

BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE

MARCH 7, 2023

A meeting of the Budget Review Committee was held Tuesday, March 7, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Alderman Richard A. Dowd, Chairman, presided.

Let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance.

Members of Committee present: Alderman Richard A. Dowd, Chairman
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr., Clerk
Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire
Alderman June M. Caron
Alderwoman-at-Large Shoshanna Kelly (via Zoom)
Alderman John Sullivan

Members not in Attendance: Alderman Ernest Jette

Also in Attendance: Police Chief Kevin Rourke
Karen Smith, NPD Business Manager

ROLL CALL

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

COMMUNICATIONS - None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None

NEW BUSINESS – RESOLUTIONS

R-23-094

Endorsers: Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire
Alderman Richard A. Dowd
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.
Alderman John Sullivan
Alderman-at-Large Melbourne Moran, Jr.
Alderman Tyler Gouveia
Alderman Derek Thibeault
Alderwoman-at-Large Gloria Timmons
Alderman Alex Comeau

APPROVING THE COST ITEMS OF A COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE NASHUA BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS AND NASHUA POLICE COMMUNICATION EMPLOYEES N.E.P.B.A. LOCAL 125, I.U.P.A., AFL-CIO FROM JULY 1, 2023 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2027

MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO RECOMMEND FINAL PASSAGE

ON THE QUESTION

Chairman Dowd

Chief would you and Karen like to come up. Just introduce yourselves for the TV audience. What we have before us this evening is a contract for the communications personnel at NPD. Would you like to give us an overview of the contract?

Kevin Rourke, Chief of Police and Karen Smith, Nashua Police

Sure. First, I'll start out the Union is made up of twenty one employees when it's at full staff. Just to let you know, right now we're at ten. That is broken down when we had full staff we're supposed to have nine dispatchers - three on each shift; twelve communication technicians who are the people that answer the phone - and again, that's four on each shift. Like I said, right now we have ten. We have one on probation as a probationary dispatcher. So four dispatchers - three are of days, one is on second. So right now, we do not have any people dispatching on third shift so that means that we bring in officers from off the street that will dispatch. We train our officers in communications and in dispatch. Right now, we have six communication technicians - three on days, two on second, and one on third. Again if we're short, we'll bring officers in off the street to cover those positions. Like I said, we have one training in dispatch.

Just a little overview. As you know, you've been around a while. These people are vital parts of our organization. They're highly skilled, highly trained. They work a busy area in the Police Department that we rely on. They take information from the public. If you call the Police Department, these communication technicians are the first people that answer the phone, take the necessary information, and then pass it on to dispatchers who dispatch it out to our officers. These are the people that keep our officers safe and people in the community safe by processing the information and relaying it to the officers on the streets. So they are a vital part of organization.

Right now someone would ask why these positions aren't filled. Again, we're down ten. If that person passes probationary status which is a sixteen week intensive training when you go through dispatch. Its twelve weeks I believe in communications, answering the phone but that person still has to pass sixteen weeks of that intensive training. Why these positions aren't filled? I can give you my opinion. I think they are grossly underpaid. For someone answering the phone in CT, they make \$18.77 an hour to answer the phones. I think we can all agree on if you can go to Dunkin Donuts, Target or Home Depot, you'll probably get paid more and deal with less stress. Second thing I would say is the schedule. They work four days on two days off just like our officers. Not a, I guess, schedule that most people want. They work weekends and holidays. Again, it's a tough job. It's demanding. It can be very stressful at times, most times for some of them. I think why it's unfilled is the job market also. There's a lot of jobs out there that are probably more entertaining to people than answering phones for \$18.00 an hour or dispatching and dealing with serious critical incidents. So that's why I think they're not filled. I think that with this contract, it brings a lot of points in the contract that people might aspire so we're hoping that this contract will pass and we can start getting some people in here.

I will go through the contract in some areas that I think are important. Again, you guys can ask questions obviously at the end but there's some articles in here that's some housekeeping articles. Article 13 I'll just touch on talks about vacation time. That adjustment was made to be consistent with the Teamster's Contract that you recently passed last year just to make them whole that they both get the same. The insurance part. Again, the part that newly hired employees all receive 100% of the City's portion of the deductible contribution upon the start of coverage. The City's already doing this. An example of that if someone got hired in May on the high deductible plan, they would be given the City's portion of \$3,000 and the employee would have to come up with \$1,000. The City's already been doing that for us for the Unions and the Police Department.

Article 17 - the sick leave. Again, this is just an incident where as people take sick days so if they hired in their first six months on probation if they have accrued enough sick time, they can take a sick day. Again, we don't want them there if they're sick. That's that article.

Then we come to Article 23 with the wages. This is a four year contract. The first year would be a 4% wage increase. The second year would be a 4% wage increase. Third year 3% and the fourth year 3%. The probationary rate would be at 2.5 increase each year. Then we added shift differential in just to be something that would give some incentive to people working second and third shift because right now everybody wants to work day shift. It was .75 cents on second shift and \$1.00 on third shift. It's just an incentive that they asked for and we thought it was important to try to compensate them for working second and third shift because those are the least desired shifts.

