



City of Biddeford
Personnel Committee
March 18, 2025 at 4:00 PM
City Hall Council Chambers

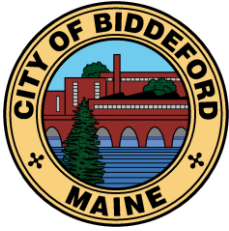
Via Zoom
When: Mar 18, 2025 04:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
Topic: Personnel Committee Meeting

Join from PC, Mac, iPad, or Android:
<https://biddeford.zoom.us/j/92782496472?pwd=7JDkINCxqJSI4XJeSLU7MAWqVts8bB.1>
Passcode:746887

Phone one-tap:
+13017158592,,92782496472# US (Washington DC)
+13052241968,,92782496472# US

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+1 305 224 1968 US
+1 309 205 3325 US
+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)
+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of Minutes
 - 2.a Personnel Committee Meeting Minutes 2-19-2025
3. Discussion
 - 3.a First Responder Resiliency Brief
 - 3.b City Manager Search (update)
4. Other Business
5. Adjourn



PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETING

February 19th, 2025

Via Zoom

4 PM

Meeting Minutes

ITEM 1 Call to Order

Chair Councilor William Emhiser called the meeting to order at 4:07PM with Councilors Norman Belanger and Scott Whiting present via zoom. Also present via zoom were Diana DePaolo (Director of Human Resources), Brian Phinney (Chief Operating Officer), and Daniel Hammond (Safety & Training Coordinator). Councilor Doris Ortiz was absent from this meeting.

ITEM 2 Approval of Minutes

Councilor Whiting made a motion to approve the minutes from January 21st, 2025. Councilor Belanger seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

ITEM 3 Discussion

3.a Remote Work

Diana stated that the current remote work policy has been in place for a couple of years and has worked well. There are a few employees who benefit from working from home one day per week and short-term arrangements, such as a child being sick, can be accommodated. As a result, the City is getting more from people as they can contribute from home rather than taking an entire day off.

There is a current hiring team considering an applicant that has a significant need to work from home more than one day a week, so it was worth re-visiting the existing policy to see if it's prohibiting the City from hiring qualified candidates. Changes would allow for a variety of accommodations and circumstances, so that the City may be able to retain and better support other highly skilled employees in the future. Some clean-up work was also performed on the policy to better define where requests should be sent regarding short-term accommodations.

Brian Phinney clarified that there is an approval process for short term arrangement requests so that employees must consult with, and receive approval from, their supervisor (they cannot just decide to work from home without this discussion). He also stated that there needs to be criteria within the policy that determines who may be eligible to work from home *and* which demonstrates that the City has a legitimate need for that employee to work from home. By having such criteria in place, leadership can ensure that the ability to work from home is offered fairly to those requesting to do so.

Scott Whiting questioned a specific section of the policy which referred to employees working from the office 'as often as is practicable.' Scott asked if it was intentionally written this way to allow for flexibility or if it should be more definitive (i.e. a minimum of 3 days each week). Diana explained that the wording is meant to allow for flexibility. The policy also states that if you can be in the office, you should be in the office. The City understands, however, that there may be things going on outside of an individual's control.

Councilor Belanger expressed concern about employees complaining that others are getting privileges they are not; this may come up as a result and HR should be prepared for such requests. Councilor Emhiser agreed. Councilor Belanger suggested amending the verbiage to include 'legitimate

substantiated need' and that best practice would be to confirm and document that the need to work from home is real and legitimate. Additional updates should be made to the verbiage as appropriate.

Councilor Emheiser recommended adding language that says, 'City Manager or Director of Human Resources, if so directed by the City Manager.'

Brian Phinney asked for clarification on implementation: are all five of the requirements for working from home required for a request to be granted or will a smaller subset of the criteria be acceptable?

Councilor Belanger suggested that leadership review each criteria balance them to make sure the decision makes sense for the situation (not necessarily require them all). Councilor Emhiser agreed and added that each of the criteria should be considered to ensure the right decision is made.

