

MEMORANDUM

TO: Roger L. Stancil, Town Manager

FROM: Daniel Jones, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: Explanation of Firefighters Shift Work Schedule in Context of Living Wage Discussion

DATE: May 21, 2009

PURPOSE

This memo is intended to explain the mechanics and function of the Fire Department shift work schedule and how that could be impacted by the living wage initiative. The shift schedule we use is the same as many other municipal fire departments in the Country and the local region including Carrboro, Cary and Raleigh. The current three shift rotating schedule utilized by the Fire Department has been in place since the termination of the Public Safety system by the Town Council in 1994. Several comments made by citizens during the May 13, 2009 Town Council budget workshop indicated misunderstandings about how rotating fire shift schedules function, are compensated and managed. This memorandum will attempt to clarify those misconceptions.

BACKGROUND

The Chapel Hill Fire Department uses a traditional 56 hour, 28 day cycle fire service work schedule as recognized and approved under the Fair Labor Standards Act of the United States Labor Department. This system was selected by the Fire Department employees and management in 1994 as a step in the transition away from the Public Safety system previously utilized by the Town of Chapel Hill. The schedule is based on a 24 hour work shift and a three shift rotation. This rotation consists of three 24 hour shifts beginning at 7:00 AM every other day, followed by a four day break and then the cycle repeats. Attachment #1 is a CHFD shift calendar that clarifies that rotation.

This shift cycle averages out to a 56 hour work week which the Labor Department approves for use in public safety occupations. The compensation cycles are 28 days over which a firefighter normally works either 216 hours or 240 hours. For any hours beyond a base of 212 in a two week period ½ of the firefighters hourly compensation is added to their pay but this is not considered overtime under this system. The total base annual compensation for a firefighter position includes the calculation of this ½ time rate. The Labor Department recognizes that during that 24 hour shift firefighters must have time to rest and eat therefore the additional hours beyond what most people recognize as “regular” or 40 hours a week is accepted as routine.

Twenty-four hour shift schedules are the most efficient manner used to staff fire protection because of the time it takes to change shifts and conduct equipment dependability checks with each shift change. Although firefighters work for 24 hours at a time, they actually only work about 10 days a month in most communities. Shift schedules of less than 24 hours are normally found in major cities where emergency response volume is significant; firefighters become physically exhausted if they try to work for 24 hours and there is not enough time for rest. Under United States labor regulations, fire employers may even choose to pay firefighters at a lesser hourly rate for the time spent resting but the calculation to do this is very complicated and undesirable to the work force. The Town of Chapel Hill has never imposed this regulation and compensates its firefighters at a standard hourly rate throughout the shift.

When comparing firefighter salaries in the market and setting the compensation rates for firefighters, employers match 56 hour work week schedules and compare the total annual compensation as opposed to looking at hourly rates. This insures that firefighters are compensated fairly and competitively in the market. When we move a firefighter to a 40 hour work week for a special assignment, medical light duty or extended training their hourly rate is adjusted upward to reflect the equivalent rate to a 40 hour employee and thus maintaining their annual salary rate.

Chapel Hill firefighters at the lower end of the career ladder (Firefighter – grade 32, \$33,008 to \$49,512 and Master Firefighter – grade 33, \$34,649 to \$51,988) are paid very competitively in our local and regional labor market. Neighboring departments in our hiring market also work the 56 hour schedule and are compensated at starting levels as follows; Raleigh, \$32,673, Cary \$34,049, Durham \$33,000, Apex \$34,677, Burlington \$30,847 and Carrboro \$32,251.

DISCUSSION

A firefighter's job is difficult, challenging and at times, dangerous however the 24 hour shift schedule is an attraction to the career. This shift schedule allows firefighters time to pursue other interests such as second careers, additional education, increased family time hobbies and sports. Adjusting the hourly rate to meet the suggested "living wage" would require adjusting the schedule to fewer hours in order to not unreasonably exceed the market annual salary for firefighters in the beginning of their careers. This change would be viewed very negatively by the fire department workforce and would ultimately result in our losing many experienced firefighters to other municipalities. It would also involve the Town Council having to make a decision to either reduce firefighter staffing and coverage or hiring an additional 28 fire personnel to staff a fourth shift.

An additional negative impact of adjusting the hourly rates of the lower end of the career ladder is that we have a career development process in place that affords the individual firefighter the opportunity to build and progress their career based on acquisition of certain skills, training, certifications and experience. Moving the lower end hourly rates without adjusting all of the employee rates upward removes the incentive for employees

to progress initially. The current system of career development is accepted and appreciated by the firefighters because it clearly defines steps to moving up to the next level of their career. Salary compression against higher level positions which would result from only addressing the bottom of the firefighter wage scales creates very real and unsustainable problems in a para-military organization like a fire department.

CONCLUSION

While the concept of a living wage is a noble and desirable objective, I believe it must be applied in the total context of the job and compensation level. Our firefighters, even at the starting wage with no experience level exceed the Orange County Community Organizing Committee (OCCOC) identified annual salary as a living wage by over \$4,000 annually. Any adjustment to the current 24 hour shift schedule could have a detrimental effect on the workforce and fire protection in Chapel Hill. The effort to address living wage in Chapel Hill appears to be out of context relative to the firefighter positions with their current compensation and schedule.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Chapel Hill Fire Department Shift Calendar (p.4)

2009 FIREFIGHTER & EMS SHIFT SCHEDULE



A SHIFT



B SHIFT



C SHIFT

JANUARY							FEBRUARY							MARCH						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
25	26	27	28	29	30	31							29	30	31					
APRIL							MAY							JUNE						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4						1	2		1	2	3	4	5	6
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
26	27	28	29	30			²⁴ ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29	30	28	29	30				
JULY							AUGUST							SEPTEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4						1			1	2	3	4	5	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
26	27	28	29	30	31		²³ ₃₀	²⁴ ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29	27	28	29	30			
OCTOBER							NOVEMBER							DECEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			1	2	3	4	5
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	29	30					27	28	29	30	31			

Shift Calendars® • 809 N. Glendora Ave. • Covina, CA 91724 • (626) 967-9021

Series 1300 •••