

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
ACTIONS
JUNE 16, 2004
6:00 P.M.
CIVIL SERVICE CONFERENCE ROOM
3RD FLOOR, CITY HALL

Roll Call

Chief Examiner Julio Lopez called the meeting to order. In attendance were Chairman Michael Finn, Chief Examiner Julio Lopez, Commissioner Geraldine George, Commissioner Frank Caracansi, Fire Chief Pete Siecienski, and Training Officer Jim Thorne. The May meeting was postponed until the June 9, 2004 meeting. The June 9, 2004 meeting was rescheduled to today's meeting, June 16, 2004.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chief Examiner Lopez explained that the topic of points issued to volunteer firefighters would be discussed first so that Fire Chief Pete Siecienski and Training Officer Jim Thorne could be present for that topic.

Preferential Points for Volunteer Firefighters - Chairman Finn stated that this issue was in the discussion stage of whether or not to institute a point system for volunteer firefighters when they take the firefighters exam. The Commission is looking for recommendations from Fire Chief Siecienski and Training Officer Jim Thorne. Fire Chief Siecienski states that in 2002, volunteers raised the question about instituting a point system in the City of Danbury. In the early 1970's and 1980's, volunteer firefighters who were active, could receive points that could be applied to the Civil Service entry level exam once they passed. Fire Chief Siecienski states that in his case, in 1979, he received 5 points if you reached a certain percentage of your responses as a volunteer and received 10 points if you reached another level of response. After 1979, there was a woman who took the City of Danbury and the volunteer fire companies to court because she felt that the volunteer fire departments did not do enough to recruit women and minorities. There was a court ruling that disbanded the points system as giving too much preference to volunteer firefighters especially white, male firefighters. That court ruling has stood for all these years and any time we tried to bring back the volunteer points system, the Corporation Counsel would be very skeptical to reinstitute that points system because we entered into a court agreement that said we would not enter into a discriminating practice. Volunteer fire companies have improved in their recruitment of women and minorities compared to years ago. However, is it enough to go to the court and say we have done better with the recruitment of women and minorities in the volunteer fire companies and we should give preference to volunteer firefighters? Fire Chief Siecienski is unsure about this and feels that this issue needs to be discussed with the Corporation Counsel. Fire Chief Siecienski states that the basis for the points system is that the volunteers have to put in a tremendous number of hours of training in order to be active as a firefighter and they get nothing back in return. There are not a lot of volunteer firefighters that want to be paid firefighters. Most of them do it just to serve their community. But for some of the younger volunteers who want to pursue a career in firefighting, if they're volunteering for the City of Danbury, we always thought it would be nice to try to give them some sort of credit, legitimately, on the Civil Service test to help them achieve their career goal. Right now, there are numerous communities

throughout Connecticut that are giving residency points (if you live in the community). That issue has been explored by the Civil Service Commission and it might be beneficial to pursue. Fire Chief Siecienski states that there was some discussion that by using volunteer firefighters that we could save money in our budget by not having to train them as much as an entry-level firefighter. That's not true because there is a bargaining agreement in place with the firefighters' union that mandates that we send all our recruits to the State Fire Academy. Regardless of whether they come in as a firefighter 1 or firefighter 2, they still are required to go to the Fire Academy in Windsor Locks for 11 weeks of training. Fire Chief Siecienski states that the department would not necessarily be saving money by hiring volunteer firefighters. However, if someone came in with a pump operator, commercial driver's license or as an EMT, then we would not have to send them for additional training which would save money. If we get Danbury residents and people who have some firefighter experience, it does two things: from the residency perspective, we get people who know the city and the community and are more likely to participate in the community such as a baseball coach, softball coach, girls hockey coach, etc. They look at the job of a firefighter as more of a career. According to Fire Chief Siecienski, one of the worst things that happened to the Fire Department is they disallowed the residency clause in the bargaining agreement. Residency gets them familiar with the City so at least Fire Chief Siecienski knows the firefighter has an idea of what the community is. If the City has someone who has some sort of firefighting background, at least they know what the expectations of the job entail. Fire Chief Siecienski is less likely to invest 11 weeks of training into an individual if he decides that being a firefighter is not what he wants to do after 9 months on the job. Fire Chief Siecienski feels that Danbury residents and people with a background in some firefighting or emergency response experience would help the Fire Department.

Chairman Finn states that he did speak with the Common Council about the residency issue. We cannot require residency of a firefighter. You cannot require residency of police officers either. What we can say is that you have to be a resident of Danbury at the time of application so that you can get X amount of points. That doesn't mean the person would not move out of Danbury at some point.

Chairman Finn presented some examples of ways the City might be able to make a point system work: we could say you get 3 points for being a Danbury resident at the time of application; you could get 2 points for being a Firefighter 1 and 3 points for being a Firefighter 2. Chairman Finn talked to the Training Officer and he recommended that because Danbury volunteers are on a stricter training program than other communities, the City should include candidates that who are currently rated as an interior responder (presently up to date with OSHA's quarterly training classes) as being eligible for points. There are firefighters out there who are not up to date. In Danbury, you are interior responder, non-interior responder or are support help. Chairman Finn has been told that volunteer firefighters have current HAZMAT operation certificate if they are an interior responder. If they are an exterior responder, they do not have a HAZMAT operation certificate. Fire Chief Siecienski asks if it is the Corporation Counsel's perspective that these points would apply to only Danbury volunteer firefighters or do these points apply to any volunteer firefighters? Chairman Finn says that the points would apply to any volunteer firefighter that would apply.

