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Mayor Walsh Should Select Civilian Fire Commissioner

Civilian Fire Commissioner and a Chief of Department are best chance for reform of BFD

The Mayor should appoint a new civilian Fire Commissioner from outside the Department. The civilian Commissioner should be a change driver who brings greater accountability to the Department and management expertise to the organization. Fire administration experience would be helpful but should not be required. The Commissioner would work closely in this effort with the Chief of Department, who is committed to change and more involved in the day-to-day operations of the Department. One person serving in a dual role of Commissioner and Chief is not practical at this time.

Two leaders are needed to continually strive to improve operations and management of the Fire Department and challenge its imbedded culture. The O'Toole Commission recommended appointment of a civilian Fire Commissioner in January 2000.

With little or no change, the Fire Department will continue to provide excellent fire suppression services, but at a high financial and human capital cost from operational and administrative inefficiencies and an imbedded culture that resists change. Boston's Fire Department costs per capita rank as one of the highest in the country.

The paragraphs above were written in a *Bureau Brief* on June 6, 2001 and they equally apply in 2014 as a search for a new Fire Commissioner in Boston is now underway.

With the departure in January of Roderick Fraser, who served as Fire Commissioner for the past seven years, Mayor Walsh appointed Deputy Chief John Hasson to serve as acting Fire Commissioner. Chief Hasson had been serving as Chief of Department due to the resignation of Steve Abaira who was recruited from outside the Department and tried to modernize it and institute national standards.

In February, the Administration hired FACETS Consulting, a Phoenix firm, to conduct a national search for the new Fire Commissioner. FACETS had been selected to prepare a health and safety review study for the Fire Department in 2010. The Mayor has indicated that candidates from outside and inside the Department would be considered. FACETS expects to provide a short list of candidates by late spring.

The Boston Fire Department Review Commission, chaired by Kathleen O'Toole issued its report in 2000 after reviewing the organizational models utilized by many public safety organizations throughout the country. The Commission recommended that the Mayor appoint a civilian Commissioner "with significant management and leadership experience" and "a commitment to progressive leadership." The report called for the Commissioner to appoint a uniformed Chief of Department with responsibility for the day to day operations and "a similar commitment to progressive leadership."