

BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE

MAY 2, 2019

A meeting of the Budget Review Committee was held Thursday, May 2, 2019, at 7:00 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Alderman Richard A. Dowd, Chairman, Chairman, presided.

Members of Committee present: Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire, Vice Chair  
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien  
Alderman-at-Large Ben Clemons  
Alderman Jan Schmidt  
Alderman-at-Large David C. Tencza  
Alderman-at-Large Shoshanna Kelly

Also in Attendance: Alderman Patricia Klee  
Alderman Linda Harriott-Gathright (arrived after roll call)  
Alderman Mary Ann Melizzi-Golja (arrived after roll call)

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PUBLIC COMMENT - None

COMMUNICATIONS – None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – None

NEW BUSINESS – None

TABLED IN COMMITTEE

**R-18-102**

Endorsers: Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire  
Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.  
Alderman Richard A. Dowd  
Alderman-at-Large Brandon Michael Laws  
Alderman Jan Schmidt

**APPROVING THE COST ITEMS OF A COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE NASHUA BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS AND UFPO LOCAL 645 PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES OF THE NASHUA POLICE DEPARTMENT FROM JULY 1, 2018 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2022 AND AUTHORIZING RELATED TRANSFERS**

- Tabled 1/17/2019

Chairman Dowd

This evening we are going to be discussing Department 152, the Fire Department. The Revenue is on Page 41 and the Appropriations on Page 151. Chief, would you like to bring up as many as you'd like to have with you here?

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO TAKE FROM THE TABLE R-19-123  
MOTION CARRIED**

**R-19-123**

Endorser: Mayor Jim Donchess

**RELATIVE TO THE ADOPTION OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2020 PROPOSED BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF NASHUA GENERAL, ENTERPRISE, AND SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS**

- Public hearing scheduled for 5/16/2019 at 7:00 p.m. at NHS-North Auditorium

		<u>Revenue</u>	<u>Appropriations</u>
152	Fire Department	41	151

Chairman Dowd

So when you speak, please identify yourselves so the person transcribing will know who is speaking. Chief, would you like to lead it off?

Brian Rhodes, Fire Chief

Certainly, good evening, Brian Rhodes, I have the pleasure of serving as your 14<sup>th</sup> Chief of Nashua Fire & Rescue. This evening with me is Assistant Chief George Walker and Commission Kevin Burgess. If I may start out, we are not only here to look for appropriations but I'd also like to thank the group for last year's appropriations and give you a little bit of an update as to what we presented last year and requested and what we have accomplished.

So part of our goals for FY19 was to work with the IT Department to purchase new records management and CAD Software System. I am happy to report to you that we are hopefully about a month away from implementation of that process. We are very excited about that because it should give us much greater capabilities to be able to give much better reports with actual data which we have been really lacking in the past. We haven't had that ability.

We came to this Board last year and we described our need for a third dispatch position in our fire alarm office; that has been staffed the same for the trailing 40+ years. I'm pleased to report April 1<sup>st</sup>, the 4 new dispatchers began working so we are a couple weeks into that now and things are going very well.

So I can't just give you all the good; I've got to give you some bad. Last year we also asked, we spoke to the need – so let me go back to 2006 when our Department took a pretty drastic cut. We lost one Assistant Fire Chief, we lost a Fire Alarm Lineman, we lost a Public Education Officer/Fire Investigator. And we lost 2 part time employees who saved us a tremendous amount of money. And the biggest one where we are actually and I'm not happy to report this but it is the truth; we are doing a horrible job with risk reduction training in our City. We are doing a horrible job trying to keep up with – well let me say this; we are not doing a horrible job, my employees are doing an incredible job trying to maintain but I have a whole list of items from my Fire Marshall's Office. So we the City of Nashua, roughly 90,000 people have, in 2006 we had a 4 person staff, we cut that in 2006 to 3; and we are still at 3 people. So the City has grown quite a bit; there's a lot going on. Some of the things that we are falling behind on are place of assembly inspections; and this is all from my Fire Marshall Adam Pouliot; unfortunately in most cases 2 to 3 months behind in getting these inspections done.

What does that mean for us? That means we are holding up Commerce. We are holding up restaurants, we are holding up occupancies. What happens is the reality is we get political pressure put on us; I get a phone call and I have to say could you go take care of that for me and he has to drop what he's doing, so it is really not efficient. Some of the other things that we really have to do, they perform over 100 annual school inspections, 3 people; 60 annual day care inspections, 150 annual foster care inspections, 942 place of assembly inspections were completed last year and at least 50% of those required a re-inspection due to violations found. I can go on all night with that but just to tell you that this is not something new that we are coming in asking for. This is a need; it's a real need. And at this particular juncture, we had one of our fire inspectors unexpectedly retire in February; so now we have 2.

The Town of Hudson has 2 Fire Inspectors and they are a third of the size as the City of Nashua; so this is something, as I said, we talked about last year. And one of the things where we are really lagging as I said was the Community Risk Reduction which is training for our two highest at-risk populations; our children and our elderly. We just don't have the time to get out there. Our Fire Marshall is frustrated that he can't do it, but he's trying to keep up with these inspections. We drive around the City we see all this new construction that's going up; and that takes a tremendous amount of time from them. So that's one of the big things that we are going to – you know – we did not put it in the budget this year. We understand, we were given direction by the Mayor as to where we should come in at. And we felt that we can't afford cuts, we cannot afford any more cuts because we have nowhere else to cut. The only cuts that we could make at this point that would have any impact on the City Budget would be a Fire Company and that's 16 people. I can't cut one or two people and try to give or make up any savings for the City of Nashua. And I don't say that, you know people have heard that before, "it's a scare tactic" – it is not, it is the reality, it is what it is.

