



**City of Springfield
Residency Commission
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Meeting of Thursday, April 4, 2024

MINUTES-PUBLIC MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m. Commissioners Drew Piemonte, Al Rodriguez, Gladys Oyola and Genesis Velez was present.

FIRST order of business-Approval of Minutes:

Commissioner Oyola motioned to approve the meeting minutes from March 7, 2024. Motion was 2nded by Commissioner Velez with a roll call vote to approve.

Commissioner Velez motioned to approve the meeting minutes from March 28, 2024. Motion was 2nded by Commissioner Oyola with a roll call vote to approve.

SECOND order of business-Discussion with Department Heads – Recruitment Challenges and Impact of Residency

Deputy Chief Lawrence Akers spoke with the commission on behalf of the Police Department and stated numbers are down in the department and he is uncertain if that is due to residency or the current climate across the country. The sole purpose of numbers being down is not only residency but it would certainly be a help if other people would be able to sign up and take their exams. The residency list must be exhausted before they can move to the non-resident list. Union President Martin Curley also was present and agreed with Deputy Chief Akers regarding having to exhaust the Springfield list. When they do reach out to individuals that do not live in the city and ask them to come to the city, they say they do not wish to move into Springfield.

Contractually there is also a ten-year residency requirement for all hires. Historically the police and fire depts have had positions filled by veterans who are already trained and may have been in those positions during their time in the service but due to residency if they are not already living in the city they are forced to live here. He further expressed that many do not want to be forced to live in Springfield. He expressed the unfairness in instances where officers are planning to get married and their spouse lives in one of the other surrounding cities or towns and is faced with either deciding to sell their house to move into the city or their spouse losing their job. Due to

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these issues, there is a shortage of officers and many have to work over their shifts because there are not enough officers to cover the next shift and as a result the overtime budget is being impacted.

Fire Commissioner BJ Calvi spoke with the commission on the difficulties fire is facing. Residency is impacting filling civilian vacancies. There has been an open mechanic position for over two years which has been continuously posted but there are no qualified candidates for heavy truck mechanics. They have tried to reach out to heavy truck mechanics to entice them to apply but they will not apply due to the residency ordinance. These candidates live in other communities and are established there and are not willing to sell their house and move into the city for the position. For administrative assistant positions they have had applicants but the applicants came for interviews and did not realize there was a residency requirement. As a result, there are losing good candidates for civilian positions who live in surrounding cities and towns but due to the residency ordinance it is not economically feasible for them to sell their homes or move for the position. They are facing similar issues in dispatch. Individuals are hired and trained and after having a year of training they are moving on to other communities that do not have a residency ordinance and will often times take less money in those areas. Residency has not been as much of an issue on the uniform side. Ten years ago, there were over 1,000 people who took the test to be firefighters. This last year there were about 150-200 people who signed up to take the test and this has resulted in an 80% decrease in the candidate pool. Commissioner Calvi has had people come in for firefighter positions who are Springfield residents who then find out they are mandated to live in the city for ten or more years. They are going into these positions seeking to improve their family's life and wish to move to the suburbs or some other community. There have been some firefighters who have resigned after a few years to go into different occupations due to pay or for the ability to live where they want. Union President Brian Ward also spoke with the commission and said about two thirds of the union members have fallen under the ten-year residency requirement and once they are about halfway through the required years many have had children and have become upset with not being able to have options regarding where to live. In addition to the ten-year requirement there are residency requirements that impact individuals who wish to move up the ranks in the department. After the ten-year requirement firefighters may move out of the city but must move back in to attain those higher position and many are not willing to do that because they would lose all of the equity in their current home and take on a new financial burden with having to move back into the city and purchase a new home.

Department of Public Works (DPW) Director Christopher Cignoli spoke with the commission and said his department is being severely impacted by residency and his ranks are down 15%. DPW hires off of the civil service list. Due to residency, he must wait for multiple openings so he can then pick from a longer civil service list of non-residents. If a person wishes to work for the city and they are from the city of Chicopee they cannot be bypassed he just cannot hire them.