Commissioner Caracansi asks what is the difference between a Firefighter 1 and a Firefighter 2? Fire Chief Siecienski answers that a Firefighter 2 is a more involved course. The basic level of certification is a Firefighter 1. There is a little more in depth training for a Firefighter 2. Commissioner Caracansi asks if all firefighters coming out of the academy are at the Firefighter 1 level and if they complete additional training, do they become a Firefighter 2? Fire Chief Siecienski explains that for volunteer firefighters, training to become a Firefighter 2 is optional. In the paid fire department, there are step increases (salary increases) based on the completion of these steps. Does the volunteer fire department have the same distinction of Firefighter 1 or 2 or is it based on whether they are exterior responders, interior responders, etc. asks Commissioner Caracansi. Training Officer Thorne explains that volunteer fire departments follow the same method. Careers in the volunteer firefighters follow the same pattern: Firefighter 1,

Firefighter 2, etc. but the volunteers do not have to take that step. As of right now, volunteer firefighters are not required to be a Firefighter 1.

Commissioner Caracansi asks that if we are going to consider giving points for an applicant, the question is how do we know the volunteer firefighter is entitled to the points? Fire Chief Siecienski says that Firefighter 1 certificates are issued from the State of Connecticut. The volunteer firefighter needs to possess the certificate from the State of Connecticut. Those certificates are for life and are not updated. There is no consistent training/refresher statewide for volunteer firefighters. Training Officer Thorne shows the documentation that he uses to keep track of the training for the Danbury firefighters. If someone in the paid firefighters has missed out on quarterly training, he will not be allowed to go inside a building until he receives training. Quarterly training is required of all firefighters. Communities handle that requirement in different ways. Danbury is structured very well regarding quarterly training. OSHA looks at Training Officer Thorne's documents to see if all firefighters are up to date on their training. There is no way to check with candidates from other communities if their training is up to date. Commissioner Caracansi says if we can't check if they're qualified and current, this is going to be a problem. Fire Chief Siecienski agreed.

Fire Chief Siecienski states that from his experience, once this point system is opened up to the outside volunteer firefighters from other communities, they will do better than the volunteer firefighters in the City of Danbury. Fire Chief Siecienski is not trying to insult the Danbury volunteer firefighters by saying this. Danbury is more of an urban setting and because we reach out to more of the minority candidates, they struggle with testing procedures. When you have volunteer firefighters who are from a more rural setting and have better educational opportunities, they are going to score higher and now you're going to give them points for being a volunteer firefighter. If we get a point system, and it's good for everybody, the Danbury volunteers are going to get hurt because people from outside this area are going to score better and then get points on top of that.

Commissioner Caracansi asks how many volunteer firefighters are in the City of Danbury. Training Officer Thorne says there approximately 65 to 70 volunteer firefighters in Danbury. Chairman Finn says that as of August 2002, it was documented that there 213 volunteer firefighters. Fire Chief Siecienski says that number has been dropping. There used to be 800 volunteer firefighters. Commissioner Caracansi asks how will we define residency? Fire Chief Siecienski says that firefighters get around the residency requirement all the time. For example, New York City has a residency requirement. They have the mail sent to a relative's home in New York City, but the firefighter lives somewhere else. There used to be a residency clause for firefighters years ago. The State passed legislation that did away with residency requirements because the courts basically said this is America and we can't tell you where to live. Commissioner Caracansi states that if we could come up with criteria that could be enforced and is acceptable by the courts, on both a certification and a residency requirement, it would be helpful.

Chairman Finn states that before we institute a point system, all the volunteer firefighters have to be surveyed and find out what the make up of the volunteer firefighter is: how many blacks, women, Hispanics? We need to know this so that we can comply with the court's ruling. Commissioner Caracansi asked if the Civil Service Commission has the right to institute a point system for certified volunteer firefighter and residents. Chairman Finn says the Civil Service Commission does have the right to institute a point system for certified volunteer firefighter and residents according to the Corporation Counsel. The Civil Service Commission can institute a point system if the volunteer firefighters are diverse enough as required by the Court decision. Commissioner Caracansi recommends that a quick quiz be given to each applicant that would show that they are current with their certification. Fire Chief Siecienski says we might not want to go that far. Chairman Finn will give copies of the court ruling and a copy of the committee report to the Civil Service Commission. Fire Chief Siecienski says that if the point system is to be instituted, a decision should be made by January 2005. A new test may be run in Spring 2005. If this is not done properly, it could set up the City of Danbury for future litigation.

