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January 30, 2008

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY

The Committee on Public Health and Public Safety convened on January 30, 2008, with Chairman William White presiding and Committee Members Aldermen John Connolly and Walter Pero also present and voting. Also present were Aldermen Maryann Heuston, Dennis Sullivan and Thomas Taylor as well as Mayor Joe Curtatone, Chief of Staff Michael Lambert, Chief Fire Engineer Kevin Kelleher, Deputy Chief David Salvi, Deputy Chief John Memory, Deputy Chief Robert Lyons, Fire Fighter and President of IAFF Local 76 – Jay Colbert and Fire Fighter Thomas Ross.

Mr. Colbert read a statement to the members and expressed some of the concerns of the Fire Fighters union, primarily dealing with manpower, equipment, facilities and training. Mr. Colbert stated that a lack of manpower effects the department's response time to calls and is also the reason that Engine 4 is out of service. Mr. Colbert stated that most of the department's vehicles are 10 to 20 years old and noted that there are no back-up vehicles available. He suggested that the city purchase new trucks each year, financed through a bonding initiative and also suggested that a comprehensive capital project plan be out in place for the department, noting that the condition of some of the fire stations is deplorable. Mr. Colbert also stated that department personnel need to be trained in new techniques and old proven methods on a regular basis.

He further stated that the department handles over 12,000 incidents yearly with only 141 fire fighters and stated that the department is not top heavy with officers, but rather "bottom light", needing fire fighting bodies. Mr. Colbert also stated that there should be training for firefighters to deal with responses to incidents in trenches, as well as equipment to access the trenches.

Chief Kelleher told the members that ideally, 4 fire fighters should be on each piece of equipment, as recommended by NFPA standards, noting that that was the case in Somerville during the 1970's. He also said that the department could do some of the training, but that a training budget was needed, estimating that the cost of training would be approximately \$16,000. Chief Kelleher informed the members that the Cambridge Fire Department would be the first responder in the event of a trench issue, since they have the necessary equipment.

The city has 5 engine companies in service and the Chief stated that there should be an engine in each station. He would like to return Engine 4 to service, but to do so, 29 fire fighters would have to be on duty. This would require that 3 fire fighters be secured through a grant to raise the staffing level. He also told the

members that it would cost approximately \$360,468 to staff the department with overtime from February 1st to June 30, 2008. At the present time, there are 11 fire fighters out due to injury.

Chief Kelleher said that over 44.5% of the calls received are for medical assistance and that the number has increased over the past 10 years. He expects that more medical calls will be received from West Somerville with the inclusion of the VNA at Capen Court. Deputy Chief Salvi told the members that the 3-man response time for medical calls is sufficient but that to properly fight a fire, the 3-man level is not enough and could cause potential problems.

Mayor Curtatone stated that he takes offense to the union's assertion that the equipment is being neglected and noted that the city is investing over \$2 million in fire fighting equipment. The city is looking into funding for a rescue pump vehicle for FY-09 and is also seeking to hire 8 new fire fighters, contingent upon grants and state aid. He also expressed concern that the department might be top heavy and indicated that an examination might be done to determine if more fire fighters could be added.

Alderman Pero suggested that the mayor direct Chief Kelleher to present a plan for a staffing reorganization and training program and to provide this information to the committee, in writing.

Alderman Pero's motion *that the Mayor's Office coordinate a tour of the city's fire stations, for members of the Board of Aldermen, to view the fire fighting equipment and personnel living quarters,* was approved.

Alderman Connolly's motion *that the Chief Fire Engineer provide the Committee on Public Health and Public Safety with the annual cost of the lease for the trailer that houses the Fire Prevention Department,* was approved.

Chairman White's motion *that the Chief Fire Engineer provide the Board of Aldermen with a list of all of the Fire Department's equipment, including the age and condition of each piece of equipment,* was approved.

Alderman Pero's motion *that the Administration present to the Committee on Public Health and Public Safety, strategic short and long term plans for the future of the Somerville Fire Department, as it relates to staffing and resources,* was approved.

Alderman Pero's motion *that the Chief Fire Engineer provide the Committee on Public Health and Public Safety with the cost of providing training for trench responses,* was approved.

No papers were acted on.

Alderman William A. White, Jr., Chairman
Committee on Public Health and Public Safety

COMMITTEE REPORT

Report of the Committee on Public Health and
Public Safety, January 30, 2008

In Board of Aldermen

Clerk