So back to the positives, what we did, what did we say we were going to do last year? We were going to apply for a grant and we are going to take 3 vehicles off the City's liability roles, Capital Equipment Reserve Fund. We were successful with a \$650,000.00 grant. We will be taking 3 vehicles off of the road so that's gas, tires, wear and tear, maintenance, insurance, all of that. We are repurposing one of the vehicles for our Fire Alarm Division Bucket Truck. And that is a vehicle we deferred last year to help with the budget process. That vehicle the cab and chassis to repurpose will serve us for another 15 to 20 years easily.

The biggest other thing that we had talked about last year was with the dispatchers is how are we going to fund this? For as many years as I can remember, the City of Nashua has provided dispatching services to our emergency ambulance service provider for \$0 dollars. I am happy to report to you tonight that through the RFP process we received 3 bids, we are in the process now of evaluating all of those and it is going to go the Committee for review. But we will bring in, in this first year, \$350,000.00 for dispatch services for the emergency ambulance contract with the potential for \$4 million dollars over 10 years. That's what the length of this contract is worth, the revenue for the City of Nashua. So we are trying, we are trying our best, we understand where everything is.

One of the things that we've always done in the past and my predecessors were always under the same constraints, I have a chart for you here that you can see this chart, that's 14 years of non-payroll budget. And you see a little spike right here, that spike is about \$100,000.00 and what happened that year was the City transitioned from carrying all of the diesel fuel and gas on a separate account and put it into our department budget. So in effect, that's a false raise for us. In FY06 our non-payroll operating budget was \$851,596.00 and in FY19 our non-payroll budget was \$951,659.00. That's basically flat for 14 years. I apologize but I have Deputy Chiefs who are sitting in the back room there, who are here on their own time. I have these guys going to meetings all the time; they have other duties on their own time and they are working very, very hard. Because each of them, in addition to working their 48 hour shifts in a week, has other responsibilities that fall under this non-payroll budget. So they are really doing their due diligence to keep our organization running. And the reality is, if it wasn't for Federal Grant Funding, I don't know where we'd be.

So again we are very thankful for the support that we do receive from the City; we understand. We are trying to be good fiscal stewards of the City's money but we are getting to a point here where we just can't. We are stealing from Peter to pay Paul and we are just kicking this can down the road. So we totally understand and we are going to try do our level best for you, but that's kind of where we are at.

#### Chairman Dowd

Ok just two things, I know you explained to me, but could you explain especially to the people at home the new vehicle that we are getting via the grant? And it is due within a month I think? Could you explain what that vehicle does?

Fire Chief Rhodes

Certainly. So currently we have one vehicle that is a repurposed fire truck that is our air supply unit which responds to all multiple alarm fires, technical rescues and brings an extra supply of air to the scene for us. We have one vehicle that is a converted beverage delivery truck that we've had for over 20 years that carries equipment. We have one other grant-funded truck that acts as kind of like the Command Post for our Special Operations. We are taking all of the components of those 3 vehicles and putting it into one. We were able to fit everything into one. Plus we are able to take that vehicle that acts as a Special Operations Command, take that cab and chassis, put a new body and boom for our Fire Alarm Division on that and that's right there, that's close to between \$80,000.00 and \$100,000.00 savings for the cab and chassis of that truck alone.

Chairman Dowd

Ok great. And also if you look at the bottom line of the Appropriations Budget, you see that \$350 K cut but that's the \$350K that you are getting from the contract that's being reapplied to your budget to cover I guess particularly the salaries of your dispatchers for the coming year. But then there's another \$150 K on top of that. I noticed in your appropriations you had several line items that are going up \$5 or \$10 K; is that negating all of those increases?

Fire Chief Rhodes

So what that adjustment is that last year I think we had a little misunderstanding internally as to what that actually meant and I think that all came about from the discussions we were having for creating that third dispatch position. When we started out, it was we couldn't fund it for the entire year; and then we couldn't fund it for three-quarters; and then we couldn't fund it for a half, so we settled on a quarter. So we were of the belief that that was kind of just an accounting move to show that's where we should have been but weren't. So what kind of happened to us is, if you looked at our full-time employees for FY19 it showed 180, but in reality we had 177 paid positions because we only funded that dispatch position for 3 months. So that equated to one salary so that kind of put us behind the eight ball. So that put us behind the eight ball coming forward to this year, which goes up to the \$150 that we can't continue that. We can't have to work backwards on Day 1 from \$150,000.00. We can work with you with that, but \$150 is kind of a big number for us.

Alderman O'Brien

Just a moment for the Clerk if I may. Just for the record, we have been joined by Alderman Harriot-Gathright has joined at 7:09 and Alderwoman Melizzi-Golja has joined us at 7:13.

Chairman Dowd

And you want to ask a general question?