Article 24. It's a shift bidding procedure before the police officers and the Supervisors bid by seniority. This Union for some reason did not do that. They were placed into shifts and for a certain amount of time, they would stay on that shift for a while. So in the past, people would be working third shift but have seniority go to second shift. If someone else was asked to go second shift even though they were junior, they would go to second shift. So we just made it consistent with the police officers. We think it's fair. You bid by seniority and you can change shifts. So we just added that in there.

Longevity. We added \$100 to the years. I think it's an insignificant cost to try to retain people. You have to have five through nine years to even be compensated. Again, that was a retention thing that we wanted to do.

Article 27. The other change that we went from compensatory time, time coming basically from 24 to 32 hours. Again, these people wouldn't be paid overtime. If you know how comp time works if someone works four hours, they get six hours comp time, so it's time and a half and they can bank up to 32 hours in their bank to keep comp time. Again, it's kind of a cost saving for us because we're not paying the person overtime. They're taking the day off later on.

That is the summary of the contract that I think that are important parts to us. I'd be glad to answer any questions if you have them.

Chairman Dowd

The Aldermen have any questions? Alderman O'Brien?

Alderman O'Brien

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Chief I would like to compliment you and the Police Commission because I think as you're finding out right now trying to get people onto like a regular police officer position it's not like the newer generation. I'm gonna sound like the old guy here but people are finding jobs like this hard. I know my friends where I came from, the Fire Department, equally finding. It doesn't surprise me one bit that it's kind of merged over into the dispatching. So I'm glad that you kept abreast of this and try to make it so the job more tenable to somebody who chooses to work in a public service type of job will be compensated appropriately. So nice job. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Alderman Sullivan?

Alderman Sullivan

Thank you very much. I have several questions. First just in the overall structure of the Department itself, let me pause. Thank you Chief Rourke. Thank you Miss Smith for coming out tonight. The #21 - I mean do you go through exercises where maybe you can raise the pay but cutting the total number of people. We kind of do that. We have this bucket of money. We can't fill it anyway but maybe if we cut it back to 18 or 17 people and gave them a raise, then we might be able to get to 18 as opposed to over 10 with a higher wage. I mean have you gone through that exercise?

Kevin Rourke, Chief of Police

So this is probably the minimum we could do with the way our schedule works - the four on two off. So when you have nine dispatchers and three one each shift, two are always working and one is always off. That's the way it works out. Then the same thing with Communications. So each shift has two dispatchers on and then each first and second shift, which are our busiest shifts call volume wise, we have three communications on each shift - first and second shift. So this works out. I think it's kind of bare bones of where we're at and that we need that coverage. It's sufficient for the call service that we handle.

Alderman Sullivan

I have a few more. Thank you.

Karen Smith, Business Manager

If I could add to that. It has been done in the history also of the Department. We were already at a high number in years past and that has been brought down. It's been down for many years so we're already lower than when we were in the past.

Alderman Sullivan

It's trending in this direction.

Karen Smith, Business Manager

Yes.

Alderman Sullivan

You mentioned in your comments Chief about because of the lack of third shift coverage that uniformed officers have to come in off the street to cover third shift. I've got to imagine that's going to impact your overtime?

Kevin Rourke, Chief of Police

Absolutely.

Alderman Sullivan

Okay so when you look at this, what is that costing compared to not filling the position? I mean what is that cost differential? So if you do nothing and those positions go unfilled, what is the cost to the City because of that overtime that you need for this coverage?

Kevin Rourke, Chief of Police

Well it costs a lot more money to put an officer inside than it does a civilian so it is costly absolutely. I think we'd all agree the community, the Police Department, and personnel agree that we'd rather have the police on the street and that's what we hire them for. So it is important to compensate these people and make their conditions better so that we can hire people to get the officers back on the street.

Alderman Sullivan

What is that - you had mentioned what are neighboring town paying Hudson, Merrimack, Tyngsboro?

Kevin Rourke, Chief of Police

So I do have those numbers for you. Right now I'll do someone with ten years on. Right now a ten year dispatcher makes \$53,570 in Nashua. In Hudson someone with ten years on dispatching makes \$61,193. NFR someone with ten years on makes \$67,389. Now I will tell you Alderman Sullivan that I would be very confident saying that these people handle twice as many calls as those two agencies that I just spoke about.

Alderman Sullivan

I have a few more if that's okay?

Chairman Dowd

Okay.

Alderman Sullivan

Now I'm looking at the front page just the budget line items. I like it because the lines are numbered so I can call out a specific line. Line 23 in Fiscal Year '24 and '25, it's up \$35,000, up \$41,000, and then in the out years Fiscal '26 and '27, it jumps up to \$318,354 if the percentage change year over year give or tax in line with that?

