



# TOWN OF FAIRFAX

## STAFF REPORT

### October 7, 2020

**TO:** Mayor and Town Council

**FROM:** Garrett Toy, Town Manager

**SUBJECT:** Receive report on the Police Chief recruitment process and consider the appointment of an interim Police Chief in December to allow for more community input into the process for a permanent replacement

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#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Receive report on the Police Chief recruitment process and consider the appointment of an interim Police Chief in December to allow for more community input into the process for a permanent replacement.

#### **BACKGROUND**

With the pending retirement of Chief Morin in December, staff thought it would be helpful to generally discuss the recruitment process for a Police Chief. A typical process would be to retain a firm to recruit a police chief. This presumes the Council wants an open recruitment for both internal and external candidates. The recruitment process normally takes 4-6 months and the cost of recruitment could be upwards of \$30,000. If the Council chose the route of an internal recruitment process, this would not involve the hiring of an outside firm but both processes could take a similar path.

Prior to the recruitment, the Town could conduct a survey to ask residents for input on what qualities they would like to see in the next Police Chief. This is similar to surveys to solicit input on the qualities desired in the next Town/City Manager. The top qualities would also be incorporated into any potential recruitment brochure and be reflected in the interview questions.

If an external search, after the application deadline, the hired recruiter would vet candidates and prepare of a binder of the top candidates, candidates worth considering, lesser qualified applicants, and the remaining applicants. The Town Council and Town Manager would consider this information and develop a short-list (e.g., 5-8) of candidates to be interviewed.

Typically, the interview process would entail a community panel, a technical panel, and the Town Council. The community panel would consist of community members appointed by the Town Manager and/or Town Council. The community panel would consist of residents and businesses representative from such organizations as the Chamber of Commerce, churches, non-profits, and/or Town committees such as the Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) committee. The community panel could also have a Town department head on it. This is the primary way for the community to participate in the selection process. Prior to the interviews, panelists and the Town Council would be asked if there were any specific questions they would like to ask the candidates. The recruiter and staff would review all the questions and settle on a list of questions for each panel to ask candidates. The questions are different for

each panel because of the panel's focus. However, the candidates are all asked the same questions by each panel so there is an objective basis for comparison.

The community panel would ask questions regarding the applicant's experience and approach to working with the community. The technical panel usually consists of other police chiefs and, possibly, another town/city manager to assess the technical skills of applicants. After the interview process is complete, the panelists meet with the Town Council and Town Manager to provide input on the merits of each candidate. The Town Council and Town Manager would meet to narrow the pool to the top 2-4 candidates and invite them to participate in the next phase of the process, which generally consist of additional interviews with the Council and Town Manager. Per Town Code, the appointment of department heads such as the Police Chief is made by the Town Manager but requires ratification by the Town Council.

An alternative to an open recruitment is to appoint an internal candidate to the position. We would still conduct an interview process since the Town Council and Town Manager would want to interview the candidate(s). However, the interview process could still involve a community panel since the Town Council and Town Manager would want that input.

## **DISCUSSION**

Chief Morin retires in mid-December and the department cannot operate without a Police Chief. In order to give proper time and thought to the process for a permanent replacement the Town should appoint an interim Police Chief in December. The most logical and qualified choice would be Lieutenant Rico Tabaranza. Lt. Tabaranza is currently the second in command and Chief Morin has been mentoring and training Lt. Tabaranza for a number of years. The Police Chief does serve shifts as a watch commander, performs patrol duties (i.e., second officer on duty,) as well as covers the 911 dispatch center for illnesses and lunch breaks. Hence, the appointment of Lt. Tabaranza makes the most sense since he is familiar with the Fairfax Police Chief's role, the needs of the department and is able to fill any open position within the department.

The appointment of an interim Chief provides leadership and structure for the department and provides the Council with the flexibility to allow for a thoughtful and a community inclusive process. In addition, the internal appointment also would allow the Council to evaluate Lt. Tabaranza's performance during this interim period while keeping all their options open. Staff recognizes that the RESJ is just beginning its work and the interim appointment would provide the Council an opportunity to consider the input from the RESJ on the matter. Should the Council not want to make the appointment permanent or decide to pursue other options, Lt. Tabaranza would return to his former position as a police lieutenant.

The length of the interim assignment could cause operational issues for the department if the decision is deferred more than 3-4 months. The appointment of Lt. Tabaranza would mean the department would be down one officer from 10 to 9, with command staff down from 4 (2 sergeants, 1 lieutenant and a Police Chief) to 3 people. In the short term, the staffing could be filled with overtime and/or some reserve officers, but ultimately staff will begin to experience "burn-out" as they would have to put in mandatory over-time to fill shifts, specifically supervisory shifts. It is not something the Town Council needs to address right away, but it is something to keep in mind.

With the Council confirmation of the staff recommendation, the Town Manager would bring the ratification of the appointment of Lt. Tabaranza as the interim Police Chief to the December Council meeting.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

An interim appointment will require a temporary salary increase for the lieutenant. The Town Manager would work out the terms with the Lt. Tabaranza. At this time, it would be difficult to assess the financial impact. Presumably, the savings from Chief Morin's retirement would offset the increased costs in overtime. Staff will have a better idea of the costs during the mid-year review in March 2021.