Alderman Clemons

So no just sort of related to that particular point. So what do you mean you can work with us? Can you just explain a little bit more on that. Because I am just trying to understand what the \$150,000.00 deduction from the budget is and what it represents I guess. And forgive me because I wasn't here last year.

Fire Chief Rhodes

So that number represents kind of the starting number where we had to start from; we were working towards for this year. So we were figuring our budget plus \$133 and change when in effect once we got down to the nitty gritty here we realized "Oh no no no we have to make up that \$133" so that skewed our budget for this year going forward to meet the parameters set forth by the Mayor.

Alderman Clemons

Got it.

Chairman Dowd

Do you have additional items that you'd like to explain; either revenue or appropriations?

Fire Chief Rhodes

I mean we talked about – there's a lot of things we could do. But the non-payroll budget is a killer. We have seven facilities and if you look at our facilities, our employees do an incredible job maintaining. As I like to say "we do our own stunts". They are the maintenance people who keep these buildings up. We get into problems when our Buildings & Grounds Account is level funded for 14 years and we all know the cost of goods and services have gone up; so the value of our dollar has gone down. And I'll say it, thank goodness for Capital Improvements and giving us \$50,000.00 a year. We try to maintain a lot of stuff with that money but again, we are on pins and needles, hoping that we are not going to have a boiler blow up in the middle of the winter or something catastrophic. So the Assistant Chief's do a fantastic job with trying to manage this; he is more a facilities manager at times than an Assistant Fire Chief when you look at all of the things that are encompassed in that role. Again, it is a lot going on. We lost that second Assistant Chief in 2006; so we had an Assistant Chief in charge of Administration and an Assistant Chief in charge of Operations. So when they lost that, the Chief and the Assistant kind of had to absorb all the roles and responsibilities of that.

Chairman Dowd

Questions?

Alderman Clemons

Thank you I have a number of questions if you don't mind. I guess I want to start with where you began tonight and that is with the Risk Reduction and the Fire Marshall. That obviously, as you said, that affects doing business in the City, making Nashua a place where somebody wants to come and open up a new shop. It affects safety, you know, so right now we have 3 positions funded even though we only have 2 Fire Marshalls working; we have 3 positions funded, is that correct?

Fire Chief Rhodes

Correct.

Alderman Clemons

So how many more positions conservatively would you need to get up to a point where you felt that Nashua, that we were working with a robust economy and we were making sure that the City was safe?

Fire Chief Rhodes

With the amount of work that they produce or that they are required to do, 2 conservatively would help that.

Alderman Clemons

And how much, dollar-wise, what would that amount be?

George Walker, Assistant Fire Chief

I think for those two positions we are looking at around \$79,000.00 a piece once they were certified.

Alderman Clemons

So \$160,000.00 roughly. So my second question is relating to the dispatchers and the money you are getting from that contract. My question there is there anything statutory in that that directs that money to a particular fund or how is that, because that's funding those positions I assume, right?

Fire Chief Rhodes

That many, I'm sorry, Brian Rhodes, no that money is not specific to any person or position, it's generic. It is for dispatch services and access to our data infrastructure, our CAD and stuff like that.

Alderman Clemons

But from what I understand the \$350,000.00 cut was supposed to, correct me if I'm wrong, but the \$350,000.00 across the board cut on the bottom of this was supposed to be made up with that money, is that correct?

Fire Chief Rhodes

I believe that's why it is there, yes.

Alderman Clemons

Ok, I guess my question is this and you may not know the answer and that's fine, is that money that is coming in from that contract going just to the General Fund or is there a Special Revenue Account that it goes to.

Fire Chief Rhodes

The Special Revenue Account is being created by the Financial Services Department for this.

Alderman Clemons

I think we need to make sure we are on that to get that Legislation in there because what I foresee happening here is or what I don't want to see happen is for us to get that money and have it just go to the General Fund. I want it to be purposed to your Department so that if there is extra revenue right, so if we pay the salaries and for some reason like you said there is a surplus there, you can repurpose it for whatever the needs may be at the time. And that's what I would personally would like to see happen with that. So maybe we can work on that separately outside of this because I think it is important that that money stay in the Fire Department.

Chairman Dowd

So I talked to the Mayor and that is their intent.

Alderman Clemons

That's great. My third question has to do with fire times. And I'll just say I had a friend who had a fire this year and you guys got there right away; amazing job. You saved half the house and they were able to rebuild, they are in the process of rebuilding. You saved their pets; we have a top notch Fire Department, you guys do a tremendous job. And obviously you were able to get there and save that structure which

saved them money on being able to rebuild the house. So my question is, what is your average response time and how does this budget affect that?

Fire Chief Rhodes

I don't have that information with me, I can get that for you but when I can tell you is that one of the things that we need to look at as a community is currently we are working off a 33 year old management study of the Fire Department. 33 years it said that we needed two more fire stations in the City of Nashua. 33 years ago we were probably doing about 2,000 emergency calls a year. Today we are doing 14,000 to 15,000 calls a year. There are voids, I mean there are, when you look at what we have, our current layout of fire stations, I think back in the day it was sufficient.

But as you see as the community has grown, we have areas where we have voids; the southwest quadrant in the City and the northwest.

Alderman Clemons

One other thing, that Management Study, if we were to do a new, which I would think we would probably want to do, right? How much does something like that cost?

