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## **Police unions, mayor remain at loggerheads**

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A public allegation by the patrolmen's union, accusing police Chief John Beaudette of rewarding his favorites and punishing the disfavored, has devolved into a dispute with Mayor John Bell over long-stalled contract negotiations.

The transition took nine days and an exchange of letters between the mayor and the union, which were released by the mayor to the Times yesterday.

On March 20, union leaders complained to the City Council that Beaudette has been forcing patrol officers who have challenged his methods to participate in outdoor training in harsh conditions, while rewarding favorites with easy overtime.

The union asked for a meeting with the mayor, who attended the council meeting, and Bell agreed to set a date.

The union went to City Hall to arrange the meeting the next day. On March 23, Bell wrote to the union to propose meeting this past Monday, but noted that while he was "interested in hearing your recommendations ... regarding constructive solutions to perceived problems" (with Beaudette), the proposed meeting would not be a contract negotiating session.

The union quickly wrote back complaining the invitation arrived Monday - the day proposed for the meeting - making it "impossible to assemble the Executive Board and meet only on a few hours notice."

In any event, the union added that a "negotiating meeting" must precede "any other meeting."

Yesterday, the two sides expressed different views about what had happened.

"How do you communicate when no one wants to listen?" Bell told the Times.

He said the union's apparent offense at the proposed short turnaround from letter to meeting was a quibble and should not have prevented a good faith effort by the union to put its complaints about the chief before the mayor.

Bell said he would have rescheduled to satisfy the union.

In a statement yesterday, union secretary Michael Williams Jr. said the fact that Bell "wants to argue over what meetings to have ... only strengthens our claim that they are not willing to come to an amicable" collective-bargaining agreement.

With contract negotiations with the 11-member superior officers' union as well as with the 47-member patrolmen's union stalled earlier this year, both filed for arbitration. Both contracts expired three years ago.

In late January, about 60 police officers from both unions appealed to City Council for support in their contract efforts.

The patrolmen union's presentation to the council March 20 seemed not to be about the lack of a contract but about decisions by Beaudette that were interpreted as reflecting a "friends and enemies" approach to the assignment of training and overtime.

"The union feels and can show that the chief's top priority since taking command has been to reward his friends and punish his enemies," the union wrote to the Times. "Rewards and retaliation is at an all-time high in the department."

Beaudette has not responded to requests for his reaction to the charges. His secretary said yesterday he is on vacation.

Williams yesterday said his union's priority is contract negotiations but that the union is still hopeful to have a parallel meeting to air its grievances about the chief. He also said the union might consider dropping its request for arbitration and return to the bargaining table.

The meeting that never was

\* **Tuesday, March 20:** Police union leaders complain to City Council that Chief John Beaudette has been unfair to patrol officers who have challenged his methods while rewarding favorites with easy overtime. The union asked for a meeting with Mayor John Bell to discuss the complaints, and Bell agrees.

\* **Wednesday, March 21:** Union leaders go to City Hall to arrange the meeting.

\* **Friday, March 23:** Bell writes union proposing they meet Monday, March 26, but notes the meeting would not be for contract negotiations.

\* **Monday, March 26:** Union receives letter and responds that it would be "impossible" to "meet only on a few hours notice."