Karen Smith, Business Manager

That's a good question. I have to look into the formulas behind it to make sure I understand what's going on with the costing. I can look at it more.

Alderman Sullivan

If I may? I'm thinking that line 22, I haven't gone into to do the math here, but I'm thinking that top line number is probably correct. I think that your line 23 dollar change over prior year, I think that formula may be a little wonky.

Karen Smith, Business Manager

Good in two of the columns and not in the other two?

Alderman Sullivan

In Fiscal Year '26 and '27.

Karen Smith, Business Manager

Right.

Chairman Dowd

Perhaps you can look into that and get us an answer.

Karen Smith, Business Manager

Yes.

Chairman Dowd

Another question?

Alderman Sullivan

Yes one more please. Line 36, there was a drop Fiscal Year '24 there was a drop of \$5,492. I know that and I've heard this answer before but if you could just refresh my memory why there was a drop in retirement costs?

Karen Smith, Business Manager

Sure. The information on the left it says 14.106 on line 34 to 13.53. It is just like you were saying, it was set by the Nashua Retirement System. So it just went down a little bit and therefore the information is going to be lower based on the rate but it's also going to be down a bit because the base rate from FY'23 to FY'24 is going to be coming from the prior year face of FY'23. So the costing from the prior year is going to use the prior number and then when you have attrition and you have higher wages that are now coming in at a starting wage, that's going to affect the base cost and that's going to affect your calculations. So basically the savings that you have from higher and lower wages are going to be part of that savings also.

Alderman Sullivan

All right. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

All set?

Alderman Sullivan

Yeah, that's it. Thanks.

Chairman Dowd

That last number you gave with examples \$67,109 what was that from? That's from the comparable other departments what they're getting for year ten.

Karen Smith, Business Manager

For the Chief mentioned or?

Chairman Dowd

Yeah, the Chief mentioned. The third one you mentioned that you had.

Kevin Rourke, Chief of Police

Oh, from FR \$67,309.

Chairman Dowd

Because I was going to mention that people doing the same job in the Fire Department are getting significantly more than those in the Police Department and gradually have been trying to catch up. How it happened nobody knows but it's just that they're hired for the same job. I think you lost people to Nashua Fire Rescue the same job.

Kevin Rourke, Chief of Police

Yeah, we've lost a couple.

Alderman Sullivan

So I ask why then you don't know? Same City, same jobish. One is up here on is...

Chairman Dowd

It's been that way for a long time the difference. The Police have been trying to catch up and of course, the firemen don't stand still but they're trying not to have as bigger increases. It's tough trying to close those kind of gaps.

Kevin Rourke, Chief of Police

That's a \$14,000 difference and \$8,000 for Hudson.

Chairman Dowd

Any initial questions? Shoshanna - nothing? Okay.

Alderwoman Kelly

I'm good.

Chairman Dowd

Alright. So the motion before us is for final passage of R-23-094.

Alderman O'Brien

Roll call.

A viva voce roll call was taken which resulted as follows:

Yea: Alderman Sullivan, Alderwoman Kelly, Alderman Dowd, Alderman Caron,
Alderman O'Brien, Alderman Wilshire 6

Nay: 0

MOTION CARRIED

Kevin Rourke, Chief of Police

I just want to thank you for your continued support.

NEW BUSINESS – ORDINANCES - None

TABLED IN COMMITTEE - None

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Chairman Dowd

I just want to mention that the actual budget season for 24 is coming up. Still early. We're trying to start the schedule. I think Donna's gone out to everybody. I believe she's gone out to the Budget Committee members. She's gone out to the Divisions. If there are any dates particularly in May that are not good for people. We've laid out some dates. We'll have a draft schedule and people can mark it up and if they're busy, we can rearrange things. I know last year we had to move the fire and police to different dates. Mr. Griffin is trying to change the budget book. I've asked them this year to do like my book in a 3-ring binder so it's easier to use.

Alderman Wilshire

Can we all get that?

Chairman Dowd

Yes.

Alderman Wilshire

Oh good. It's so much easier. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

The people on the Budget Committee. There's some extra things that were in the book that really aren't needed for the budget and they're going to take them out. They're trying to skinny the book up a little bit. The first meeting that we have is going to be with Director Cummings, Doria Brown, Mr. Griffin. The things that are in the book that we have no control over and can't change and part of the budget system will all be explained. That's benefits, energy costs, and those types of things. We're going to try and streamline it a little bit if we can.

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

REMARKS BY THE ALDERMEN - None

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO ADJOURN, BY ROLL CALL

A viva voce roll call was taken which resulted as follows:

Yea: Alderman Sullivan, Alderwoman Kelly, Alderman Caron, Alderman Wilshire, Alderman O'Brien, Alderman Dowd	6
Nay:	0

MOTION CARRIED

The meeting was declared closed at 7:23 p.m.

Alderman Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.
Committee Clerk