Fire Chief Rhodes

I've looked into that already and got quotes from two different vendors for \$50,000.00. They feel that they could come in and do a probably 6-month, very comprehensive analysis of our community, our needs, where our apparatus is located, our response times.

Alderman Clemons

Is that in your budget or no?

Fire Chief Rhodes

No.

Chairman Dowd

Did you have an opportunity to talk to Director Marchant yet?

Fire Chief Rhodes

I have not, we have a meeting scheduled for next week, yes.

Alderman Clemons

Just one more question and I am done and I am sorry I just want to get through these. My last question is in relation to that, outside of these things here that we've mentioned, is there anything else that's pressing that you haven't mentioned, I guess, to us?

Fire Chief Rhodes

No I mean we are trying to do the best we can, I am not going to lie. We are a very well-equipped organization, a lot of that is from grant funding. We are very fortunate that the City has always had a good Capital Equipment Reserve Fund. Our apparatus is topnotch. The problem we have is towards the end of the budget cycle we have to hold off on purchases and I don't particularly like doing that because then that makes it look like we don't know what we are doing managing our money. Which couldn't be further from the

truth; we have our payroll numbers down to the penny to the week now. And there have been – you know – with the Spit Brook Road addition, we were able to add, so all 6 of our fire stations have the industrial washing machines to wash the gear. But what happens when we start washing the gear more? We start to wear it out quicker. That gear is roughly, just the pants and coats, \$2,000.00 a set. We are on a replacement schedule of trying to keep our Fire Fighters in primary fire fighter gear that is no older than 5 years.

We work on, when we are doing scheduled training, we have them wear their secondary gear so that they don't beat up the primary gear. But this all costs money. Our tires on Ladder 2 alone, so at the Lake Street Station, the newest aerial with the bucket on it, \$10,000.00 to put 10 tires on that truck and that's just, and that is State bid pricing. So we are doing the best we can. There are things that we'd like to be able to do in the fire stations, there are other trainings we'd like to be able to put on. I don't think we are treading water; I think we are managing our budget based upon the resources and the funds we have and we are trying to make it work.

Alderman Clemons

And if you were able to get, if you got an extra \$250,000.00 could you tell me tonight that you would hire two more of the Fire Marshalls and do that management study?

Fire Chief Rhodes

Absolutely.

Alderman Clemons

Ok thank you.

Alderman O'Brien

Thank you, Chief as you know, I think I have a little bit of experience with you. But one thing that has amazed me over the years is the reduplication of services between Police and Fire. And I look over and they have a wonderful Command Van. They may not want you to use it because we have a bunch of dirty smoke eaters coming in it probably would take a while to I'm sure. But you mentioned you want to purchase something like that. Could you work, try to form, there's a new Chief over there, could we try to work to see if we can get a collaboration of some of these different things. As you may remember, I was in charge of the dive team and I remember sticking everything in an old ambulance and I told my guys driving it, do not go by the State DOT we will be arrested for an overweight vehicle. And we finally morphed up and everything. But it seems like when we have limited access to some of this equipment, yet there is that type of equipment within the City, can we get progressive or should we get progressive and look at a combined effort on some of those things?

Fire Chief Rhodes

That's a great question and thank you for asking that because under our administration we have started to meet with the Deputy Police Chief and the second shift supervisors once a month. We have a lot of good inroads and we are talking a lot more about collaborating with these types of events as you speak of. I don't think, we don't need that type of vehicle we already have one. But I think yes we could work with them on that and we are talking about working more in collaboration at some of these larger City events so there isn't that duplication of effort.

Alderman Tencza

When Chief Lavoie was here for the Police Department we had a discussion about their overtime costs and the overtime costs for your Department as well are fairly high. Would you say that's just because of the

normal coverage you need or are your staffing levels not where they should be; therefore you need overtime in order to make up for positions that aren't filled.

#### Fire Chief Rhodes

No, we are staffed where we should be staffed; the difference we have versus the Police Department is our specialty team's people are working. We lay out our groups so that we have divers, we have Hazmat Techs on each group. Example, our dive team went to Manchester today to help them. We have divers working we don't need to call divers back in. Our Hazmat team is working; we don't need to call employees back in. That's a big difference. Our other overtime, it's contractual, that's what it is. We have our staffing levels that are appropriate, they are safe, but as Alderman Clemons alluded to earlier, we have big fires in the City every now and then. The reason we don't have a lot of big fires in the City is because we have great staffing, we have great equipment and it makes a difference. It makes a difference in keeping our and your employees healthy because we are splitting the work up.

There are all kinds of studies that have been done to show the efficiencies of a 2 person fire engine crews versus 3 person versus 4 person. We also, you know one thing that a lot of people don't realize is, we have a catastrophic fire somewhere and that home becomes uninhabitable, those people they've suffered quite a bit already but they can file for an abatement on their taxes. So that's not money coming into the City then. So if we can get out there and we can get these incidents mitigated quickly; it is better for the occupant, it's better for the City, it's better for my employees. It's a win.

#### Alderman O'Brien

Chief it probably would be fair, I'm familiar with it but probably to the others to discuss the contractual as far as OSHA regulations of two men in, stay together as a team, a lot of this and get in to why we have this particular staffing; why it is so important, why we need teams and other different intervention devices on this for the safety and efficiency of the operations.

