

# State rules fire officials can join bargaining unit

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OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Battalion chiefs, the fire marshal and fire inspector can join a bargaining unit of the Winter Park Professional Firefighters Local 1598.

The state Public Employees Relations Commission issued that ruling last week and, in doing so, threw out a hearing officer's recommendation that those people be excluded from the unit made up of the fire department's lieutenants.

Assistant City Manager John Litton said the hearing officer had decided they should be excluded because they represent different levels of managers than the department's nine lieutenants.

The city's fight to exclude the battalion chiefs, fire marshal and inspector was similar to another it went through to exclude lieutenants from a unit made up of firefighters. It was successful in that effort when it contended lieutenants should not be part of a bargaining unit composed of people they supervise.

Litton said the city believes PERC ruled as it did to prevent the 44-member department from having too many bargaining units. Two already exist.

The city so far has gone through contract bargaining with only the unit

made up of firefighters. A contract imposed by the city commission Aug. 6 recently was rejected by the firefighters when 24 voted against it, with one favorable vote and one abstention.

Bargaining for a new contract will begin when the city enters its 1988 fiscal year Oct. 1, but no dates have been set, Litton said.

He said the city probably will appeal the PERC ruling.

"We are thinking of that right now because we feel there is a distinction between the battalion chiefs and lieutenants," said Litton.

Lt. Bobby Ferrell, president of the firefighters union, said the ruling will make the union stronger because only three individuals in the department — the chief, assistant chief and training officer — would not be members of the union. "We consider it a big victory."