

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: **JOINT FINANCE & PERSONNEL**

DATE: **APRIL 15, 2011**

Personnel Committee Members

Present:

Supervisors Conover
Kenny
VanNess
Belden
Goodspeed
Sokol
Taylor
Strainer

Others Present:

Daniel G. Stec, Chairman of the Board
Paul Dusek, County Attorney/Administrator
Nicole Livingston, Deputy Clerk
Kevin Geraghty, Budget Officer
Supervisors Champagne
Loeb
McCoy
McDevitt
Wood

Finance Committee Member

Present:

Supervisor Thomas

Karen Putney, Administrator, Fire Prevention
& Building Code Enforcement
Don Lehman, *The Post Star*
Thom Randall, *Adirondack Journal*
Charlene DiResta, Sr. Legislative Office
Specialist

Committee Members Absent:

Supervisors Merlino
Monroe

Mr. Thomas called the Joint Finance & Personnel Committee meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. VanNess and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the April 6, 2011 Finance and Personnel Committee meetings, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Copies of the Finance & Personnel Agenda were provided to the Committee members, and a copy of same is on file with the minutes.

Commencing the Action Agenda review, Mr. Conover apprised Item 1 was a referral from the Public Safety Committee, Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement, requesting to create the position of Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement Officer, base salary of \$39,273, Grade 17, effective approximately May 23, 2011. He noted this position was not mandated or reimbursed; however, the work was mandated and revenues would be generated by the inspections done by this employee. Motion was made by Mr. VanNess and seconded by Mr. Belden to approve the request as presented.

Mr. VanNess explained that the concept of creating the position had been derived from a meeting that was held to address the issue of timeliness of fire inspections. He said approximately 60 contractors had attended the meeting and there had been questions pertaining to timeliness of the inspection process and the number of available inspectors employed by the County. He apprised the time frame for construction projects was so short and the timeliness of fire inspections was crucial to the process.

Further discussion was held at the April 11, 2011 Public Safety Committee meeting, Mr. VanNess continued, and the Committee approved the request to create the position of Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement Officer, base salary of \$39,273, Grade 17, effective approximately May 23, 2011. He stated that Karen Putney, Administrator of Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement, had completed a comparison survey of fire inspection data for the neighboring Counties and the Town of Queensbury; a copy of which is on file with the minutes.

Mr. Goodspeed entered the meeting at 9:08 a.m.

Mrs. Putney explained she had met with Paul Dusek, County Attorney/Administrator, to discuss the need for additional fire inspectors. She noted an information sheet had been provided pertaining to Department staffing levels from 2007 to present; a copy of which is on file with the minutes. She opined it was necessary to increase the staffing level of the Department in order to accomplish the fire inspection work load. She said there had been discussion pertaining to the possibility of staff members completing the majority of the inspections during the slow seasons; however, she added, the number of inspections did not decrease significantly at any point of the year due to contractors desire to complete the exterior construction of new building prior to the winter in order to work on the interior during the colder months. She noted there were 30% more permits issued this year as compared to 2010 and contractors depended on timely fire inspections in order to continue their work and meet deadlines. She added the fire safety duties of the Department were the portion of the work load which continually fell behind. Mrs. Putney apprised the concept of having the Cost Coordinator of the Planning & Community Development Department complete fire inspections on a part-time basis had been initiated and the employee had taken the majority of the necessary courses for certification. She added the employee had advised that the work load was too much to accomplish on a part-time basis and had said there were in excess of 1,500 structures in need of fire inspections in the County. Mrs. Putney explained a previous part-time employee had only completed 160 fire inspections in a six month period. She explained there had been one employee out on disability in 2010 and a part-time temporary employee had been hired. The part-time employee, she added, was unable to accomplish much in a four hour shift as he would have to stop working in the middle of a project or stay longer than the allotted time per day. Mrs. Putney apprised the requested position would be solely for fire safety inspections in addition to the part-time assistance of the Cost Coordinator.

Mr. Belden asked if the base salary of \$39,273 included benefits and Mrs. Putney replied in the negative. Mr. Belden inquired as to the inclusion of a vehicle for the potential employee and Mrs. Putney responded a Department vehicle would be available for 3 days a week and a County Fleet vehicle would be available for the remaining 2 days if necessary. Mr. Belden asked if the position was reimbursable and Mrs. Putney replied in the negative. Mr. VanNess interjected that the position would be partly reimbursed by the revenues generated by the fire inspection fee of \$75 each. He acknowledged the fees generated would be insufficient to cover the cost of the salary but would assist in offsetting the costs. He noted there was \$18,000 budgeted to cover the part-time salary of the Cost Coordinator which could only be utilized if the

employee continued to perform fire inspections in addition to building inspections. In answer to a question pertaining to the anticipated revenues from fire inspections, Mrs. Putney responded approximately \$18,000 to \$20,000 based on the number of inspections completed. She noted the inspection fee was currently waived for the Towns, the County and select County and non-profit agencies; however, she added, the possibility of amending which organizations and municipalities qualified for waiving the fee could be addressed at a future Public Safety Committee meeting if necessary. She apprised if one full time and one part-time employee could complete 500 fire inspections at a rate of \$75 each, approximately \$37,000 in revenue could be generated.

Mr. Taylor opined that anything less than one full time employee would be insufficient. He said the comparison survey was beneficial but he would like to see a comparison of the fees charged, as well. He recommended increasing the fee for fire inspections from \$75 to \$100 each. Mr. Strainer asked if there was a current employee who completed the fire inspections and Mrs. Putney replied in the negative and noted there had only been three fire inspections completed thus far in 2011. Mr. Strainer apprised the Town of Queensbury employed two full time fire inspectors and he recommended the creation of two part-time positions, as opposed one full time position. He asked if there was an established Civil Service list for the position and Mrs. Putney responded there was a Civil Service list for the full time position which was effective until July 28, 2011. She noted one of the people on the list was a previous employee of the Department who had resigned when the position was abolished. She added the person in question was certified and ready to begin work. As far as a possible part-time position, Mrs. Putney continued, there had been interest and there was one person who had received training and was willing to work on a part-time basis. She said there was another person who was interested in a part-time position and had fire service training; however, she continued, she was unsure if the person had completed the required courses.

