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Yonkers City Council adopts overtime cap and possible wage freeze

YONKERS — After years of big overtime earnings for some city workers, the City Council has voted to approve new overtime limits and wage freezes.

The council adopted a resolution Tuesday putting a \$20,000 overtime cap on municipal workers, similar to a \$15,000 cap that exists in the public schools.

The vote came on the same day The Journal News published a report about the city's 2010 calendar year salaries, noting that eight police officers had earned more than \$100,000 in overtime and that 130 workers had earned more than \$50,000 in overtime.

"I'm in favor of limiting how overtime is distributed. We've had these stories every year about the disproportionate amount of overtime," Mayor Phil Amicone said of The Journal News' annual reports on Yonkers' salaries.

The new ordinance will not prevent workers from earning overtime beyond \$20,000.

"The commissioner can ask the mayor for a dispensation and the mayor can grant it," City Council President Chuck Lesnick said Wednesday.

Amicone has proposed a \$919 million combined city and school budget for fiscal 2011-12, with a 4.81 percent property tax-rate increase that would cost the average homeowner an extra \$367.

His budget plan has been unpopular with some City Council members and many public-school parents and school unions because it includes hundreds of proposed school layoffs and the elimination of prekindergarten, school sports and most after-school activities.

The council adopted the overtime measure along with a resolution asking state officials to create a transitional finance authority that would allow city officials to impose wage freezes on school and municipal workers if the authority borrows \$20 million to prevent some layoffs.

Lesnick said the wage freeze would go into effect when the proposed authority issues bonds.

"If it borrows the money for five years, then it's in effect for five years," Lesnick said of the wage freeze.

"It's totally in the control of the city, if we get our finances in order, to lift the wage freeze," he added.

Lt. Thomas Phelan, president of the Yonkers Captains, Lieutenants and Sergeants Association, said big overtime numbers for his members are a result of individuals asked to do more than one job.

Phelan said any overtime cap would require contract negotiations.

"We are going to fight that," he said.

Phelan said his union has cooperated with Amicone and that his union's members have made salary sacrifices. He said his members have not had a raise since January 2009.

"As far as I'm concerned there is a wage freeze," Phelan said.

City union leaders responded to the overtime cap and wage freeze by having an emergency meeting Wednesday afternoon with Amicone.

New York City has a transitional finance authority, which issues bonds to pay for school building projects, World Trade Center recovery projects and municipal debt refinancing.

The state Legislature authorization would be needed for the creation of a transitional finance authority, and there are only about 10 days of sessions left this month before the body recesses for the summer.

If the Legislature rejects Yonkers' request or fails to act on it, then city officials would be forced to adopt Amicone's budget.

The city's charter technically requires that a budget for fiscal 2011-12 be adopted June 1, but Lesnick said that the budget vote likely wouldn't happen until the end of the month, in order to give the state Legislature time to act.

The new fiscal year begins July 1.

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