#### Fire Chief Rhodes

It's as Alderman O'Brien stated, I mean there are OSHA Regulations out there that say you need 2 firefighters outside before you send 2 firefighters inside. There are studies that have been done to prove the efficiencies are greater. There are studies that show the rates of Workman's Comp claims are less when you have proper staffing. Many hands make light work, right?

#### Chairman Dowd

Do you ever get in a situation like the Police Department where you are watching your funding at the end of the year by attrition?

#### Fire Chief Rhodes

Yes.

#### Alderman Dowd

Can you explain that to the people what that entails? In other words you are not hiring replacements to cover your budget at the end of the year because it is so tight.

#### Fire Chief Rhodes

It's gone on for a long time. It is the reality of the job and when some of our senior, tenured employees retire, we hire back with the new employee, so we achieve savings there which allows us to balance the budget. We are as I said earlier, I couldn't be prouder of my command staff and the four other Chiefs who

are there with the amount of scrutiny that goes into their areas of responsibility because they know. And I'll go as far as to say this; in this budget, we have 7 facilities that need to be cleaned, we need cleaning supplies. As mundane as it is, you need toilet paper, you need paper towels, you need Simple Green. Well a couple years ago what we decided was, Deputy Buxton at the time, he was a Captain and Captain Kirk, they came up with a little formula. And they took the total of the money we had and they assigned a value to kitchens, to bathrooms and to bodies and that equated to a dollar figure. So we basically allotted X amount of dollars to each location. We basically said to the Station Captains, here you go. And they did an incredible job and they continue to do an incredible job managing their budget. Where in years past, we would hit the March, Alderman then Deputy O'Brien can attest to this and the word would go out – no more supplies.

#### Alderman O'Brien

Bring in your own toilet paper.

#### Fire Chief Rhodes

So there's a lot of people in our organization that are doing a lot of great things to try to help the City and move along. And I guess I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't come in here to advocate for more assistance, because we are doing the best we can and I am not telling you the Fire Department is falling apart. But I am telling you we are getting to that point where we are getting stretched way too thin.

#### Alderman Wilshire

Well I have to agree with one thing you said and maybe two things. But our Fire Department does a fabulous job in this City; everyone works hard, top notch, really a top notch organization you have. The two positions, can you tell me a little bit more about what those would be for, not for dispatch but for Fire Marshall?

#### Fire Chief Rhodes

So right now, one of the positions that is open is called "Public Education/Inspector" and what that person was tasked with was primarily doing all the pub ed in our schools for our school age children instead of one month a year – Fire Prevention Month. They were tasked with doing the training for our elderly population, our seniors; they were doing which we don't, I have a note, which this is kind of an important one too, I do know the Fire Marshall told me what some of the big things that they used to be able to do were and this was with the business community. They could assist with conducting Fire Egress Drills; we don't have the staff to do that now. They would meet with the staff to discuss Fire Safety in the workplace; they can no longer do that. We used to provide fire extinguisher training for companies at no additional cost; they just don't have the time to do that.

These are all things that if we want to be a World Class City and I think we are, I think we are an incredible City, we should be providing these things to our business community. I mean one of the things we do in this community is our 100 million amp municipal fire alarm system. It protects over \$1.6 billion with a "B" dollars of assessed real estate in the City of Nashua; at no additional cost to any of those property owners other than the initial hook-up, it's paid for with their taxes. We do this on a maintenance budget of about \$40,000.00 a year, we maintain this. There are close to 900 fire alarm boxes in the City of Nashua. That system has been around for hundreds of years and the beauty of that system, it's called a "Redundant System", so if a line should break, and the travel of path was to the right, the travel of path now switches to the left, so it always works.

Our two people, and that's another person we lost back in '06 was the Fire Alarm Lineman, that was his primary job was to help maintain that system. So now unfortunately what we have is we have our high-end manager and his assistant that are doing all that work. So that's not work that I can say "don't do it". It is important but we have somewhat of a void there with his job.

Alderman O'Brien

Yes Chief we heard testimony from the Police Department. We are very fortunate in the City, we have the Great American Downtown which posts on and hosts great events such as the Holiday Stroll and everything else. And we heard some testimony back from the Police Department and it's tough to budget for that, trying to put out different things. So if we were to get these 2 Fire Marshalls, would they help alleviate some of your stress points of hiring people back for these special events that the City does host from time to time and would they be an asset?

Fire Chief Rhodes

Well our Fire Marshall's Office are the ones responsible for supervising and inspecting any of the fireworks that go on in the City. So the 4<sup>th</sup> of July we always have a Fire Marshall there with the Police, bomb techs. Every night at the Silver Knights are there with fireworks, our people have to be there. The Downtown Stroll, our Fire Marshall's Office, they are responsible for compliance and safety. They are out walking Main Street, making sure the vendors are all safe to keep the public safe, they are checking occupancy in all those restaurants. And again, it's a lot of work for 3 people, it's a lot. And I guess to answer your question, no we don't have additional money, we don't have special funding that takes care of that.

Alderman O'Brien

Other events that come to the top of my head is like the night before the football game and everybody comes back to homecoming. I know it has been your tradition within your Department to hire back extra Fire Marshalls particularly to watch out. I mean we don't something like that happened in Rhode Island to happen in this particular community. We have over-crowding and although you are not trying to limit the fun; but what you are trying to do is ensure the safety of the public. So you need the extra manpower.