Brian Phinney stated that more clarification is required in paragraph 3 regarding the public and conducting business at home. He also suggested adding clarity in paragraph 4, particularly deleting each occurrence of 'the employee and manager will.'

Norman Belanger motioned to approve the policy with the above discussed amendments. Councilor Whiting seconded the motion. The policy was unanimously approved with the amendments discussed.

As follow up, Councilor Emhiser asked how a change like this would be communicated to employees. Diana stated that all non-union staff are emailed to receive the information and updates like this are communicated city-wide through the employe newsletter.

3.b Staff Appreciation

Diana gave a summary of information gathered from other municipalities (this work is on-going). Ultimately recognizing employees is a good thing; currently this only happens across the City at the employee banquet, which may not necessarily need an overhaul. The City also offers swag through new hire orientation which is something that HR manages.

Councilor Emhiser said that seeing the Fire Department being recognized in Council Chambers is great and other departments could also benefit from such praise. Diana suggested the announcement of promotions at City Council meetings. Councilors Belanger and Emheiser, as well as Brian, agreed this might be a good place to start. Staff are the backbone of the City and appreciation should be shown.

ITEM 4 Other Business

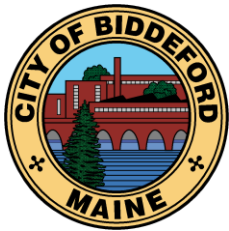
City Manager Search (update): Diana Depaolo stated that the advertisement should be by Friday, February 21st; everyone is encouraged to share it widely. The next steps will include the review of applications to determine interviews.

ITEM 5 Adjourn

Councilor Belanger made a motion to adjourn at 4:46 PM, Councilor Whiting seconded the motion; the motion was approved unanimously.

Personnel Committee Members:

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



CITY OF BIDDEFORD

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PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Meeting Date: Tuesday, March 18th
Meeting Time: 4:00PM
Item Description: Budgeting for first responder resiliency
Agenda Item No: 3.a
Submitted by: Diana DePaolo, HR Director
Key Terms: N/A

Executive Summary:

The City of Biddeford's first responders face significant mental and emotional stress, impacting their well-being and job performance. To proactively address these challenges, the FY26 budget request includes \$141,600 for expanded behavioral health services, including Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), peer support training, and dedicated clinician office hours. These initiatives aim to reduce absenteeism, turnover, and workers' compensation claims while fostering a resilient workforce. Investing in structured mental health programs has been shown to lower psychological injury claims and operational costs, making this a fiscally responsible and necessary step to support employee wellness and long-term workforce stability.

Detailed Review:

The City of Biddeford's employees, particularly first responders and frontline staff, face significant mental and emotional stress in their daily work. To support first responder well-being and maintain a resilient Fire, Police and Dispatch workforce, I am requesting funding in our FY26 budget for expanded behavioral health services, including Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), peer support training, and dedicated office hours with behavioral health professionals. These initiatives will provide proactive support to employees, ultimately reducing absenteeism, workers' compensation claims, and turnover while increasing productivity, workplace satisfaction and retention.

The total cost for these services is \$141,600, which is broken down as follows:

- CISM sessions (3 per year) – \$7,200
- Peer Support Training (48 hours per year) – \$9,600
- 12 Weekly Office Hours with a Clinician (*including proactive counseling, resiliency training, quarterly family trainings, and referral support*) – \$124,800

Providing these services is not just an investment in employee well-being but also a cost-saving measure for the City. Studies have shown that proactive behavioral health programs significantly reduce workplace injuries, long-term disability claims, and stress-related absenteeism. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), approximately 30% of first responders develop behavioral health conditions such as PTSD and depression, compared to 20% in the general population. For our Medic/Firefighters, Police and Dispatch staff. **That is equal to 35 of our first responder employees.** Additionally, a study by the Ruderman Family Foundation found that in 2017, more firefighters and police officers died by suicide than in the line of duty, emphasizing the urgent need for mental health interventions. Implementing structured behavioral health initiatives has been proven to help mitigate these risks and improve long-term employee retention.

