

July/August 2008

Fire Strategic Planning Committee Report

First SPC Quarterly Report points to positive implementation

Fire Commissioner Rod Fraser has issued the first Quarterly Report of the Department's Strategic Planning Committee which highlights six steps for departmental improvement that have been implemented this year. The report also notes nine other recommendations that are in the process of being implemented, all based on the report issued by the Fire Department Independent Review Panel on November 30, 2007. This Panel was appointed by the Mayor in October, 2007 and was chaired by former Congressman James Shannon, President of the National Fire Protection Association.

The four-page quarterly report presents more of an outline of accomplishments and ongoing work underway to implement the recommendations of the Fire Panel. The public reporting and implementation of recommendations from a Fire Department study is a welcome change from prior responses to fire studies in 1995 and 2000.

Implementation of some recommendations has not come without difficulty or challenge from the firefighters' union, Local 718. Other steps that have been implemented seem so basic in 2008 that they indicate how far the Fire Department still has to go to reach the management and operational standards of leading major city fire departments.

The first recommendation of the Fire Panel to establish a Strategic Planning Committee met with fierce resistance when the Commissioner insisted on appointing the union members

rather than the President of the union. All union members except one Lieutenant resigned from the Committee.

The six completed recommendations are:

- Establishment of a Strategic Planning Committee with a focus initially on implementing the Panel's suggestions. The Panel made a total of 25 recommendations for consideration.
- Creation of the civilian position of Deputy Commissioner for Administration and Finance.
- Reinstatement of a system of formal daily roll-calls at each fire station.
- Development of a program of monthly station inspections by the District Chief.
- Creation of annual operating budgets for every division and staff element.
- Creation of a credentialed professional development academy program for company-level and chief-level officers.

Since this report was issued, a civilian position of Deputy Commissioner for Labor and Management was created. Local 718 has filed a grievance regarding this new position. Both new civilian positions represent an effort to create a management structure responsive to the Fire Commissioner.

Panel recommendations in the process of being implemented involve such issues as shift swapping, pre-employment psychological testing, updated personnel reporting data bases and psychological screening and services.