

White Plains union leaders shocked at cop, firefighter layoffs

White Plains police and fire union leaders expressed shock and anger Tuesday as 21 of their members cleaned out their lockers and turned in their badges following the Common Council's decision to lay off 12 officers and nine firefighters.

"I never thought I'd ever see this in White Plains, but there's nothing we can do about it," said James Carrier, president of the Police Benevolent Association. "We went to the city with proposals that would have saved the money they wanted and avoided layoffs, but they wanted to reopen our contract, and we can't do that. So now our guys are done, and if you include the jobs already unfilled, the city is 22 cops in the hole."

The council unanimously approved the cuts late Monday. They are believed to be the first layoffs in city history involving police officers and firefighters.

John Callahan, chief of staff for Mayor Adam Bradley, said the layoffs would save about \$1.18 million in police salaries and benefits and \$884,000 from the firefighter cuts.

A new city attorney, the city spokeswoman and the mayor's administrative aide also were laid off Monday.

Those cuts, along with concessions and givebacks by the Civil Service Employees Association and Teamsters, will bring the proposed property-tax increase from 18.9 percent to less than 10 percent, Callahan said.

Fire union President Joe Carrier, James Carrier's brother, called it a "sad day in White Plains."

"We're now down to 151 firefighters, when we're supposed to be at 169. These numbers will cripple the level of fire protection and response times in this city," he said. "It will leave us with one or two rigs out of service at any given time."

He said the fire union "tried to negotiate in good faith," but the city "made a big mistake."

"This is more than a money issue; it's a safety issue," he said.

Both union presidents assailed Public Safety Commissioner David Chong, who they said was not involved in negotiations and did not do enough to warn the council and the public about the impact police and fire layoffs might have on the city.

"I thought he would take a public role in conveying to the council and the public how

crucial a role manpower plays in maintaining the level of safety we've had here," Joe Carrier said. "I don't feel he did that, and it's disappointing."

James Carrier said Chong is "ultimately the one who will have to deal with having only 192 cops to protect the city."

"You'd think he'd at least be here," he said.

Chong is attending an International Conference on Asian Organized Crime and Terrorism and could not be reached for comment.

In a statement released through Police Chief James Bradley, Chong said he was "saddened by these layoffs" and had hoped for a compromise but added that he thinks "the police and fire bureaus will continue to serve and protect the city with honor, bravery and distinction."

Callahan said the Public Safety Department would adjust and "be able to put the same number of police on the streets as there are now."

Bradley said in a statement that his administration "has been focused on preserving jobs and dealing with a very serious fiscal crisis while protecting taxpayers who are already overburdened."

While the city was able to reach agreements with the Teamsters and CSEA, it was unable to reach similar deals with the police and fire unions, the statement said.

The Teamsters and CSEA agreed to a three-year contract, with raises of 3.75 percent for 2009, 4 percent for 2010 and no raises in 2011 in exchange for a guarantee of no layoffs through fiscal 2011.

The unions also agreed to waive much of their retroactive pay for the 2009 and 2010 raises and for new employees to pay 15 percent of their health insurance.

Staff writer Sean Cohen contributed to this report.

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