

TUMWATER CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

MINUTES OF MEETING

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CONVENE: 5:32 p.m.

PRESENT: Chair Eric Trimble and Commissioners Maggie Bean and Simon Tee.

Staff: Chief Examiner Heidi Behrends Cerniwey, Fire Chief Scott LaVielle, Police Chief Jon Weiks, Assistant Fire Chief Jim McGarva, Fire Medical Services Officer Shawn Crimmins, and Recording Secretary Valerie Gow.

**APPROVAL OF
JULY 12, 2018
MINUTES:**

MOTION: **Commissioner Tee moved, seconded by Commissioner Bean, to approve the minutes of July 12, 2018 as published. Motion carried unanimously.**

**STATUS OF
ELIGIBILITY
LISTS:** Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey reviewed the status of all eligibility lists. This month, all names on the entry firefighter list will expire.

**APPROVAL OF
MODIFIED
ELIGIBILITY
LIST: LATERAL
POLICE
OFFICER:** Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey reported the City received one application. Scores are based on the individual's experience score through completion of a self-assessment scored by the City. The applicant is proposed for inclusion on the list with another applicant name removed from the list. The proposed list contains seven names. The Police Chief can hire from the top seven names on the list.

Commissioner Tee asked about the reason for removal of an applicant from the list. Police Chief Weiks advised that the applicant timed out on the list.

MOTION: **Commissioner Bean moved, seconded by Commissioner Tee, to approve the proposed Modified Eligibility List: Lateral Police Officer. Motion carried unanimously.**

**REVISED
TESTING
PROCESS FOR
ENTRY LEVEL
FIREFIGHTER:** Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey reported the Fire Department is working with the IDEA Project Team. The acronym of IDEA means Inclusive, Diverse, Empowered, and Accessible. The goal of the team is to evaluate the Fire Department and its culture and processes to assist in ensuring all doors are open for diversity of employment within the Fire Department, to include diversity of experience and character. The team is working closely with Fire Department leadership. Monthly meetings have been ongoing since June 2018 with smaller groups formed to focus on specific elements. One group is focusing on the Fire Department's hiring process.

Similar efforts are underway at the national level through the fire service and fire unions. One of the priorities is to evaluate fire services in terms of gender and diversity balance in the profession. The examination provides an

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opportunity to determine why an imbalance exists and review the dynamics of the Fire Department to identify ways to change the situation to achieve a better balance.

During the last Civil Service Conference, a presentation was provided by Eastside Fire Authority, which explored changes in processes to open doors for diverse fire service candidates. The IDEA Team reviewed other models used by other agencies to examine the hiring process to remove some of the barriers that might be contributing to the lack of gender and diversity in the fire service.

At some point, the IDEA Team would likely render a recommendation for a new hiring process.

As part of the review process, the team reviewed community demographics to include the Fire Department. The community has a 50/50 gender ratio in the local student body. Diversity is also represented in the local study body. The effort is not to attract certain individuals to the organization but more about ways to embrace and attract diversity in the fire service.

An assumption identified by the team was a belief that diverse teams offer a broad perspective and ultimately better services. Different perspectives generate more ideas that offer value. Removal of barriers in the hiring process might generate a different hiring pool. It would be important for that process to help people envision themselves in a future role by creating equity in the process through removal of barriers.

Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey reviewed the steps, functions, and barriers of the current entry level firefighter hiring process for the Fire Department. The role of the Commission is to ensure a system of checks and balances in the hiring process through actions based on merit. The Commission approves the testing exam process. Today, the City utilizes a continuous exam process. Posting of positions is continuous through Public Safety Testing. Applicants pay fees dependent upon the number of agencies they select for application. Although the continuous process is a holistic system, it might merit some considerations to attract people differently. It is important to advertise positions to individuals and group who might not be considering a fire service career.

Since 2016, the City has relied on Public Safety Testing for testing. The test covers eight different dimensions, is validated, and is reliable. Testing is available year-round. The minimum passing score is 70% with the written score representing 60% of the total score. Repeat testers often achieve higher scores, which could serve to act as a barrier as others might not be financially able to retest numerous times.

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The Certified Physical Ability Test (CPAT) is a certified test at a cost of \$124 to include two orientation practice sessions. The City requires completion of a CPAT prior to the applicant requesting a Tumwater application. The test has been challenged and some changes were implemented within the last 10 years. The main concern was bias against women. Testing is limited in the state with one testing center located in eastern Washington and another located in western Washington. Individuals passing the CPAT receive an invitation to complete a Tumwater Fire Department application.

Candidates with higher scores are invited to participate in the City's oral board.

Another challenge identified by the team is the unpredictable testing cycle. Adoption of a predictable cycle might be more helpful as individuals have to miss work, travel, and contend with timing uncertainties with each step. Additionally, the City is competing with other agencies also seeking a diverse candidate pool.

