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Fire chief may soon be hired

By MISSY CLARK
Staff Writer

If all goes according to plan, the City of Winter Park may start the new year by hiring a new fire chief. And close on the heels of that appointment may come the creation of a new position in the city's heirarchy: a public safety director to oversee the operations of the police and fire departments.

The city commission and staff began taking steps to create a public safety director's position last August, and in November voters approved an ordinance giving the city power to do so when and if it deemed such a position necessary. According to guidelines in the city's charter, the public safety director would be responsible to the Civil Service Board.

City officials are interviewing six finalists this week for the position of fire chief, and City Manager David Harden said he hopes to make a selection and present it to the city commission for approval early next week. The commission must review the staff's selection and approve it by a majority vote in order for the applicant to be hired by the city.

Former Fire Chief Mike Molthrop resigned last June, and Police Chief Ray Beary has been acting fire chief until the city hires a permanent employee to fill the position.

The city has received hundreds of applications from all over the country since it began advertising for the position. John Litton, assistant city manager and personnel director, has spent the last two months sifting through and screening the applicants. The list of potentials was recently narrowed down to the six finalists who are being interviewed this week by Litton and other staff members, including Harden and Beary.

Harden said that, once the fire chief has been hired, the city will probably proceed with plans for appointing a public safety director.

While Beary's days as the two-hatted (police and fire) chief are numbered, he is the most likely and obvious candidate for the position of public safety director.

The city commission would have to approve any proposals for creating the position as well as for appointing personnel to fill it.

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