

Hackensack Introduces Measure to Reorganize Police

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HACKENSACK — The City Council has introduced a reorganization ordinance that establishes a set number of rank and file in the police department.

The ordinance, introduced Tuesday night, sets limits in the department to one police chief and up to one deputy chief, five captains, nine lieutenants, 18 sergeants, and a maximum of 80 police officers. The ordinance does not include a second deputy chief or police inspector — positions that had been previously filled. The police ordinance that currently exists does not set numbers for rank and file.

“It will give us a clearer guide as to our allotment of officers,” said Capt. Tomas Padilla, the acting officer in charge of the Hackensack Police Department. “Obviously like any other law enforcement executive I would always want more officers, but I understand the difficult financial times that we have.”

The revisions were the result of a review and analysis of the rules and regulations governing the police department, which was required under a memorandum of understanding between the city and the Bergen County Prosecutor’s Office. The memorandum was signed in April after Police Chief Ken Zisa surrendered to county authorities on an insurance fraud charge, and was stripped of his duties. The prosecutor’s office also began daily monitoring of the police department.

The ordinance was drafted after several meetings between Padilla, the county prosecutor’s monitor, and the Rodgers Group LLC, a consultant which was hired to review and revise the police ordinance, its rules and regulations, and the department’s standard operating procedures.

The three-page ordinance already has its critics. Police Officer Anthony Ferraioli, president of the local union, told the council that he was opposed to the proposed law and felt that the union should have been included in discussions before the ordinance was drafted.

“For them to put this out without speaking to the union is extremely disturbing and for the council to pass any of this is very disturbing,” he said at the council meeting. “We have the right to know as the union and the members of this department what is going on, and I don’t believe this is a fair ordinance to put through.”

Ferraioli said he would prefer six captains, saying that the new ordinance unfairly limits the competition when it comes to applying for the chief’s position, when it becomes available.

Under the current rules, as well as in the proposed ordinance, the city manager appoints the chief and deputy chief. However, the department operates under civil service rules, which require a test

when three or more officers apply for those positions. The test can be waived if fewer than three officers express interest in those jobs.

"A fair process would be to give a test" no matter how many people apply, Ferraioli said, noting that there was no exam when Zisa became chief.

"I want to make it fair for all members of my union," he added.

City Manager Stephen Lo Iacono and Padilla said that the city always adheres to civil service regulations and will continue to do so.

Ferraioli also raised concerns about the maximum number of police officers, saying that in the future more may be needed.

"The city is growing, you don't know when you got to hire more police officers to go over that limit," he said.

Currently, there are 107 members in the police department. Under the new ordinance, there would be a maximum of 114.

A public hearing and possible adoption of the ordinance will be held Dec. 21 at 7 p.m.

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