Following the oral board, the written test and the oral board score are combined at a 60/40 ratio to produce a final score. A candidate who is a veteran receives additional points. Candidates with volunteer fire service receive credit with additional points added to their written text score. Candidates have five days to review final scores to file a protest. Following a decision by the Chief Examiner, the candidate can appeal that decision to the Civil Service Commission.

The list is certified by the Civil Service Commission. The Chief can hire from the top seven candidates on the entry level list.

The Chief's interview follows and includes a collaborative process of leadership panels followed by the Chief and Assistant Chief interviews/panels. Background investigations are initiated earlier in the process to ensure candidates are vetted prior to the Chief's interview.

Conditional offers are approved by the City Administrator. The conditional offer is based on successful completion of the background examination. The final appointment letter is offered when all requirements have been fulfilled.

One of the proposed changes would update the class specification to ensure the job description includes all essential details of the position. Another recommendation is creating a predictable process and schedule by establishing an annual process using Public Safety Testing to administer testing during the year with the City initiating the remaining process once a year to create a clear process and timeline for establishing a list.

Affordability can also serve as a barrier. Another recommendation is moving

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the CPAT exam to the time of conditional hiring to enable the City to pay for the test.

The IDEA team also recommends establishing a recruitment strategy, as the City should be more aggressive in its recruitment activity. A separate committee is working with the Communications Manager on the City's brand and marketing strategy to promote the Tumwater Fire Department holistically and in its recruitment process by taking advantage of media to target audiences to recruit.

The team examined previous candidate pools passing the written test and the CPAT by gender and race. Both tests reflect consistency in gender and race with some loss of diversity occurring after the CPAT test. Additionally, some of the applicants who passed both tests did not pursue an application with the City. One of the evaluation questions by the team includes querying some of the candidates to learn why they did not complete a Tumwater application to afford a better understanding of the reason some applicants did not pursue Tumwater as a potential employer.

Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey reviewed the pool of candidates after completing the written test and the oral board. The list reflects a lack of diversity at the top of the list even though there is diversity within the applicant pool. One of the ways to address that shortcoming is including another step of a screening interview similar to the process used by Eastside Fire Authority. The screening interview includes several questions over a seven-minute interview. The Fire Authority interviewed 700 candidates through that process. Although the step requires a commitment of resources, the interview was used as a floor rather than just the written test as there was agreement written tests often do not reflect how well a person might perform or whether the individual would be a good firefighter. During the screening interview, applicants are rated on specific criteria. Results from several agencies are indicative of success with more diverse applicants rising to the top who never would have been eligible to proceed to the oral board. Many of those candidates were also hired. The changes reflect value in opening the testing process to more applicants. Civil Service rules require specific criteria and a process to ensure a defensible process.

Today, candidates are rated on four elements during the oral board. They include experience and education, communication and interpersonal skills, judgment and problem solving, and motivation and expectations. It could be possible to evaluate some or all of the elements during a screening interview because the goal is to conduct more oral boards for a one-year list. It would also be important for panel members to participate in cultural and diversity training. Screening interviews would follow completion of the Tumwater application. Other options include allowing for the addition of volunteer service points.

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Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey invited questions.

Commissioner Tee inquired about diversity training for staff. Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey replied that the team is in the early stages of discussing diversity training, such as offering diversity training and other options. The intent with attaining a workforce with different experiences and backgrounds is establishing a culture that embraces diversity.

Commissioner Tee commented on the importance of education because it promotes awareness.

Fire Chief LaVielle said one of the panel presentations featured two female firefighter/paramedics who shared information on the process they undertook and some of the barriers. Other panel members included the Assistant Fire Chief from Tacoma Fire Department and West Pierce Fire Authority. Both departments have changed the written test process by having the department administer the test.

Chair Trimble asked how the screening interview score would be factored in the overall score. Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey replied that a method for incorporating the score has not been determined, although the team agreed there would need to be some type of score rather than a pass/fail as a ranking score would be necessary to determine which candidates move to the oral board.

Fire Chief LaVielle added that the screening interview employed by Eastside Fire Authority included multiple questions that were weighted to establish a preliminary list for oral board interviews.

Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey noted that Eastside Fire Authority discarded scores during each step. Any candidate receiving a score of 80% or above received an invitation to participate in the screening interview. Following the screening interview, the written test score was discarded. The final oral board score served as the score for placement on the eligibility list.

Chair Trimble asked whether the discussions during the Civil Service Conference spoke to the reliability of written tests versus interviews. Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey replied that there was no specific conversation relative to that issue other than acknowledgment of some data that speaks to both the validity and whether written tests are a good measure of performance of a potential candidate. It is a difficult subject in terms of identifying a valid and reliable method to measure candidates.

