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Fiesta has been paying part of police costs

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The St. Peter's Fiesta committee has paid Gloucester police \$5,000 in each of the last four or five years to help offset the cost of patrolling the annual festival in June, the committee president said yesterday.

Joseph Novello, president of the St. Peter's Fiesta Committee, said the committee has been making the payments in response to a Police Department request. "We've done quite a bit," Novello added.

However, the Fiesta still faces possible loss of police coverage at the five-day event. Gloucester police Chief John Beaudette warned the City Council in writing Wednesday that impending cuts in his budget would mean no officers at the Fiesta, which is held every June. Beaudette calculated he could avoid spending \$26,000 by not assigning overtime for staff officers and part-time reserve officers.

Beaudette did not specify whether coverage would be withdrawn for the event later this month, or for Fiesta 2008. The budget cuts in question are for fiscal 2008, which does not begin until July 1, the last day of Fiesta.

Novello said he had not been informed by Beaudette of the possible loss of police at Fiesta.

Mayor John Bell yesterday said for the second straight day he would not allow Beaudette to ignore Fiesta.

Wednesday, Beaudette told the City Council's Budget and Finance Committee that before he dropped councilor-recommended special training and conferences, budgeted for \$36,300, he would sacrifice security details at the Fiesta, which draws thousands for five days in late June and early July.

He told the committee he would also end beach patrols and lay off meter maids before giving up the training, heavily weighted with firearms practice. He calculated he could save \$26,000 by not providing Fiesta security, \$33,440 by ignoring the beaches and \$86,000 by terminating the meter maids.

The chief's insistence he cut other services before conferences and discretionary overtime for optional, elite training was challenged yesterday by the 47-member Gloucester Police Patrolman's Union. In a written statement to the Times, the union accused their chief of using the special assignments budgeted to cost \$35,000 to reward his favorites and "buy ... loyalty" of "a select few."

The union also said Beaudette, who sparred with the City Council's Budget and Finance Committee in two hearings in the last week, "intentionally misled" councilors.

Through his secretary, Beaudette declined to speak to the Times.

The union charges echoed a complaint to the City Council by union leaders in March.

The patrolman's union disagreed with their chief's stated priorities - to maintain the specialized, optional training in marksmanship, advanced rape counseling and SWAT-like responses and participation in a firearm's conference.

In its statement yesterday, the union said it is "strongly opposed to anyone being laid off from any city union while we have irresponsible department heads managing money."

Along with the jobs of teachers and nonteaching school staff, the budget cutting and reappropriation process underway in the council puts an uncertain number of union jobs in city departments in jeopardy.

The union did not explain why it accused Beaudette of misleading the council and instead reiterated accusations made in March that Beaudette "showered" favorites with "unlimited overtime, questionable assignments" and "no show jobs."

Beaudette put his priorities in writing - as did all city departments - in response to the council committee's request that managers show how they would squeeze 2 percent and 5 percent of spending from their departments' plans for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

Roughly halfway through the comprehensive review of all departmental budgets totaling \$78.6 million, the council committee had removed about \$400,000 for possible reappropriation.

The budget review resumes Monday.

The Police Department was projected to spend \$5.1 million in fiscal 2008.

After a long and often heated discussion with Beaudette, his department business manager, Phil Terpos, and his lieutenant, Joseph Aiello, the Budget and Finance Committee Wednesday voted to cut the Police Department budget by 2 percent or \$102,000.

Councilor Jason Grow proposed targeted cuts to the discretionary "tuition and training" accounts under Beaudette's personal control, but his committee colleagues, Council President James Destino and Alphonse Swekla, formed a majority in favor of an unspecified departmental cut, leaving the choice of where to cut at the discretion of the chief.

In defending his budget to the council committee, Beaudette, Terpos and Aiello described the discretionary accounts as essential. These include \$2,500 for a firearms conference, \$7,200 for admission to a school that teaches advance SWAT-type entries, \$5,000 for tuition for a school that teaches advanced skills in rape counseling, and \$21,000 for a variety of marksmanship programs.

Destino said Beaudette, not the council, should be held responsible for abandoning St. Peter's Fiesta. He also questioned Beaudette's priorities. Councilor Michael McLeod faulted Beaudette for threatening to sacrifice Fiesta patrols to make the point that his budget shouldn't be cut.

The committee's action, which must be ratified by the full council next Tuesday, was part of a broad but not all-encompassing set of 2 percent cuts to other departments.

The committee issued the request for budget-cutting plans last Friday, days after the School Committee, backed by teachers and parents, pleaded with the council to restore \$1 million to its budget to save teacher jobs and help ease the transition of students out of Fuller Elementary School.

Yesterday, the council red lined three DPW road maintenance positions and a sign painter.