

TOWN OF TIVERTON, RHODE ISLAND

OFFICE OF TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

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Town of Tiverton Announces Measures Taken to Maintain Budget Integrity for Current Fiscal Year

Tiverton Town Administrator Matt Wojcik announced today that temporary operational measures and intra-budget transfers will be necessary to assure compliance with the local fiscal year 2015 spending plan.

Wojcik said, "The combination of extraordinary winter weather and the premature spend-down of the Tiverton Fire Department's overtime account jeopardize the Town's ability to end the year with a balanced budget. I have established a set of recommendations for the Town Council that mirror similar efforts in other New England communities struggling with snow removal issues, as well as specific temporary measures to rein in the overtime spending at the Fire Department."

"Working with the Town's Treasurer and department heads, I have identified nearly two dozen accounts that could be frozen and provide the Town with sufficient funds to transfer, as needed, in support of snow removal and sanding and salting efforts one might reasonably expect to conduct for the remainder of the winter. As the policy making body of the Town, only the Council can prioritize those accounts and make the necessary budget transfers to fill our funding gaps. I will present the Council with options and recommendations at its next regular meeting," he continued.

Wojcik concluded, "As for the fire department overtime account, it is the only account in Town government that has been overspent to such a large extent. We believe the account is already \$30,000 in the red and is on a pace to end the year well over \$125,000 short. I have already frozen several accounts at the Fire Department to preserve the means to cover overtime. While Chief Lloyd has identified additional expenses he can defer, it is inappropriate to tie his hands in this way. We should not forego equipment maintenance and routine, necessary purchases. Nor should we attempt to balance this account on the backs of all the other departments that have lived within their funding limits and have priorities that were carefully established in the budget. Therefore, we need to 'stop the bleeding' at the source."

With the backing of the Town Council, offered in the form of a general statement of support approved as part of an executive session briefing at the Council's Saturday special session on the municipal budget, Wojcik has ordered the Fire Department to adhere to the following operational guidelines, effective today:

- The Tiverton Fire Department will staff no fewer than 6 members per shift (compared to the current level of 7);
- Overtime will only be paid out in compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), in essence, a firefighter can only earn overtime after working his entire schedule of straight time within a given period of time, with vacation and sick time excluded from the calculation of hours worked;
- When shifts have a compliment of 7 or more, the Town's South Station on East Road will be manned. If, however, a shift has only 6 members on duty, South Station will be closed and firefighters assigned to that Station will operate from the Crandall Road Fire Station;
- The Tiverton Fire Department staffs its fire marshal function with overtime. For the duration of these budget measures, the Chief shall assign one qualified fire marshal to each of the four shift rotations and the individual on duty during the day shift shall serve as fire marshal. Other than active investigations on a fire scene, all fire suppression activity will take precedence over fire inspections, plan reviews, etc. and those personnel will respond to all fire calls as part of minimum manning.

The Town of Tiverton is currently recruiting for several firefighters as lateral hires (experienced enough to waive most training). The measures in place to prevent excessive use of overtime will be relaxed if and when sufficient staffing is achieved and other more palatable long term changes can be agreed upon to prevent overtime cost overruns from occurring in the future.

As a final note, Wojcik said, "At this point in the fiscal year, the tax bills have been sent and most of our fees collected. The Town does not have the luxury of raising more revenue whenever it wants to, nor can an administration sit idly by and allow problem accounts to undermine operations across the rest of government. I think the situation the elected and appointed leaders of this Town have been put in is extremely uncomfortable and unfortunate. However, we cannot overspend the budget. Responsibility to the taxpayers requires us to address these problems proactively."