Chair Trimble commented that unless circumstances have changed, Public Safety Testing has always contended that written tests are by far the most

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reliable instrument. Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey responded that during the conference, officials from Public Safety Testing acknowledged that the screening interview was a very different process. The interview moves away from its model. As a private agency, Public Safety Testing benefits from individuals testing multiple times.

Chair Trimble said his concern is creation of liability to the City by relying so heavily on interviews should someone decide to pursue litigation. It is always difficult to prove legally that an interview is as fair as a written test. He has always advocated for an option of conducting all interviews after the list was created; however, that was not possible as all departments conduct the oral boards. An important consideration is whether the Fire Department would be willing to consider all applicants who scored 80% or above placed on the list and moved forward to the department for consideration.

Fire Chief LaVielle noted that the current process is similar to that approach. Chair Trimble said his recommended approach would require the department to advise candidates of their removal from the list if the department's process eliminates them as an employable candidate, which is a key component to maintain a viable list.

Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey commented that some conversations have acknowledged there would be some value in obtaining some data that supports more validity for other types of measures.

Chair Trimble said another advantage of eliminating the oral board is acting quicker than other fire departments, which are directly competing with the City.

Chair Trimble requested clarification of the test pool results for the CPAT. It appears that after the written test, 7% of the candidates are female. After the CPAT, female candidates represent only 4% of the candidate pool. Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey affirmed that approximately 3% of the female candidates fail the CPAT.

Commissioner Bean added that some fire departments offer coaching classes for the CPAT exam.

Chair Trimble questioned the possibility of requiring the successful completion of the CPAT prior to completion of the probationary period. Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey said the team discussed that option; however, the challenge is the timing of the fire academy and the expectation of personnel attending the academy to be physically fit.

Discussion followed on the possibility of providing feedback to candidates failing the CPAT exam or including more flexibility in terms of the CPAT

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exam. Members and staff shared suggestions for improving the process to increase the success rate of female candidates. Assistant Fire Chief McGarva added that there are other health and safety initiatives that require successful completion of CPAT as part of the department's hiring process.

Commissioner Tee asked about the weighting of the entire testing process. Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniway replied that the written test is 60% of the score and the oral board is 40% of the score. The CPAT exam is pass or fail. The Chief interview follows after the list is certified by the Commission.

Commissioner Tee agreed liability is an important factor with respect to testing. Another factor is validity. He questioned whether answers provided during an oral board are capable of being measured in terms of judgment or motivation. Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniway said the oral board is comprised of a series of structured questions with recommended answers using specific criteria. The scores are weighted against a standard.

Fire Chief LaVielle asked about the application of volunteer points and veteran points. Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniway advised that the maximum number of points is 10 based on state or federal law. Within the current testing system, volunteer points are credited earlier, which is based on a determination by the Civil Service Commission. Current rules do not speak to the maximum number of points.

Chair Trimble pointed out that currently, volunteer points are applied to the written score. Veteran preference points are assessed later in the process, which includes the written score.

UPDATES AND SCHEDULING:

Police Chief Weiks reported on the completion of the field training program by two new officers. Another new lateral hire is nearing completion of field training. The department hired a new entry level officer who is scheduled to begin work on Monday, September 17, 2018. The officer is a graduate from Black Hills High School. Additionally, the Police Department recently learned that the timing for application to the Criminal Justice Training Academy could occur after a conditional offer has been extended to an applicant. Because of the additional funding the academy received, more classes were scheduled. The new officer is scheduled to attend the academy on October 23, 2018. Pressure from different cities and other entities on the Legislature should increase odds of the academy receiving a source of permanent funding to resolve the backlog.

The department recently discontinued two background processes. One applicant was hired by the Thurston County Sheriff's Office and the second applicant failed to qualify. One new background process is currently in progress for another Black Hills High School graduate.

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applying for a position in north Puget Sound because of the location of his home. The next round of oral boards is scheduled on October 1, 2018 for entry level candidates.

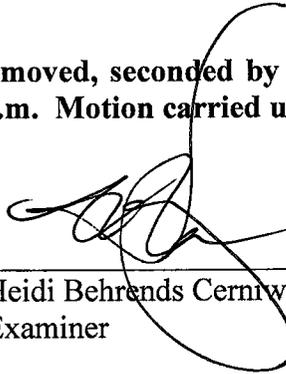
Fire Chief LaVielle reported on the recent hiring of two firefighter/paramedics. A new firefighter who completed the fire academy is now working the day shift. The department has two vacant firefighter positions.

Chief Examiner Behrends Cerniwey reported the next meeting is scheduled on October 11, 2018.

ADJOURNMENT: Commissioner Bean moved, seconded by Commissioner Tee, to adjourn the meeting at 6:46 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.



Eric Trimble, Chair



Heidi Behrends Cerniwey, Secretary/Chief Examiner