



Town of Fairhaven
Massachusetts
Office of the Select Board

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement by the Fairhaven Select Board regarding Civil Service:

The Civil Service system in Massachusetts has not served the interests of our community for many years, and Fairhaven is not alone in that regard. The current Civil Service system no longer fulfills its primary mission and is particularly deficient in terms of allowing communities to hire women and minority candidates. In addition to diversity concerns, there are documented shortcomings with Civil Service promotional procedures and the disciplinary appeal process.

For all of these reasons, Fairhaven, along with many other communities, has pursued withdrawal from Civil Service in our police and fire departments. Our first step was to negotiate with our police and fire unions over the withdrawal. The unions representing our police officers and firefighters both agreed to support withdrawal from Civil Service. Additionally, the Town bargained with the Union and agreed to new hiring and promotional processes to replace the archaic processes required under the Civil Service law.

We then put the matter of withdrawal before voters at our Annual Town Meeting in 2023, and voters overwhelmingly supported withdrawal. We placed these questions before town meeting based on the belief that all the positions in the Police Department, including the police chief, came under Civil Service jurisdiction by a vote of town meeting in 1954. We subsequently learned that the decision to put the police chief under Civil Service was approved at a town election in 1938, meaning it would require putting the question of withdrawal before voters at a town election.

Following the vote of the 2023 Annual Town Meeting to withdraw from Civil Service, the Town went through a process to determine who would succeed Chief Myers when he retires in August 2024. As our prior town meeting vote did not effectively remove the position of police chief from Civil Service, the promotional process we used to select the next chief is effectively null and void. The Select Board will be meeting after town meeting to determine the best course of action to replace Chief Myers. We are committed to choosing the next police chief through a fair, unbiased and comprehensive assessment process. The Board will share the details of that process with our employees and our residents before a selection is made.

The decision to leave Civil Service was made with the support of our police officers and firefighters, and final approval of that decision rests with our voters. The central question to consider is whether decisions on hiring, promotions and discipline will be local decisions, or whether those decisions will be governed by a state agency. As for replacing Chief Myers, the Select Board again would like to assure our residents that we will fully disclose the process for making that decision before the Town selects a new police chief.

We hope this addresses any concerns regarding our position on Civil Service and the selection of a new police chief.

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