

***APPROVED MINUTES*** of the Budget  
Workshop of the City Council of the City of Rye held  
in City Hall on December 5, 2011 at 8:00 P.M.

PRESENT:

DOUGLAS FRENCH Mayor  
PAULA J. GAMACHE  
PETER JOVANOVIK  
SUZANNA KEITH  
CATHERINE F. PARKER  
JOSEPH A. SACK  
Councilmembers

ABSENT: RICHARD FILIPPI, Councilman

The Council convened at 7:30 p.m. Councilwoman Gamache made a motion, seconded by Councilwoman Keith and unanimously carried, to immediately adjourn into executive session to discuss labor relations. Councilman Jovanovich made a motion, seconded by Councilwoman Parker and unanimously carried, to adjourn the executive session at 8:13 p.m. The regular meeting convened at 8:34 p.m.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor French called the meeting to order and invited the Council to join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Roll Call

Mayor French asked the City Clerk to call the roll; a quorum was present to conduct official city business.

3. 2012 Budget Review: Fire Department

Mayor French began by saying that the City lives in a “tax cap world” now and must look at things differently. The City Manager has put forth recommendations regarding the Fire Department that will allow the Council to look at things for the next five or ten years. City Manager Pickup summarized that in November a proposal was made to change the Charter to create a new position of Commissioner of Public Safety, who would have authority for both police and fire. A retirement in the Fire Department next year has provided an opportunity to look at the overall structure and look for opportunities.

Fire Chief George Hogben provided a summary of department activities for 2011 that keep the Department in compliance with New York State requirements. He also outlined what would be done during 2012 to maintain that compliance.

City Manager Pickup outlined the structure of operation of the Fire Department. By Charter, the Board of Wardens have the general responsibility for running the Department through the Chiefs and others in the command structure. There is also a full-time staff that consists of a Fire Inspector and paid staff. According to the Charter, the City Manager serves in an advisory role to the Board of Wardens. There is no specific relationship defined in the Charter between the City Council and the Board of Wardens. Going forward in a tax cap environment, the City must look for opportunities to be more efficient in the way it provides services. He said that the goal of the proposed changes was not to criticize the way the Department is being run, but simply to allow the Council and the community to review all options. He said that the creation of a Public Safety Commissioner and changing the relationship between the Board of Fire Wardens and the City Manager would both require public hearings.

Career Firefighter John Castelhana provided the Council with charts regarding the types of incidents the Fire Department responded to during 2009 and 2010 that detailed the various types of calls and man hours spent. He said the average number of calls during a year ranges from 800 to 1,000. At this point it looks like 2011 will be within the same range.

Richard Barber, a member of the Board of Wardens, read a statement regarding the proposed Charter changes to the operation of the Fire Department. He said that he believed if implemented, the morale of the department would drop. He said he believed the proposed changes to be a “vote of no confidence” to the Board of Wardens. Before creating a new position of Public Safety Commissioner, the City Manager should provide information on how it will save the City money and let the Board of Wardens know if the job description will require a background in fire related matters. He said any proposed changes to the Charter should first be referred to a Charter Revision Committee and then be voted on by the public. If this is not done, a petition of 550 signatures could force the matter to public referendum. He urged the Council to table the proposed Charter changes for an indefinite period of time.

Mayor French said that a longer discussion will be needed on the position of Public Safety Commissioner, but asked what would be the impact to the Board of Wardens and the volunteer portion of the Fire Department if the Charter was changed to have them report to the City Manager? Mr. Barber said that the Department works the way it is and that volunteers would leave if they had to report to the City Manager.

John Castelhana referred to the study done in 2004, which was done in order to come up with recommendations for a better Fire Department. He gave credit to City Manager Pickup and Mayor French for looking into doing things differently in the Department. He added that the career staff did not believe a Public Safety Commissioner would suit the needs of the Department.

Captain Barry Nechis of the New Rochelle Fire Department also addressed the Council. He referred to consolidation studies for other fire departments in Westchester done three years ago, which noted that if a tax cap was enacted it would cause problems for delivery of services

by Fire Departments. He said that there are good and bad aspects to having a Public Safety Commissioner. The abilities of the Commissioner appointed will determine how well the position works because it is important that they understand the operations of both police and fire. He said that possibly a lower level supervisor would be a better solution for the day to day supervision issues that exist in the department. He noted that people don't understand all of the economics of fire protection and said that it includes not only the cost of the department, but also the costs of the water system and fire insurance costs paid by property owners, which are affected by the rating assigned to a community by the insurance industry. The way fire departments operate is controlled by the insurance rating system. He said that he believed the concept of the paid fireman and volunteers reporting to the same person makes the most sense.

James Finneran of the Board of Wardens suggested that while the Council is considering any changes to the Charter regarding operation of the Fire Department, the City Manager should attend the Board of Wardens monthly meetings. Fire Chief Hogben suggested that shift lieutenants be created for the paid staff in order to provide more structure

Members of the Council said that they would like more information on the operation of the Fire Department in order to determine what works and what can be done better. A suggestion was made that a plan be put in place for an interim Fire Inspector so that the Council is not rushed into making a decision before all options are explored. City Manager Pickup said that there are specific requirements needed to perform this function. A request was also made for more information on the operation of the parallel structures in the fire department. City Manager Pickup said he would work with the Fire Wardens and the paid staff and bring more options back to the Council in January. In response to a question about why he is recommending the position of Public Safety Commissioner, Mr. Pickup said that the City has to look at the balancing of interests of the community as it invests in police and fire over the next 20 to 30 years. He said the biggest investment of tax dollars is in public safety and the way the City manages these expenses will control the tax rate. It was suggested that another workshop dealing with the Fire Department should be scheduled for early in 2012.

4. General Budget Discussion and Questions

This agenda item was not discussed.

5. Discussion of setting a Public Hearing to amend the City of Rye Charter for the creation of a Public Safety Commissioner to head the Police Department and the Fire Department reporting directly to the City Manager

This agenda item was not discussed.

6. Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss Councilwoman Gamache made a motion, seconded by Councilman Jovanovich and unanimously carried, to adjourn the meeting at 9:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dawn F. Nodarse  
City Clerk