

Georgetown's Fire Chief: increase salary \$40K?

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Just as the ink dries on his newly signed 3-year contract, Georgetown Fire Chief Al Beardsley presented his "Vision" to the Georgetown community via a televised Selectman's meeting 1/12/2009 to increase his own take-home pay by \$40K in two years, from \$48K to \$88K. In exchange, Chief Beardsley would work an additional 10 hours per week.

Currently, the Chief works 30-hrs/week for \$48K, but the Valley Patriot has learned that during final contract negotiations with the new chief, Georgetown selectmen granted a contract provision providing for \$20/hr for any work beyond his 30-hrs/week. At least one member of the selectmen has publicly commented that he wants to encourage the Chief to use as much of that overtime as practical.

In addition to virtually unlimited overtime pay, the Selectmen granted the new chief use of the department's "command vehicle" to travel to and from his Boxford residence, and to and from his commute to his second job, training firefighters as part of the State's firefighter training academy. Previously, use of the vehicle was predominantly restricted to in-town use, not commuting to or from a place of residence nor to a second job.

Chief Beardsley quickly came under scrutiny for his proposed public salary request, and for requesting a fire department increase of 10.4% for the next year, with an effective 37% increase over two years

"We can't fund it without a proposition 2 1/2 override," Selectman Evan O'Reilly pointed out, "and that's irresponsible."

Chief Beardsley and his finance advisor, firefighter Jeff Manning, explained that their "Vision" included new necessities in their budget, including a new "command car" for the Chief to replace his current vehicle. By sheer

example of the car's advancing mileage of recent days, the command car was spotted by the Valley Patriot the day after the "Vision" presentation, at 12:57 in the afternoon headed back into Georgetown, passing through West Boxford center.

The department's request includes the long-sought-after purchase of an ambulance. However, timing and funding for Advanced Life Support (ALS) certification has become an issue. More specifically, Mr. Manning came under a hailstorm of rapid-fire questions regarding certification from Mr. O'Reilly who questioned the statement that ALS certification could be achieved in short order. "It took Byfield five years to get certified. How can you say we'll get certified in one year?" he asked. "Clearly this will cost even more than you have on paper here."

Selectman Chair Matt Vincent was quick to point out that at this point, "it's just a proposal." He thanked the new chief for coming before the Town and then suggested that his colleagues move on to other matters. After the meeting, Mr. O'Reilly summarized the financial details of the fire department's "Vision" statement and issued a letter to the weekly paper. In response, it appears that approximately a dozen members of the Central fire company have issued a signed petition against Mr. O'Reilly's comments, and in support of the chief. Mr. O'Reilly has been quick to point out that all of his comments have been about spending, and not against the Chief who he has praised repeatedly, despite being the lone vote against the initial hiring. In addition, we have learned that Mr. O'Reilly and the selectmen were chastised in an e-mail from Finance Committee Chairwoman Robin O'Malley for sharing the contents of the fire department's "Vision" presentation with the public. In addition to the letter, Mr. O'Reilly had posted the budget on his personal website where he shares other public government documents:
www.EvanOReilly.com.

As we go to press, the Valley Patriot has learned that at least one member of the fire department has come under scrutiny for posting what have been deemed hateful messages online and blogging in a manner that has been seen as unbecoming of an officer. We will share details as we receive them.

Without an override to fund the new requests, the funding of the fire department will compete with school department budget requests.

POLICE CHIEF GETS 3% RAISE

In related news, an hour prior to the meeting with the fire chief, selectmen Phil Trapani heralded a 3% raise for Georgetown Police Chief James Mulligan. This raise was reportedly agreed to just minutes before the town's State Senator, Bruce Tarr, and Representatives, Barbara L'Italien and Harriet Stanley, met with the Democratic Town Committee and other residents at the Georgetown Middle/High School in a forum to discuss upcoming State budget cuts.

The bigger questions are: Will the Georgetown Financial Advisory Committee support such lavish expenditures in this time of budget cuts? Will they recommend a salary freeze? Will they recommend layoffs or reductions in work hours? And, as all contracts are reportedly 'subject to funding' by the voters, will the FinCom recommend payment of these increases in their budget at Town Meeting?

If the Selectmen continue to spend, and fail to wake up and smell the economy, it could make for an interesting budget season.



Lonnie Brennan is a former selectman in Georgetown, the owner of the Chocolate Cellar and the Republican candidate for state representative in 2008. You can email him at lonnie@thechocolatecellar.com.