

WP's firefighters vote for collective bargaining with city

By **MISSY CLARK**
Staff Writer

Firefighters in Winter Park voted unanimously last Friday to certify Local 1598, Winter Park Professional Firefighters Union, as their bargaining unit.

Lts. Bob Ferrell and Larry Niren will head the union as president and vice-president, respectively, although they will not be allowed to take part in the bargaining process.

The Public Employees Relations Commission ruled Sept. 11 that lieutenants and the fire inspector be excluded from the union bargaining unit. The state commission reaffirmed that ruling Oct. 11, after a union appeal which charged that the city had misled the commission into believing lieutenants held management positions and responsibilities when, in fact, they do not.

PERC's decision was based on testimony from firefighters and from the city administrative staff during public hearings last June.

Ferrell and Niren, who have led the union campaign since last spring, said the city rewrote job descriptions for lieutenants just days before those hearings, specifically for the purpose of persuading the commission to rule in the city's favor.

The new job descriptions require lieutenants to evaluate fire employees

for merit pay increases. Battalion chiefs previously were responsible for those evaluations.

Representatives for the city told PERC in June that the new job descriptions had been approved earlier in the year.

But, as the union pointed out to PERC in its appeal last month, the new job descriptions did not go into effect until Oct. 1. The union argued that lieutenants should be included in the bargaining unit because job evaluations were performed not by them but

rather by battalion chiefs both before the June hearings and after the Sept. 11 ruling.

The PERC commission upheld its ruling, however, citing a supervisory conflict of interest as its basis.

After the election Friday, Niren said they will continue to pursue action to have union representation for lieutenants and other supervisory personnel, excluding the chief and assistant chief.

Niren and Ferrell are also looking
Please see Union on Page 12A

City pensions may change

Responding to proposals from both the police and firefighters' pension boards, the city commission met at City Hall Monday to discuss possible changes in pension plans for city employees.

The purpose of the work session was to begin setting goals and objectives to follow in revising employee pension plans.

Three pension plans currently exist for city employees: one for police, one for fire and one for general employees. Without general guidelines and a framework within which to consider proposed changes, the city commission could be faced with conflicts from each of the three plans trying to outdo the others.

John Litton, assistant city manager and personnel director, said that the separate pension policies are needed because of differing natures of and responsibilities involved in different jobs.

"Each category of employee (fire, police and general) has its own pension and benefits policy, but we need to set objective goals to work toward for all pensions," said Litton.

Please see Pension on Page 12A

OUTLOOK

Nov. 20, 1986 pm 2

WP's Firefighters Vote... Cont.

Union

Continued from page 1A

into the city's efforts against the union both before and after the PERC ruling. "We're finding out what they did and how much they spent in fighting the union," said Niren. "They spent a fortune on legal fees alone."

Out of 27 eligible firefighters, 26 participated in the union election; all voting in favor.

John Litton, assistant city manager and personnel director, said that

although he had hoped the union would not pass, he was not surprised by the election.

"I knew it would go through; I never even gave it a second thought," said Litton. "and the city will certainly comply with the law. I expect we'll sit down now in the near future and begin collective bargaining. It's going to have to be a process of give and take."

part 2.1

Pension

Continued from page 1A

Among factors being considered for change by the city include: the number of years of service required before an employee becomes vested, the definition of employee's average final compensation and percentages on which benefits are based.

Although there was no formal vote taken Monday, the majority of the commission indicated they think the police and fire pension plans should be more similar to each other, while the general employees' pension should be significantly different.

"This is because there is a significant difference between police and fire employees' and general employees' jobs," said City Manager David Harden.

The firefighters pension board is asking for a one-time increase in benefits of 10 percent for persons already retired, and for changing the definition of average final compensation; basing it on the best three out of the last five years of service. Presently, their average final compensation is based on the best five out of the last 10 years of service.

The police pension board is asking for the same change in definition of their average final compensation, and also for their benefits to be raised from 2 percent to 2.5 percent for each year of service. Fire employees already receive 2.5 percent.

Although, the General Employees Pension Board has not yet submitted a formal proposal, Harden said he expects one soon, and that he believes the board will ask for an increase in benefits from 1.25 percent to 1.5 or 1.75 percent for each year of service.

Under all three pension plans, employees are vested after 10 years' service with the city. This means that after that time, employees may retire or go to work for another employer and still be eligible for retirement benefits from the city when they reach the normal retirement age of 65. General employees, however, do not begin earning credit for their years of service until they reach the age of 25. Harden said the city would like to change that aspect of the general employees' pension plan and make it equal to the other two.

Police and fire employees begin earning credit immediately upon employment, regardless of their age.

part 2.2

AUP's Firefighters vote ... cont.