

SPECIAL BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE

SEPTEMBER 7, 2023

A meeting of the Special Budget Review Committee was held Thursday, September 7, 2023 at 6:42 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Alderman Richard A. Dowd, Chairman, presided.

Let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance. If you are participating via Zoom, please state your presence, reason for not attending the meeting in person, and whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-To-Know Law.

Members of Committee present: Alderman Richard A. Dowd, Chair  
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr., Clerk  
Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire  
Alderman John Sullivan

Members not in Attendance: Alderwoman-at-Large Shoshanna Kelly  
Alderman Ernest Jette  
Alderman June M. Caron

Also in Attendance: Steve Buxton, Fire Chief  
Karen Conde, Executive Assistant/Business Coordinator  
Tom Wholey, Deputy Fire Chief, IAFF789  
Kevin Burgess, Fire Commissioner  
Mary Ann Melizzi-Golja, Fire Commissioner

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ROLL CALL

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

COMMUNICATIONS

From: Kevin Burgess, BOFC Chairman  
Re: IAFF Local 789 Collective Bargaining Agreement

***There being no objection, Chairman Dowd accepted the communication and placed it on file.***

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None

NEW BUSINESS – RESOLUTIONS

**R-23-151**

Endorsers: Mayor Jim Donchess  
Alderman-at-Large Melbourne Moran, Jr.  
Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire  
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.  
Alderman John Sullivan  
Alderman Patricia Klee  
Alderman Thomas Lopez  
Alderman-at-Large Ben Clemons  
Alderman Richard A. Dowd  
Alderman Derek Thibeault

**APPROVING THE COST ITEMS OF A COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE MAYOR AND THE BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF NASHUA, NEW HAMPSHIRE AND LOCAL #789,**

**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS FROM JULY 1, 2023 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2027**

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO RECOMMEND FINAL PASSAGE**

ON THE QUESTION

Chairman Dowd

Motion is to recommend to the full board final passage of R-23-151. Can we have someone come up and go through the contract? So what we usually ask you to cover is what are the changes to the contract and I always ask the finance person whether the money is in the budget to cover the cost. I'm sure there might be other questions.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Thank you for the opportunity to be here to review our proposed collective bargaining agreement between the City of Nashua and IAFF Local 789. With me tonight is Karen Conde, President Tom Wholey, and we have Commissioner Melizzi-Golja in the crowd.

A quick overview of the CBA. Basically there is a toll. It's a four-year deal. It's a total of 10% cost of living adjustments for all members over the four years. In year two of the CBA, there's an additional 2% for members of the Emergency Services Division and Fire Marshal's Office. In year three, we adjust the Hazardous Materials Team and Dive Team pay to a percentage from an hourly rate and we give them a little bump in pay for that as well, approximately a half a percent.

There is many language updates. There is one thing our agreement is very old I guess I would say and mature would be a better word for it and we've been very good about creating new language in there but we haven't been very good about extracting the old language that's outdated and no longer pertinent and we had a lot of work sessions to accomplish a lot of that to make it a more efficient document.

We also incorporated four MOU's into the CBA: one for military leave, one for administrative overtime, one for daylight savings time, and one for the promotional process.

Also contained within this agreement is the establishment of a Health Trust Committee to review health care and potential savings to both the City and members. This Committee is to be established within sixty days of the execution of the contract and it should furnish a report within one year.

We are going to establish a medical expense reimbursement program within this contract. This is for our members which will obviously provide a benefit for them upon retirement but this will also assist us in our recruitment and retention efforts. Both President Wholey and myself before this contract's even been executed have already received inquiries from people outside of our agency that are curious about this and feel that it will be a very attractive incentive for us to have.

There is the establishment of language for a Captain of EMS within our organization, establishment of an in-service training program which will allow us to remove a member from service and send them for training on certain topics to assist them with advancement within our organization.

I'd like to tell you that currently within the Fire Service it is wide open and what I mean by this is organizations are offering sign on bonuses, relocation bonuses, they bring members into their organization with seniority, rank, and increased pay above and beyond what a normal member entering their organization would be. Recruitment now requires a more intense effort than ever before. I am proud to say that while we do recruit new fire fighters, we do not engage in any of those tactics that I just mentioned. Instead we would like to focus on our members and create pathways for them to realize success and financial gain within our organization. This in turn will assist us in making our organization successful which will result in better service for our community. Some of the items I have listed here tonight are the result of much collaboration with Local 789 to accomplish this.

Overall what you have in front of you is the result of much hard work, negotiation, and collaboration. For the first time in my 27-year career here at Nashua Fire, we had a tentative agreement in place prior to the expiration of the previous CBA. I'd like to thank the Executive Board, President Wholey, Commissioners Burgess and Lambert, Deputy Wholey, Attorney Bolton for their efforts in negotiating this package that is before you. Of course all these efforts would not be possible without the administrative support of Karen Conde and Ann-Marie Boucher. If you have any questions or concerns, I can work to address those.

Chairman Dowd

Just for the general public, MOU is memorandums of understanding that get agreed to by the Fire Commissioners, and the Fire Chief, and the Union, and then come to the Board of Aldermen for approval, and they get added to the contract, and when possible, we try to take those MOUs that are attached to the current contract and bring them into the language of the existing contract. We've done a lot of that recently in the past didn't do as much of it.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

That's correct. You described that process perfectly.

Chairman Dowd

I think I've been through a few of them. Questions? Alderman Sullivan.