The financial impact of untreated behavioral health issues is also significant. Studies indicate that departments with proactive mental health programming see reductions in workers' compensation claims, sick leave usage, and turnover rates. A report from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) suggests that early intervention programs can reduce psychological injury claims by up to 40%. Additionally, first responders experiencing PTSD or untreated stress are more likely to take extended leaves of absence, leading to increased overtime costs and operational disruptions.

In the chart below you can see an overview of our mental stress claims over the past five years. We have done some amazing work improving culture and providing a positive workplace, and you can see that reflected in the cost of claims. However, taking our foot off the gas is taking the huge risk of a backslide into claims resulting in nearly half a million dollars. Proactive work in this area is the far more fiscally responsible approach and it is considerably more beneficial to employees. Although

these net costs are through workers' compensation insurance and not directly incurred by the City, those costs get passed on to us through our mod rating.

The proposed peer support training will help cultivate a sustainable internal support system, allowing employees to receive guidance and encouragement from trained colleagues who understand the unique stressors of their roles. This approach has been highly effective in law enforcement, fire services, and municipal workforces, as it fosters a culture of well-being and resilience while reducing stigma around seeking help. The dedicated weekly office hours will further ensure employees have consistent, confidential access to behavioral health professionals, strengthening their ability to manage stress and perform effectively.

Given the increasing demands placed on municipal employees, particularly first responders, this funding request represents a strategic investment in workforce stability, productivity, and cost reduction. The clinicians I consulted with charge between \$150-\$250 per hour, which is competitive and reasonable for the expertise provided. By approving this funding, the City of Biddeford can take a proactive stance on employee wellness, demonstrating a commitment to the long-term health and success of its workforce while mitigating future costs related to turnover, absenteeism, and workplace injuries.

Fund Year	Claim Type	Dept.	Net Incurred	Status	Nature of loss
2020	Medical w/in waiting period	Police	\$ -	Closed	Mental Stress
2020	Lost time	Fire Department	\$854,385.40	Open	Mental Stress
2020	Lost time	Fire Department	\$459,836.48	Closed	Mental Stress
2021	FYI WC	Police	\$ -	Closed	Mental Stress
2021	Lost time	Fire Department	\$649,079.00	Open	Mental Stress
2021	Lost time	Fire Department	\$7.25	Closed	Mental Stress

2021	Lost time	Fire Department	\$22,859.55	Closed	Mental Stress
2021	Lost time	Fire Department	\$-	Closed	Mental Stress
2021	Lost time	Police	\$3,992.46	Closed	Mental Stress
2021	Lost time	Fire Department	\$-	Closed	Mental Stress
2022	Lost time	Police	\$260,525.00	Open	Mental Stress
2022	Lost time	Fire Department	\$-	Closed	Mental Stress
2023	FYI WC	Police	\$-	Closed	Mental Stress
2023	FYI WC	Police	\$-	Closed	Mental Stress
2023	Lost time	Police	\$-	Closed	Mental Stress
2023	Lost time	Fire Department	\$6.35	Closed	Mental Stress
2023	Medical	Police	\$600.00	Closed	Mental Stress
2023	FYI WC	Police	\$-	Closed	Mental Stress
2023	Medical w/in waiting period	Police	\$-	Closed	Mental Stress
2023	Lost time	Fire Department	\$1,200.00	Closed	Mental Stress
2024	FYI WC	Fire Department	\$-	Closed	Mental Stress

2024	Medical w/in waiting period	School	\$-	Closed	Mental Stress
2024	Medical	Police	\$3,050.00	Open	Mental Stress
2024	Lost time	Police	\$20,050.00	Open	Mental Stress
2024	Lost time	Fire Department	\$20,050.00	Open	Mental Stress
2024	Medical	Fire Department	\$3,025.00	Open	Mental Stress
2024	Medical w/in waiting period	Police	\$-	Open	Mental Stress
		TOTAL	\$2,298,666.49		

I wanted to provide you with this information outside of a budget presentation where it can be looked at and discussed more deeply. I am not asking you to take any action today but asking that you strongly consider supporting this initiative during the budget season. I am happy to provide any more information or answer any questions you might have. Thank you.

Staff Recommendation: N/A