Fire Chief Rhodes

I spoke at Rotary the other day and when I explained the Fire Marshall's Office I said "No they are not the fun police". They are there to keep everyone safe, that's their job and they do a great job of working with our business community, not against.

Chairman Dowd

So the person you lost to retirement, do you have the funds in the budget to rehire someone for that?

Fire Chief Rhodes

We are in the process now. Yes we are in the contracture process of filling that, yes.

Chairman Dowd

The other question in a discussion that I had last night with someone at that event to be sure you have money in the budget to cover the re-negotiations of your Fireman's Contract this year?

Fire Chief Rhodes

We've talked to the Mayor's Office about it and they basically said work on what you have to work on and we will discuss it when we get there which leads me to believe that yes, there is some funding that they have put aside and I have not been privy to that at this point.

Chairman Dowd

The other thing is a couple of other groups that came in here more particularly the Board of Public Works said that there was a 15% increase in repair parts for all of their equipment. Did you take that into your account in your repair budget?

Fire Chief Rhodes

With all due respect Mr. Chairman, 14 years of a flat budget, no.

Chairman Dowd

Ok.

Alderman O'Brien

Chief just as a comment but to say what Alderman Dowd I do see in Building & Maintenance & Grounds you did go up an additional \$10,000.00 and that would include, people don't think of, but stuff like snow blowers or lawnmowers and the other things. I do have to compliment the Department. The amount of pride that your firefighters take in every structure. I know they live there and they do treat it like their – it is a municipal building – but they treat it like home; it is their home. So to compliment on that; I love the way some of the companies, it's almost like a contest on the Christmas Decorations. It's duly noted and everything.

But to get back to my question, the Police Department when they were here, they were saying, you know looking at difficulties in hiring. And as we go on with this level funding and budget and everything; is our Department attractable to people seeking a fire service career to come in to the City of Nashua and to work for us. Are we getting qualified candidates when you hold a test?

Fire Chief Rhodes

I think the short answer is yes, but it's a much deeper discussion when you look at nationwide and you look at – well think back when you tested for the City of Nashua. I don't know but I know when I tested and Chief Walker and Chief Carignan, there were over 600 applicants. The last time we offered positions, we had 33. So part of that is the Fire Chief's Association of New Hampshire we created a Committee to try to figure out what is going on because this is a problem nationwide, but it's more so of volunteer services of recruitment and retaining. But you have a lot of today's workforce that maybe doesn't want to work the type of schedule we work. And the pace of advancement isn't quick enough for them. So I think we have seen a downturn and I can't speak for the Police but just seeing how the Police are under attack every day throughout our country and the world, that's why no one wants to be a Police Officer. And I think part of that has also come to the Fire Service. So we are looking and I've instructed our Training Officer who kind of handles all of that, we have to expand our footprint. We have to start advertising regionally, nationally, we have to do something.

But I think to answer your question and I've this conversation with many Fire Chiefs in the State and it's not a nice way to put it but Nashua is a taker. We take everybody else's employees, we don't give up. In some respects that's not fair to them because they are having the same problems we are having but we are hiring their people who are already certified, they are already trained. And they spent a lot of time, energy and effort hiring new employees. Because we all know that's a lot of money to hire a new employee but it's not like we go out and recruit them so I can at least sleep at night when I talk to the other Chiefs and I say "Sorry we are not doing that". It's an open hiring process.

Chairman Dowd

So one other thing, in conversation we had when I visited with you guys and in association with that study, the amount of new building that has gone on particular in the southeast, southwest quadrant of the City and

the fact that we might be building a new school down there with 800 students. It is a good possibility in the not-too-distant future that we will need another station down in that area. Adding a station adds significant number of personnel to your requirements. So we need to start looking at your budget so that when that happens it is not like a huge spike, you know, you build to it and once it is decided to build the station, where it is going to go, that you have people ready to man it as soon as it opens. So I think that is part of something that needs to be looked at in that study.

Alderman Wilshire

I agree. I was going to mention the study, you know, I'd like to see that study done sooner rather than later, I mean it's \$50,000.00 and hopefully we can find that somewhere to get that going. Because a 33 year old study doesn't really serve us well, thank you.

Alderman O'Brien

Yeah and a follow up on that, the name of it, if my memory serves me right it was the HAY Study, unfortunately because of the level funding, this is just a little comment on it. Not much of it was really implemented, but it was a comprehensive study from what I remember. It looked at the station, the total infrastructure itself, it looked at even the furnishings, the living conditions, the other types of things as well as the general protection area. I agree, Madam President, that 33 years old, that is an old study and to rely on that we probably need to take a step forward to look at that again.

Alderman Clemons

And to expand on what the two previous speakers have said, you know, you can't just take a study like that from 30 years ago because think about; there's a couple of things. The Lake Street Fire Station was over 30 years was not what it is now, right? That's different; so is Crown Hill. We added on to Spit Brook and so those things we've got to take into account those changes for those areas of the City. The way that the City has grown both in density and geographically is different; the traffic patterns are different. Back 30 years ago the highway wasn't the way that it was; we didn't have the Broad Street Parkway. So there are things that you have to consider now because it all goes into response times and all that stuff. So yeah I mean we definitely absolutely need a new study if not just to say here's where we are at now and compare it to where we were 30 years ago. And I think that the just the benefit of that alone, of the information that we'd find in that is worthwhile even if nothing got implemented. Although I do think that we, if we are going to do this, we should look at it and look at a way and hopefully part of the component in that as Alderman Wilshire pointed to is how do we pay for these changes as well considering the budget and all that. I hope that's part of the study as well, not just the statistics. But Nashua has changed a lot.