Alderman Sullivan

A lot of my questions I realized when I was listening to Chief Buxton's remarks probably should be directed to CFO Griffin and I'll explain. I was going through the budget that we approved for Fiscal Year '24 and the top line numbers didn't seem to match up. I mean they're off by about \$2 million dollars. There are questions that I have around we approved \$19.493 million for the Fire Department for the wages, salaries, and what not and then in the contract, it has \$17.891 million. So I need to better understand why the difference. There must be numbers in that contract that aren't in the budget that we approved so that was my question.

Chairman Dowd

I'll let Karen explain but basically the monies for negotiations are put in contingency funds and then when the contract is approved, the money comes out of the contingency funds to cover the salaries.

Alderman Sullivan

So that \$19 million includes contingencies. Is that what you're saying?

Chairman Dowd

The new contract - you had contingencies put aside for contract negotiations.

Karen Conde, Executive Assistant/Business Coordinator

Correct. I don't know without looking the 19 to 17 but that's what normally happens. If there's no contract, it doesn't go directly into the budget right away. It's just put into contingency because it could change or they could not have a contract and it stays in contingency for the next year.

Alderman Sullivan

Okay. So they built in some cushion.

Chairman Dowd

Yeah. We always take for all the contracts we take the department's contingency because they're not quite sure how it's going to – we take that contingency money and put it into contingency in the general budget so then when the contracts negotiated during the year, we take the money out of the contingency and put it towards the...

Alderman Sullivan

Okay, okay. All right. Thank you for explaining that.

Alderman O'Brien

To help you explain it too coming from my union roots back in the old days, idealistically it would be great if the union knew

exactly the dollar amount and they don't because they read the same public, the right to know, the same budget. So this is why the contingency. It makes it fair. They negotiate. They know what they're dealing with, what the home number should be, and it just works out best.

Alderman Sullivan

Makes your job really easy. Could I?

Chairman Dowd

Follow up?

Alderman Sullivan

Yeah, thank you. Could you talk more about the Health Trust Committee and also you mentioned an incentive. Could you talk more about that please Chief Buxton?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

In regards to the incentive or...?

Alderman Sullivan

Health Trust Committee first and then the incentive after that.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

So we've actually worked on these in the past and what it is is a joint committee between labor and management to take a look at the health benefit that the employs are able to engage in to see if we can find a better benefit that would result in both a cost savings to the City as well as our members and if we're able to engage in it. So President Wholey may be able to speak to some of the specifics but their Local actually is the IAFF. They actually have the Health Trust and I believe that is one of the ones that they are actually interested in looking at.

Alderman Sullivan

Okay.

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Does that answer your question or do you want more details?

Alderman Sullivan

No, I understand it. And then the incentive, you talked about an incentive?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Yeah the incentive portion of that would be if we're able to achieve savings come to agreement on it, both sides would realize the benefit as we'd be saving money and achieving a better benefit for our members.

Alderman Sullivan

Okay, okay. Very good. And one last question.

Chairman Dowd

Go ahead.

Alderman Sullivan

Are you fully staffed? 171 is in this contract. Are you fully staffed?

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Current we are not but we will be hiring this spring. So this fiscal budget will be trying to plug every opening we can. Unfortunately but the last three years we hired between 10 and 15 people by the time they graduate recruit school, we've had people leave. By this point of the year, we've achieved about 10 openings.

Alderman Sullivan

Okay, great. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Just for members of the audience if you're here for the Planning Board, it's upstairs. This is Budget. Alderman Wilshire.

Alderman Wilshire

I just want to say I'm impressed that you took the steps that you took to do those small increases, the stipends or whatever to keep people that you have. I mean we have a good Fire Department. We have great people and to have them swept away to another department, it can be very disheartening and I'm sure it is for all of you as well. So thank you for that getting innovated, creative with this contract. I really appreciate that.

Chairman Dowd

Mayor did you want to comment at all or?

Mayor Donchess

Thank you. I'd like to say that it's a very fair contract to both sides. I want to thank everyone who was involved in the negotiations. Of course from the 789 Fire Fighter Wholey, Chief Buxton, and we also had Steve Bolton on the City's team, as well as Tim Cummings. I think there was a real discussion of the issues. We came up with some creative solutions. You've already heard that the (inaudible) is something I think will help the fire fighters and it's a fair contract. We have very hard working fire fighters, a great workforce, and I think it's a fair contract that I hope everyone will approve.

Chairman Dowd

Okay. Any other questions? Seeing none. Thank you. Stay right there, we're gonna take a vote.

## **MOTION CARRIED**

Steve Buxton, Fire Chief

Thank you very much.

NEW BUSINESS – ORDINANCES - None

TABLED IN COMMITTEE

## **R-23-118 Amended**

Endorsers: Alderman-at-Large Melbourne Moran, Jr.  
Alderman Thomas Lopez  
Alderman-at-Large Gloria Timmons  
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.

## **INCREASING THE MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE AMOUNT IN THE SNOW REMOVAL EXPENDABLE TRUST FUND AND EXPANDING ITS USE**

- Amended and tabled at 5/24/23 meeting

**O-23-056**

Endorsers: Mayor Jim Donchess  
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.

**PERMITTING CERTAIN FUNDING TRANSFERS WITHIN THE PUBLIC WORKS DIVISION**

- Amended and tabled at 7/24/23 meeting

GENERAL DISCUSSION - None

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

REMARKS BY THE ALDERMEN

Alderman O'Brien

I think that what Chief Buxton was talking about on the medical end, it will help in the retention of fire fighters and it is quite innovative in diving through and looking at it. It's something that I think these other entities including the State may want to take a look at this. It is quite innovative and I think it will help in a long way. So it's good that some new ideas came out of this, and that it was agreed upon, and I think it will definitely help us out so I congratulate all those that worked on it. It's quite a process.

ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO ADJOURN**

**MOTION CARRIED**

The meeting was declared closed at 6:59 p.m.

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