Mrs. Putney explained in order to complete fire inspections it was necessary to complete the first three courses of the Code Compliance Specialist program. She said it would take three months to complete the necessary courses and thus far the schedule for upcoming training was not available. Mr. Belden noted there had been no new homes built in the Town of Hague in 2010. Mrs. Putney responded the number of new constructions of single family homes in 2010 was equal to the number in 2009.

Mr. Kenny said he was hesitant to create any new full time positions in the County based on the current economy. He stated it was easier for the County to abolish part-time positions in the future than it was to abolish a full time position. He advised a part-time position did not necessarily need to work five four hour days, as the schedule could be set to meet the needs of the Department. Mr. Kenny asked if the possibility of having a Fire Company, such as the Glens Falls Fire Department (GFFD) assume the responsibility of completing fire inspections had been considered. Mr. VanNess responded that the GFFD currently completed fire inspections for the City of Glens Falls and they had been contacted to determine if there was an interest in assuming the responsibility for the County.

Mr. VanNess stated he was not opposed to the concept of hiring two part-time employees instead of one full time employee. He said the cost of fringe benefits would be saved while still having the available manpower. Mr. Belden agreed and said the two part-time positions should be filled immediately. Mr. Conover suggested the needs of the Department be re-evaluated in six months. Mrs. Putney commented the only issue with two part-time employees instead of one full time was the availability of vehicles. Mr. VanNess apprised new vehicles had been purchased for the Sheriff's Office and he would check to determine if there was an older vehicle available which could be transferred to Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement. Mrs. Putney said there would still be a shortfall in the budget and Mr. VanNess reminded the Committee that the Department budget had been decreased in areas, such as gas and mileage. Mr. Taylor opined that two part time employees would be less efficient than one full time employee and he warned that some part-time employees had a part-time mentality.

Mr. VanNess amended his motion to create two part time positions of Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement Officers and to re-evaluate the needs of the Department in six months and Mr. Belden amended his second to the motion.

Referring to the information sheet on staffing levels in the Department, Mr. Kenny asked if the original request was for 1 ½ positions and Mrs. Putney responded that the ½ employee referred to the Cost Coordinator from the Planning & Community Development Department. Mr. VanNess explained the intent was for the Cost Coordinator to work for the Department part time in order to complete fire inspections and building code inspections; however, he added, the employee was unsure of his ability to complete the fire inspections. Mrs. Putney said she still intended to utilize the Cost Coordinator for fire inspections but the employee did not feel he would make much of an impact on the work load on a part-time basis. She stated she intended to have the full time position or the two part-time positions complete fire inspections with the Cost Coordinator assisting as needed.

Mr. Kenny apprised he would feel more comfortable if the GFFD was asked about the possibility of assuming the responsibility of fire inspections for the County. Mrs. Putney responded she had posed the question in the past and was informed there was concern about the possibility of causing delays with fire inspections in the City of Glens Falls. She noted the GFFD only employed two certified fire inspectors. Mr. Kenny pointed out the GFFD had illustrated their flexibility by assuming ambulance services and they were capable of completing additional training if required.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Strainer asked how many hours a full time employee worked in the Department and Mrs. Putney replied 35 hours per week. Mr. Strainer pointed out an additional 5 man hours would be derived from hiring two part-time employees. Mr. Kenny questioned the salary of the Cost Coordinator and Mr. Dusek explained the employee's time and salary were split between the two Departments. Mr. McDevitt asked how long the certification process was and Mrs. Putney responded 144 hours.

Mr. Thomas called the question and the motion was carried unanimously to approve the request to create two part-time positions of Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement Officers and to re-evaluate the needs of the Department in six months.

Now that the approval of the Personnel Committee was received, Mr. Thomas stated it was necessary for the Finance Committee to determine a salary and source of funding for the two part time positions. Mr. Belden recommended the source of funding be the Department budget and advised Mrs. Putney could return to the Committee when funding was no longer available. Mrs. Putney reported the Department had been budgeted \$7,000 for gasoline expenses and based on January and February, she anticipated going over budget for the current vehicle usage. Mr. Sokol said it would be necessary to review the possibility of increasing the fee for fire inspections and Mrs. Putney apprised the Public Safety Committee had discussed the concept several times and it had met with opposition. She mentioned she would bring the issue up again in a future Committee meeting. Mr. Kenny questioned the proposed salary for the two part-time Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement Officer positions. Mrs. Putney responded the base salary would be \$39,273, pro-rated to \$19,637 for part-time. Mr. Belden informed there was only 8 months remaining in 2011, making the expense approximately \$30,000 this year. Mr. Thomas noted the hourly rate would be \$18.88.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. VanNess and carried unanimously to approve the request to create two part-time Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement Officer positions, base salary of \$39,273, pro-rated to \$19,637 (20 hours per week) with the understanding that the needs of the Department would be re-evaluated in six months and the necessary resolution was authorized for the next board meeting. *(Please note: Subsequent to the meeting it was determined that the correct base salary for the two part-time positions of Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement Officer was \$37,934, Grade 17, pro-rated to 20 hours per week at \$18.24 per hour.)*

There being no further business to come before the Committee, on motion made by Mr. Belden and seconded by Mr. Kenny, Mr. Thomas adjourned the meeting at 9:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlene DiResta, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist