response equipment to allow for response from three additional stations. Another is to close Engine Seven at 350 Main Street and reassign those personnel to other locations. This was evaluated in terms of response capability objectives, which can be met without Engine Seven.

The City Manager noted that the consultants recommended closure of two stations, removal of a ladder company and the building of a new station. However, the objections can be achieved

without these measures and the Chief strongly recommends that no ladder companies be removed.

Fire Chief Kevin Fitzgerald said that the present strength of the fire department is 249 and will go to 248 with the retirement of Deputy Chief O'Brien. This is an excellent department. There are no sick leave and discipline problems. He emphasized that Cambridge does not have too many ladder companies. However, with hiring up to the budget level of 278, for which interviews are in process, and with computer-aided dispatch, he does support closing Engine Seven.

Councillor Toomey said he is concerned with closing Engine Seven and asked whether the response to M.I.T. was considered, along with the growing biotech industry in that area. Chief Fitzgerald said that it was considered. Councillor Toomey said that he would like to see the two engines at Binney Street. Robert W. Healy said that the overlap of stations to serve East Cambridge was well-documented in the study. There will still be capacity to arrive quickly at East Cambridge locations. Councillor Toomey said that he would like information as to the number of times the Fire Department has to respond to M.I.T. City Treasurer James Maloney agreed to provide this information and noted that Engine Seven covers the smallest number of dwellings and the smallest number of calls. With the change in the area over the last 100 years, the station is no longer well-utilized.

... Councillor Russell said that she is concerned about the response time in West Cambridge and asked what could be done. Robert Healy said that the computer assisted dispatch will help, and the completion of the rebuilding of the bridge on Alewife Brook Parkway will also help. At that time Cambridge should take another look. Chief Fitzgerald said that there are also arrangements with Belmont and Somerville for assistance in these areas at rush hours, etc.

Councillor Wolf asked whether computer assisted dispatch is related to the enhanced 911 program. Robert Healy said that it will be interrelated. They will work in a joint fashion out of the same facility. He looks forward to completion in 18-24 months. Computer assisted dispatching cuts 30-40 seconds from the time between receipt of call and arrival at the fire scene.

Councillor Wolf asked where the equipment from Engine Seven will go. Chief Fitzgerald said one is worn-out; the other will go to Engine Three.

Councillor Myers asked about the four areas where optimum response time is not currently being met. Robert Healy said that three will be significantly resolved with computer aided dispatch, and the West Cambridge area cannot be fully resolved until 1995 when the bridge is fixed. Councillor Myers asked about the EMT capability. Chief Fitzgerald said that all engine and ladder companies can perform emergency medical services; the improvement

suggested is an additional piece of equipment. City Manager Healy said that Cambridge has one of the most sophisticated medical responses in the country.

Councillor Myers asked whether there was a possibility of women firefighters in the new recruits. Chief Fitzgerald said there was only one woman on the civil service list, but she is high up on the list.

Councillor Toomey noted that in many communities the discussion is not hiring additional fire and safety personnel but rather the need to lay them off. The City Manager should be commended for the skillful management that has put Cambridge in the position to consider hiring additional public safety personnel.

Thereupon Councillor Myers opened the hearing to public testimony. John "Spike" Lawless, President of the Firefighters Union Local 30, requested time for an additional presentation. Their concerns include life safety objectives; the interrelated function of rescue and firefighting; the impact on the East Cambridge population; and the increased level of risk to firefighters. Mr. Lawless said that the City Manager should be commended for his support.

Rocco Capolucci, Cambridge, said that it is a mistake to close fire stations.

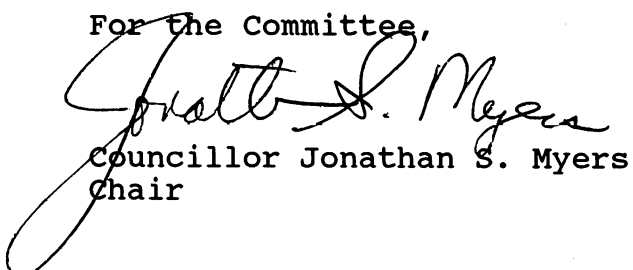
Rich Vendetti, 28 Winter Street, asked about what height building requires sprinklers. Chief Fitzgerald said there are many variables. Mr. Vendetti said that he is concerned that future new development in Kendall Square will mean that Engine Seven will be needed again. Some of the proposed buildings are over 220 feet high. Robert Healy said that it is important to look at the situation in terms of the response capacity objectives; and these objectives will continue to be met.

Steven Carl Sedless, Auxiliary Fire Captain, said that he is concerned about the progress of the 911 dispatch system and how it relates to closing Engine Seven. There have been recent improvements in the dispatch system currently used. Also, dispatchers have been trained to give first aid instructions over the telephone.

Councillor Myers thanked those present for their attendance.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

For the Committee,


Councillor Jonathan S. Myers
Chair

2.

Public Safety Committee Report for a
hearing held on February 3, 1993
to consider Police Department staff
issues and to receive a presentation
of the Fire Study.

In City Council,

February 22, 1993

Report accepted

Placed on file