Alderwoman Melizzi-Golja

Yes I would just add to what Alderman Clemons said. The timing is perfect now for this because we are also looking at updating the Master Plan. So it's not only incorporating what has happened in the past 33 years but what is it we are planning for going forward. Hopefully it won't be going forward 20 years; we will update the Master Plan again in 10 to 15 years.

But there have been so many changes and just the old mill buildings that have now become residential downtown; I mean those, some of us who were sitting here 10 years ago were like "God we'd like that to happen" and then it happened in the blink of an eye. So I think that looking at what the Master Plan is hoping will happen also going forward is going to be a very important part of that study to make it really be useful and projecting out where our needs to be focused and where our priorities need to be focused. So I am happy to hear you are meeting with Director Marchant.

And also just all of the things that are going on along the riverfront and attracting more people into the City and more events; as you have spoken this evening about your role and all of what goes on in the City. I don't think people realize that you are in and out of events looking at what the occupancy rate is, you are looking

to make sure Main Street is safe from fire hazards during the stroll when we have all these food vendors there and all of the power. So I hope that the public who is listening has gotten a broader view of what our Fire Department does besides responding to fires and being called out when there's an accident. Because just knowing that our guys are out there maintaining their buildings and maintaining their lawns and keeping those facilities looking the way they do. And I think both Alderman O'Brien and Alderman Dowd mentioned that those stations are their homes. If for no other reason, we need to make sure they are well-maintained, so I hope the public has come to appreciate just listening to this evening all of the things we ask our firemen to do; as well as how amazing you are in managing your resources. When I sit at your meetings and listen to how you are budgeting and repurposing and being resourceful in what you do and who has skills to do whatever? It is just amazing so I commend you and your Department.

#### Alderman O' Brien

Yes a couple of things referring Chief you are familiar with this book. And I misquoted it unfortunately has the priority, this for the public, this is the Capital Improvements Program for the City. And I remember reading it and I went back and unfortunately got a B5 rating but that is your Nashua Fire Rescue is working on a 1986 Fire Pro study which is now almost 32 years old at the time of this writing. While the study recognized the need of both Station 7 northwest quadrant; Station 8 southwest quadrant; we believe that to fully provide the City of Nashua accurate plans for the future a comprehensive study is needed to evaluate the needs of Nashua Fire Rescue. And it has a cost of the strategic goals for NFR at the \$55,000.00 with that. But on this book too and I see in your budget here, how is the ... I see Conant Road is up, talking about taking care of the homes, you know what I mean, the stations is roof replacement; what is the status?

#### Chief Rhodes

I am going to refer to my Facilities Manager.

#### Unidentified Speaker

So we put a few things together for the Capital Improvements Study and I believe we haven't got the final book but we believe that roof replacement at Station 6, Conant Road, has been approved. As he has mentioned, the Capital Improvements Fund really bails us out with the seven stations. Maintaining seven stations with a \$52,000.00 buildings & grounds budget is difficult at best. So the \$55,000.00 that we get from Capital Improvements really is the catalyst to keep these buildings in what we consider pretty decent shape. We use that money wisely and obviously it is difficult to do but we are proud of how we've done it. So it's a very important part of our overall maintenance program. Without it we would be in a different position certainly.

And I just want to comment on one other thing about buildings and we talked about positions that were cut and what kind of an effect that has on us. We cut one of the positions in 2006 and it was a part-time position; it was a part-time maintenance man that at that time I think we paid \$15,000.00 per year. That gentleman saved us hundreds of thousands of dollars over the course of his years working there. To get some to some of the things done that he used to be able to do, costs me a lot of money just to have them come and take a look at it. So when we talk about spending money wisely that probably wasn't the best cut that was made to the Fire Department. I mean obviously a part-time position that could have done a lot of the smaller jobs that we need done was very effective and that was missed. So just those little things that make a big difference.

#### Alderman Wilshire

I wanted to make a comment about the additional units that have come on line over the last few years; you've got Cotton Mill, you've got Riverfront, you've got Loft 34, you've got Marshall Street. Those are 700 or 800 units right there just in our compact downtown that have come on line in the past 5 years or so. And the Performing Arts Center that is going to bring a lot more cars and traffic and issues, right, to downtown.

We are all looking forward to that and we know you are going to handle it well, but it's just an added, very much so, added responsibility. That's 750 units and 750 seat theater downtown.

Chief Rhodes

Could I respond to that Mr. Chairman? So there are studies out there that and one of our Captains just came back from the National Fire Academy, might have been in the last year. But one of these studies that he was made aware of is how many actual responses is it efficient and effective for a unit to handle and what is that breaking point when they are tied up and we have to move resources from another area of town in to take care of that incident? So these are all things that we could find out in a Needs Analysis Management Study.

