

Panel says no to community officer proposal

By Yvonne C.T. Vassel

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Using on-duty firefighters to work as community service officers is not a viable concept, the city's Civil Service Board concluded last week after studying a proposal by city Commissioner Tom Ivey.

In January Ivey asked the board to review his proposal, which he characterized as a way to "give better service to the citizens of Winter Park."

On each 24-hour shift there are 13 firefighters. At any given time, that would be reduced by two firefighters, according to Ivey's plan.

The firefighters would work in the police department handling reports on minor accidents or domestic incidents, Ivey suggested. Police officers would be freed to handle more serious incidents.

In his critique of Ivey's proposal, Fire Chief Mike Molthop said because only three firefighters are assigned to each engine company, "if this amount is reduced by one to two, it can create delayed fire-fighting operations as well as rescue attempts . . ."

Civil service board member Anne Hamilton studied Ivey's proposal and visited fire stations, reviewed the fire department's daily log book and training records and talked to fire personnel.

"I did not find that they [firefighters] sit twiddling their thumbs for long periods," said Hamilton to the board Tuesday. "But then you can't expect a 24-hour shift to be 'Go!' all the time. They have to have time to relax."

Hamilton's report outlined some daily activities of firefighters, such as daily drug box and equipment checks, training classes and equipment maintenance.

"In 1984 there were approximately eight runs or calls per day," Hamilton wrote. "These runs can range from 30 minutes to hours depending on the severity of the situation. After each run the required paperwork must be completed and the equipment must be checked and readied for the next run."

Hamilton said firefighters told her the community

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service officer program would be "beneficial to the community, if staffed by off-duty personnel or personnel hired for that specific purpose."

Hamilton summarized her report by writing, "The key to top level service is teamwork, as the unit of performance is not the individual person but the individual company working as a prepared and competent team."

Friday, Ivey said he had not heard of the board's decision.

"Well that's their [the board's] prerogative. I made my point," Ivey said. "I would like to utilize those people [firefighters] more. I think it was a good concept. Most of the firemen I spoke to wanted to work the program. Most of them sit around and do busy work to justify their existence."

"I think if they are out on the street, they can work more efficiently. They can get to the fire or get to the emergency quicker."

Ivey said he has not decided whether to propose the plan to the city commission, despite the lack of endorsement by the Civil Service Board.

"I haven't thought about it. I think it is a good concept. I saw three of them [firefighters] washing the chief's car about a month ago. I'm sure we can use them better than that," Ivey said.

"I think the concept of community service officers is really nice but you don't take on-duty personnel to do it," Hamilton said. "I just don't understand how that would be a logical way to do it."