

**COMMITTEE ON LIAISON
MAY 7, 2018 at 6:28 p.m.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WOBURN CITY HALL**

Voting Members present: President Richard Haggerty, Alderman Michael Anderson, Alderman Joanne Campbell, Alderman Michael Concannon, Alderman Mark Gaffney, Alderman Richard Gately, Alderman Lindsay Higgins, and Alderman Edward Tedesco. Absent: Alderman Darlene Mercer-Bruen.

Also present: Lt. Mark Smith, Woburn Firefighters Association Local 971, Fitchburg Fire Dept. Lt. Patrick J. Roy, Massachusetts Firefighters Academy

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Citizens participation request from Brian J. McLaughlin, President, Woburn Firefighters Association Local 971: Lt. Smith introduced Lt. Roy, a member of the Fitchburg Fire Dept. whose presentation is designed to bring awareness to the occupational hazards that firefighters are facing. Lt. Roy said this is a very important subject and that cancer is becoming an epidemic in the firefighting profession. He said Woburn and Fitchburg are very similar communities. He said he got involved in cancer prevention awareness after his father, who was a Fitchburg firefighter for 39 years, contracted cancer and died. Lt. Roy said his father is the reason he and his brother became firefighters. Lt. Roy said in early 2012 his father noticed a lump and his neck, diagnosed it as a sinus infection and let it go, until he was at work one day and started coughing up blood. Lt. Roy said his father went immediately to Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, where a cancer diagnosis was confirmed. Lt. Roy said his father went through three months of radiation, but the cancer spread and his father required multiple surgeries. Lt. Roy said when his father came home from the hospital, he and his brother wanted to aid him bedside but their father insisted they go to work. Lt. Roy said his father passed away when he was just 62-years-old and when he died he weighed just 140 pounds, after spending much of his life at around 240 pounds. Lt. Roy said cancer is becoming increasingly epidemic with firefighters due to their exposure to carcinogens at work, but it can be diminished if firefighters are properly outfitted with a second set of turnout gear that is regularly washed. Lt. Roy said one of three firefighters will be diagnosed with cancer and cancer deaths will continue if firefighters are not properly equipped and facilities are not equipped with gear dryers and gear extractors. Lt. Roy said cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death among firefighters but the numbers may be off because of improper diagnosis. He said Fitchburg now has gear dryers and gear extenders and is working on obtaining second sets of turnout gear. Lt. Roy said he is encouraging other communities to make the same commitment. He said statistics show firefighters are 77 percent more likely than the general public to contract cancer, and incidents of testicular cancer among male firefighters and breast cancer among female firefighters is increasing. He said an independent study by a doctor in Leominster indicates firefighters are 53 percent more likely than the general public to contract multiple melanoma. Lt. Roy said a firefighter in Boston was being diagnosed with cancer every two weeks and it was costing the city considerable money for health care. He said every firefighter in Boston now has two sets of turnout gear and that is reducing the number of cancer diagnoses. Lt. Roy said statistics indicate a firefighter is 90 percent more likely to be diagnosed

