



PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETING

March 18th, 2025

Via Zoom

4 PM

Meeting Minutes

ITEM 1 Call to Order

Chair Councilor William Emhiser called the meeting to order at 4:02PM with Councilors Norman Belanger and Doris Ortiz present via zoom. Also present via zoom were Diana DePaolo (Director of Human Resources), Daniel Hammond (Safety & Training Coordinator), Lynn Abbott (HR Specialist), Shelly Gibson (Deputy Director of HR), and Chief Lawrence Best (Fire Department). Councilor Scott Whiting was absent and excused from this meeting.

ITEM 2 Approval of Minutes

Councilor Belanger made a motion to approve the minutes from February 18th, 2025. Councilor Ortiz seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

ITEM 3 Discussion

3.a First Responder

Diana DePaolo gave an overview of the current program and relevant activities utilized by the City. Both the Fire and Police Departments are extremely busy, understaffed, and facing forced overtime. As a result, it is unfair to ask them to find their own mental health support (or create those programs in-house), given the amount of work they are presently managing. The City is currently talking with first responders in both departments to see what they need, talking with family members, and ultimately are trying to plan proactively for the future.

Overall programs like this, and what the City has done already, are proven effective, in terms of improved mental health and workplace stress, and from a cost-effective standpoint. There are mental health clinicians currently available for first responders on-site with the City, but for a limited amount of time. This proposal increases those supports and resources. If the hours of availability are increased weekly to 6–12, the average must be maintained, but the City will only be billed for the time used.

This funding would also support programming through the CISM model (Critical Incident Stress Management), which allows for more immediate debriefing and management of post-traumatic stress right after an incident occurs. These might be group sessions, 1:1 sessions, and, depending on the support needed, scale of trauma, etc., could lead to a more clinical referral for an employee (outside of the City resources), which is sometimes needed. Building out a peer support training program will build trusting relationships and help stay on top of employees needing support from each other. Currently, having check-ins for first responders has shown to improve the turnaround time in getting an employee back to working at capacity.

Ideally, the City will create one support team for the FD and PD, where weekly office hours would still be available for 1:1 support, in addition to group training courses re: resiliency, quarterly family trainings, and direct referrals for services as needed. Both Chief Best and Diana shared that other municipalities are doing similar and reiterated that prevention is essential in this work and the recognition of these supports have really come a long way in the field.

Both Diana and Chief Best clarified that employees are currently using the services offered and this proposal will increase access to supports, save the City money, and ultimately create programming that is catered to Biddeford First Responders based on relationships and trust built with consistent providers. As more employees access these resources and find them helpful, they will share their experiences with colleagues and then it's likely that more will consider doing it. Overall, employees are much more receptive to behavioral health than they used to be.

Questions from Councilors were posed about insurance crossover, and the current annual check-in the City requires for all first responders. This proposal recommends continuing check-ins, but with a consistent provider, on-site, that employees can access when needed and build a relationship with overtime. Employees may also need more than one session, or none at all, but this proposal allows for more options. It's essential to recognize this proposal prioritizes the health of employees and also aims to save the City significant amounts of money in the long run (avoids additional sick/leave time, etc.).

It is unclear exactly what insurance supports for union employees because of what the City already requires for annual check-ins (and mental health services are not necessarily guaranteed through any additional insurance options). Additionally, Councilor Ortiz and Diana agreed that finding a trusted mental health professional with availability, even if the employee *wants* to see them, is extremely difficult. This proposal gives employees an opportunity to see if it works for them, with less barriers.

Councilors Belanger, Ortiz, and Emheiser all agreed this is extremely important and will be challenging to approve from a budgetary standpoint. Councilor Emheiser encouraged Diana to consider plan B (what can be done/accomplished with less money), and to break down the proposal between what programs the City currently utilizes, what is the additional ask, and what is connected to/associated with what (i.e. what is already being spent versus what is incremental for this fiscal year versus the last). Everyone agreed that prevention is essential, and, from a budgetary perspective, it's difficult to prove what amount will be saved when something was prevented.

3.b City Manager Update

There are currently a total of 7 candidates with City Manager experience and 7 who have Director level experience (or higher) within municipalities. March 24th is when the search committee will meet to review the packets regarding applicants, and they will determine who will be asked to join interviews. The first round of interviews will likely take place via zoom.

ITEM 4 Other Business

Councilor Emheiser asked if there were any updates on Paid Family Medical Leave. Diana shared that the school has determined they want to proceed with the private plan so the City will need to follow suit. This actually offers massive savings, the same benefits, and the rate is locked in until it expires (at that point the City can either return to the state plan or go back on the private plan). Diana will be presenting on this at the Council meeting on March 18th.

ITEM 5 Adjourn

Councilor Belanger made a motion to adjourn at 4:53 PM, Councilor Ortiz seconded the motion; the motion was approved unanimously.

Personnel Committee Members:

- Councilor William Emhiser, Chair
- Councilor Norman Belanger
- Councilor Doris Ortiz
- Councilor Scott Whiting