

Winter Park Fire Chief Id; City Cites Bid Irregularities

Dismissal Ordered By Commission

By ROSEMARY SIMMS

Sentinel Star Staff

Winter Park Fire Chief Robert Finlayson, accused of bid irregularities and poor administration, was fired Wednesday by City Manager Frank Wooten.

The dismissal was ordered by the city commission, Wooten said.

FINLAYSON denied any wrongdoing.

Wooten refused to comment, but Mayor Jim Driver said the issue was brought to a head by "irregular" bid specifications for a new fire truck.

The bid was geared to a specific manufacturer, Driver said. Several other manufacturers complained they could not meet specifications although they said their equipment was adequate.

COMMISSIONERS agreed with other reasons — some vague — given by Driver, including:

- The handling of a fire which destroyed old Lyman Hall at Rollins College.
- Other irregular bid specifications.
- Erroneous administrative reports given by the chief concerning the General Waterworks franchise, the fire sprinkler ordinance and other unnamed fire department related matters.
- The controversy surrounding the suspension of fireman Orville Anderson.
- Finlayson's siding with the union in negotiations with the city.
- Numerous requests for "special" nonbudgeted items.

Deputy Fire Chief Ed Ballard was named acting chief.

Finlayson said he was called to Wooten's office about 2:30 a.m. and was asked to resign. He refused.

THE FIRE chief said he was not given a reason. He said Wooten told him he did not know why. Finlayson said he had received no complaints from the commissioners.

"If I'm guilty of anything it's one thing and that's trying to bring better fire protection to Winter Park. If I was dismissed for trying to serve the citizens properly, I'm guilty of this," Finlayson said.

"He (Wooten) has illegally discharged me. I intend to retain counsel and sue for my vested interests. I will appeal to the civil service board and to the city commission. It will all come out then."

ASKED why he had been fired, Finlayson replied, "I don't have any idea whatsoever. I was kind of astounded. I had no reason to believe anything was wrong or I had done anything."

Driver and Commissioners Harold Roberts, Jerry Donnelly and Byron Villwock said they concurred with the firing. Commissioner Dick Stevens could not be contacted.

The three commissioners said Finlayson's firing won't solve all the problems within the city administration. But they wouldn't elaborate.

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