Previous meeting minutes:

Commissioner Caracansi made a motion to accept the previous meeting's minutes. Commissioner George seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Information on Positions:

Chief Examiner Julio Lopez gave information on the following positions:

Superintendent of Highways - The employee who was appointed to this position was originally a General Foreman in the Highway Department. This creates a vacancy for the General Foreman position. Mayor Boughton and Bill Buckley interviewed candidates from the current list. An appointment should be coming soon.

Superintendent of Parks - This position was advertised and we collected a \$25.00 fee from the candidates. This position has been eliminated from next fiscal year's budget. The fees collected from the candidates should be returned. A letter has been sent to the candidates that the position is on hold and may be deleted. The letter also said if the position was deleted, the \$25.00 fee would be returned to them. Commissioner Caracansi made a motion to refund the fee to the candidates. Commissioner George seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Lateral Entry Police Officers - We currently have two individuals on the list: Frederick Dirga and Richard Tirado. They are going through the background process, etc. and Chief Examiner Lopez is hoping they'll move through quickly. Mr. Dirga was a Police Officer in New York City, and then he was a State Trooper in Connecticut. The State of New York is giving us some difficulty in providing to us the Academy records for Mr. Dirga. We have paperwork from the Academy that he is certified, so we are going ahead with the polygraph and psychological evaluations for Mr. Dirga.

Chief Examiner - Chief Examiner Lopez announced that this would be his last meeting as Chief Examiner of the Civil Service Commission. The Personnel and Civil Service Department is being reorganized. A part-time Chief Examiner will be in place with the new fiscal year budget beginning July 1, 2004. Commissioner Caracansi states that the Civil Service Commission was never approached about reorganizing the Commission. Chairman Finn and Chief Examiner Lopez had been discussing this change. A part-time Chief Examiner position was added to the budget. The main concern was to keep the Commission operating the way it's been operating. The Commission has to set up a test and interview candidates. The Civil Service Commission will be involved in more of the day-to-day items until the part-time Examiner is hired. Commissioner George asks where in the budget is the money coming from to hire a part-time Chief Examiner. Chairman Finn states that the Personnel Director position will remain empty and that's where the money will come from to support a Chief Examiner position. Commissioner Caracansi asks who will be in charge of the Personnel Department if there is no Personnel Director. Chief Examiner Lopez says that the structure of the department has changed: The Director of Finance will also be the Director of Personnel. Chief Examiner Lopez's title changes to Deputy Director of Personnel. Commissioner Caracansi doesn't understand why the Commission was not consulted on this restructuring. Chairman Finn states that no one was consulted. The decision was made and they were told about the restructuring. Commissioner George states that maybe the Civil Service Commission is not needed anymore since decisions are made without the Commission being consulted. Chairman Finn explains that he is not defending anybody, but decisions were made based on the budget and the Commission was never consulted. Commissioner Caracansi states that if there is an economic impact on a department or commission, that the head of the department or commission should at least be consulted as to input. To make the decisions unilaterally, it doesn't make much sense. But if the decisions have been made, the Commission will have to make the necessary adjustments. The Chief Examiner position will be advertised but the position does not have to be tested. Chief Examiner Lopez will make copies of the Chief Examiner's job description to give to the Commission at the end of the meeting. Commissioner Caracansi wants to put on the next agenda to have an executive session to discuss Personnel and personnel problems. Chairman Finn agrees with that idea.

Director of Economic Development - The position was advertised and two candidates applied. Commissioner Caracansi felt that both applicants were qualified and he recommended that the candidates be presented to the Mayor.

Eligibility Lists - There are Eligibility Lists that are expiring or have expired:

Claims Processor: Expires July 7, 2004. Extended to July 7, 2005.
Assistant Information Technology Manager: Expired April 30, 2004. Extended to April 30, 2005.
Executive Secretary: Expired May 29, 2004. Extended to May 29, 2005.
Account Clerk II: Expired May 30, 2004. Extended to May 30, 2005.
Police Officer (Entry Level): Expires June 24, 2004. Extended to June 24, 2005.

Commissioner Caracansi made several motions that all the eligibility lists as noted above should be extended for one more year; but if the list had less than three applicants on it, the list should not be extended and the position should be re-advertised. Commissioner George and Chairman Finn seconded the motions. The motions passed unanimously. Regarding the Police Officer eligibility list, Commissioner George asks if any Police Officers from the entry level list will be hired because there are no seats available at the Police Academy. Chief Examiner Lopez says that some retirements are coming up and the list could become active again. Chief Examiner Lopez said supposedly the Academy has opened up more seats, but it's still difficult to get seats. Commissioner Caracansi asks if the people listed on the eligibility lists are listed randomly. Chief Examiner Lopez explains the candidates are listed according to the grade/rank achieved on the test(s). Commissioner George notes that most of the applicants on the police eligibility list are not Danbury residents. She asked why couldn't the federal government get involved and institute a residency requirement for the police. If there was some sort of emergency, we'd have to wait for officers to come in from other cities and towns. The Commission agreed that this was a good point and maybe the federal government should get involved at some point.

Commissioner Caracansi made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner George seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Chief Examiner Lopez adjourned the meeting at 7:01 P.M.

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