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City services are being impacted. In February and March street signs were not repaired because he did not have people for those jobs. Director Cignoli said there will be a severe shortage this year and streets will not be swept because there are not enough people with the proper licensing to do the work. There is also a severe delay in pothole repair because the street maintenance division is down 25%. As a result, he has had to hire or promote from within his department which as a result has caused shortages in other areas. He also explained he recently had an employee resign and the reasons were residency and pay and they said they are getting married and did not want to be fired due to residency. Director Cignoli stated services are being severely impacted and expects them to continue to be severely impacted in the winter. There has been animosity among the ranks due to some new hires being able to receive residency waivers. Director Cignoli also said there are issues with the application process because it does not clearly state you have to live in the city or move in so applicants do not find out until they come in for interviews. There have also been instances of people accepting positions who then come back and say they are not

Patrick Greenhalgh, Assessor appeared before the commission and said his department has not been directly impacted by residency until recently. He explained they recently lost one of their members of the Board of Assessors because they had to move to Holyoke and as a result, they had to resign due to the residency requirement. This employee had a very specialized and unique background and skills in the area of commercial appraisals. Greenhalgh explained they recently posted a job posting for a commercial appraiser position and he would keep the commission updated on the results. He went on to explain losing this employee has not only resulted in the loss of a board member in Assessors missing. The skills and expertise this employee had allowed Assessors to spend less money on outside vendors. This resulted in his department being able to save money on less vendor services. As a result, the department many need to increase their professional services budget to offset the loss of this employee/board member.

Health and Human Services (HHS) Commissioner Helen Caulton-Harris spoke with the commission on the impact residency has had on her department. The impact has been in the clinical areas when trying to hire clinical staff, nursing staff and specialized individuals such as physicians and dentist. Residency also impacts the animal control shelter which services Springfield, Chicopee and Holyoke. The Commissioner believes it is important to have the opportunity to hire individuals from those cities and on some level, they do but the director/department head has to be a Springfield resident which is understandable but also problematic. They have not been able to hire many individuals who specialize in animal welfare due to the residency requirement. Commissioner Caulton-Harris explained another area where they are having difficulty is with the Public Health Council. She stated the Acts of 1980 says member of the Public Health Council must be a resident of the City of Springfield. There are two positions on the council for a physician and there are about five physicians who live in the city. As a result, their pool of physicians who could serve on the board is very limited. Commissioner

Oyola asked if residency was also impacting Veterans Services or Elder Affairs. Commissioner Caulton-Harris they have not really had a challenge in because they mostly serve veterans and seniors from Springfield and they prefer to have Springfield residents serving Springfield veterans and seniors but that does not mean someone from outside could not come in and do a good job in those positions. She explained the challenge across the city is hiring individuals in those specialized areas as well as entry level positions. She also believes retention is another issue and we need to create a culture that encourages employees to want to stay with the city.

Code Enforcement Commissioner Steve Desilets appeared before the commission to explain the challenges he has faced. One of the main challenges he has faced is investing money to certify and train individuals who ultimately do not stay in their positions because they would rather move to another community where residency is not a requirement or issue. He has also faced major issues related to retention. Commissioner Desilets explained he has had five inspector positions open and unfilled for a few years. Another challenge is other communities are taking his inspectors because they do not have residency requirements and offer higher pay. He also is unable to hire experienced inspectors because they are unwilling to sell their homes and move into the city. As a result, he does not have enough staff to do inspections and as a result they are behind. He also expressed that Springfield residents deserve to have qualified people filling these positions and because of the specialized education and skills required many of those qualified individuals do not live in the city. Union Representative for Building Inspectors Sean Carney also appeared. He shared with the commission that they are having issues among the ranks regarding waivers because it raises issues with fairness. Waivers are offered to potential employees while other union members have to live in the city and as a result this creates animosity. Many employees are overworked due to unfilled positions and they recognize the need to offer waivers but it still causes issues. He also stated a result of residency the surrounding towns are benefitting from employees who have been fully trained and certified by Springfield at the city's expense who are leaving their positions for positions in other communities that do not have residency restrictions.

THIRD order of business-Executive Session:

Case Assignment

Commissioner Oyola made a motion to move into executive session for the purpose of discussing employment matters and the body will not be returning to open session. Motion was 2nded by Commissioner Velez. Roll call vote taken with Commissioners Piemonte, Rodriguez, Oyola and Velez voting in the affirmative to enter Executive Session.