Again, I want this to be totally unbiased, I want an outside person to come in here because I don't want anyone to say "Well he's the Fire Chief, of course he wants more people". I am more than confident that if we get an independent analysis done, I think we are going to be shocked and I think we are going to be shocked because I think our employees are doing an outstanding job every day. They are overcoming these obstacles that are just the City moving forward. Madam President, you just spoke of all those units, you didn't talk of the 400 that went in the south end of the City. 400 units that went up down there; and now we are seeing the conceptual drawings or proposed drawings for the old Grace Chemical site, 40 acres on the riverfront. What is that going to do for us? We are seeing potential for, if we ever get the Mohawk Tannery Site cleaned up, how many units are going to go in there? There's a potential for Baldwin Street, between Baldwin Street and Fairmount, another 2 or 3 buildings like are going up right across from fire headquarters. So you know I've talked to people in the community and they say "Oh this is nothing like the 80's" and I'm saying "you're right, it isn't anything like the 80's". We are not building single family homes anymore; we are putting up monstrous lightweight, wood-framed, apartment buildings out of platform construction that's what we are doing. And they are throwing them up like Legos. All I'm doing is, again, I'm not doing my job if I'm not telling you, explaining to you that if I can as an organization handle this or I can't. Because if I can't, it will be readily apparent; and I'd rather have a conversation here with you now instead of a bunch of TV cameras.

Alderman Wilshire

There must be National Standards for staffing, versus your geographical area and your density? Are there National Standards for that?

Chief Rhodes

Well I think there are recommendations for that but at the end of the day it all comes down to the elected body as to how much fire protection and emergency services can you afford and do you want to pay for?

Alderman Wilshire

Well I want to pay for what I need. I mean if I need 2 more fire houses, that's what I want to pay for. I mean I'm not saying we are going to go throw them up today but if that's what this study comes out and says, I think we need to work on that. We owe it to the people of the City.

Alderman Clemons

I just want to say for the record though given all of the things that, you know, the pressures that we have here in the City; it is an absolute testament to you and prior Chiefs, of how well and how great the Department is and how it must be one of the best places to work for when you are attracting people from other areas of the State and you are not even actively recruiting them. That is a testament to you and you should be really, really, really proud. I just wanted to say that.

Alderwoman Melizzi-Golja

I would just add to the comments about the building that's going on and certainly it is not only in the southern part of the City but sprinkled across other light industrial areas. We have people moving in who are doing,

on a very small scale, and I know for example out on Budd Way in some of those units. People are doing things where they are handling materials and chemicals that we never had there before; those places were office spaces. So we've got these little pockets that I think, unless you know someone who is starting a business or you happen to go out there and go "Oh what's this"; you are not even aware of what's going on and how that impacts the needs to equip our Fire Department and what our guys and women are encountering when they go out. So you know certainly at Gateway Hills, we used to have one company occupying one building and now we certainly have one management for that building but we have many different entities within there. They are all doing different things and so that brings a totally different game to the table in terms of what you are engaging with out there if there is a fire.

But again, I think as we develop and we become a place where people are doing innovative things and starting their own businesses, that impacts what challenges we have if there is a fire.

#### Alderman Klee

Yes thank you. I too want to kind of echo some of things that I've seen happening in the 30+ years that I've been living here. We do have a lot of new buildings, new hotels, when you look at Amherst Street. When I first moved there that was a big, giant soccer field and all the things that have come in and so on. So there's been much growth throughout the City. But at the same time, we still have a lot of old structures. When you think about the Tree Street areas and so and that has got to create a challenge for you. When I first got here the plots where people would build were a little bit bigger than they are now; now we are putting them on much smaller acreage and putting them closer. I just look at the four houses that went up real quickly on Manchester Street and the other ones that they are talking about and so on. That must create more of an issue for you when you have closer homes and some of the old wiring and trying to get in there. You guys do a phenomenal job and I really want to thank you for that.

#### Alderwoman Dowd

Just a couple things, wrap up thing, notes I had. Hopefully you can get some use of the new Energy Manager that the City is hiring along with the School Department to evaluate some savings. Too I have received in the last few days especially unsolicited testimony about the Nashua Fire Rescue, saying what an outstanding that you guys do in protecting the City so I thought you ought to know that.

The other thing is I had the opportunity along with the Mayor back in the day when he was an Alderman, I forget how many years ago it was, to go through the training out at your training facility at the landfill and actually go up a ladder dragging a hose and going into a burning building. I don't know if anyone else want to do that.

#### Alderwoman Melizzi-Golja

I also had that opportunity with the jaws of life.

#### Alderman Dowd

Yeah with the jaws of life, but several of the Aldermen took that and it gave them a much greater appreciation of what you guys do and what it takes to go into a burning building; and although that's a controlled environment, but it was pretty interesting. At the time I said "what in the heck am I doing!" But anyway, thank you very much. If there are no other questions, we appreciate you coming in and sharing your information with us. And hopefully we can help you in the long run here.

#### Chief Rhodes

Well thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you to the Committee for entertaining us this evening.

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO TABLE R-19-123  
MOTION CARRIED**

GENERAL DISCUSSION - None

PUBLIC COMMENT- None

REMARKS BY THE ALDERMEN - None

POSSIBLE NON-PUBLIC SESSION - None

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was declared closed at 8:13 p.m.

Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.  
Committee Clerk