with cancer than a police officer. He said it is important for a firefighter to have a second set of turnout gear while their first set is being washed. He said the increase in cancer diagnoses is happening in small town America and in big cities, and that it was never talked about for years. He said the problem in New England is worse because there is a lot of asbestos in the old buildings here. Lt. Roy said he is relatively certain there is asbestos under the linoleum floors of City Hall. He encouraged the city of Woburn to support the purchase of a second set of turnout gear so firefighters don't become sick and the city won't have to pay for health care for the firefighters who do contract cancer. He said firefighters have been diagnosed at a greater rate than the public for 15-20 different types of cancer. He said firefighters are 129 percent more likely to get cancer from exposure to asbestos than the general public, and they are 100 percent more likely to die from cancer contracted from exposure to asbestos than the general public. Lt. Roy said even with the best breathing apparatus, asbestos can be absorbed into the body. He said turnout gear protects firefighters only from heat and not smoke, which carries carcinogens. Lt. Roy referenced a survey conducted in Miami where firefighters are 310 percent more likely to get cancer and 280 percent more likely to have brain tumors. Lt. Roy said the Miami survey indicates that of the 756 retirees from the fire department, about half were diagnosed with cancer. Lt. Roy said if the city did some research, it would discover there are more firefighters diagnosed with cancer than among the general public. Lt. Roy said 14 percent of Miami's budget goes to firefighters who are out sick, not including the hours the department has to backfill to cover for firefighters who are on sick leave. He said firefighters can't work when they are battling cancer because they are too weak. He said between 1952-2014 there were 96 deaths in Miami due to cancer and 67 percent of the line of duty deaths in Boston from 1990-2015 were due to cancer. Lt. Roy said his father loved his job, and his death deeply affected his family. Lt. Roy said if the city of Woburn pays money forward for turnout gear and related equipment, it is money the city will save later on health care expenditures. Lt. Roy said he knows Woburn is a busy city and it is important for the firefighters to have a second set of turnout gear. Lt. Roy said all chemicals are cancer-causing agents that firefighters have to deal with at all fires. He said soot is a known carcinogen and it can be absorbed through the skin. He said dirty turnout gear retains soot, and constant exposure to soot is making firefighters sick. He said it is important for firefighters to be protected, particularly in the groin area, as testicular cancer is running rampant. Lt. Roy said firefighters are instructed to wear more than one hood because the area from the neck up is one of the worst places to get cancer. Lt. Roy said firefighters absorb carcinogens through their gloves and coat. Lt. Roy said there is an increased emphasis among the firefighting community about health and nutrition. He said firefighters are instructed to eat a good diet, avoid alcohol, exercise, and use sunscreen. He said increased exercise is helping to keep firefighters healthier. Lt. Roy said it is even more important to have a second set of turnout gear at older fire stations. He said Gov. Baker is supporting an effort to by 2019 have three components to all fire stations – a gear room, a room for fire apparatus and living quarters. He said firefighters are taking home fire residue to their homes and exposing it to their families, and it is important to have laundering equipment at the station. He said research indicates the worst time for a firefighter to remove breathing apparatus is during an overhaul. Lt. Roy said it is being stressed to firefighters to use action wipes on-site to remove soot and residue. He said firefighters are also encouraged to shower within an hour to get the carcinogens and soot off their bodies. Lt. Roy played for the Committee a video filmed in Palm Beach County, Florida, about how soot is brought into the station, lingers on bodies and equipment and can be transmitted to family members at home. He said it is important for fire stations to be equipped with cleaning facilities.

Lt. Roy said turnout gear should be washed two times a year and after every fire. He said there are gear washers at every station in Fitchburg and that unwashed fire gear is not allowed in the living quarters. Lt. Roy said early detection procedures for cancer are now being encouraged among firefighters. He asked the Council to support the concept of acquiring two sets of turnout gear for firefighters. He said he does not want any other family to go through what his went through when his father got sick. President Haggerty asked Lt. Roy if he could email a copy of the documents he presented to the City Clerk or Clerk of Committees. Lt. Roy said he will have clear it with the fire academy and if he can get the presentation to the Council, he will. Alderman Campbell asked Lt. Roy if he knows the price for a second set of turnout gear. Lt. Roy said he is not sure because there are different types of turnout gear. Alderman Gately said he can appreciate Lt. Roy's presentation because he is a three-time cancer survivor and is well aware of what happens when cancer begins. Alderman Gately said all the information Lt. Roy presented is mesmerizing and he will support anything that helps keep firefighters healthy and on the job. He said once a person contracts cancer, they are never the same after. President Haggerty said it seems fairly obvious that the acquisition of a second set of turnout gear and related equipment is the next step and that it is important for the city to keep its firefighters safe. Alderman Anderson asked if Lt. Roy could forward to the Council a hard copy of his presentation. Lt. Smith thanked the Committee for hosting Lt. Roy's presentation. He said Chief Adgate is aware of the union's request for a second set of turnout gear and that the union has formed a committee to address the situation. Lt. Smith thanked Lt. Roy for coming to Woburn. President Haggerty said a cost breakdown would be helpful. Alderman Anderson suggested the breakdown include the cost turnout gear, washers and dryers.

Motion made by Alderman Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Anderson to adjourn; approved, 8-0. President Haggerty adjourned the meeting at 7:21 p.m.

Attest: _____
Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees