Public safety policy shakeup

By Sam Friedman

So-called “vertical” inebriated people are once again the responsibility of the Fairbanks Police Department.

The recent policy shake-up in as many months regarding whether the city fire or police departments should have the time-consuming job of putting intoxicated people into protective custody. A change in policy made last month moves responsibility for inebriated people who are capable of sitting up from the fire department to the police department.

Mayor John Eberhart described the new policy as a partial reversal of the one set by the previous mayor, Jerry Cleworth, on Oct. 1, with just a few weeks remaining in his term. In an interview Tuesday, the new mayor said he changed the policy because he felt his predecessor didn’t address the need for firefighters to respond to emergencies in groups.

“I think the change of policy by Mayor Cleworth didn’t take into account, as I see it, the necessary teamwork for the fire department to respond effectively,” Eberhart said.

Changing the policy also helped resolve an “unfair labor practices” grievance by the Fairbanks Firefighters Association, which claimed the intoxicated-person calls violated its contract. Eberhart said.

Revised figures show firefighting staffing above average, even with layoffs

By Sam Friedman

The Fairbanks city fire chief has corrected some of the statistics he used to argue against firefighter layoffs at Monday’s City Council meeting.

During budget discussions Monday,
But the threat from the firefighters didn't cause the policy change, he said.

"I've handled plenty of grievances, so it's not like I was scared of the grievance," he said.

Under Eberhart's policy, which started Nov. 5, the police department responds in cases when an intoxicated person is vertical. The fire department responds when an intoxicated person is horizontal, Eberhart said. Eberhart's policy went into effect Nov. 5.

Eberhart described the new policy as a temporary solution. He said his long-term goal is to reduce intoxicated-person calls for both the police and fire departments by expanding the Community Service Patrol, which now patrols the downtown area and transports intoxicated people to safe locations.

The Community Service Patrol is funded by $30,000 in city bond tax revenue and $140,000 in community donations, said David van den Berg, executive director of the Downtown Association of Fairbanks, which administers the program. The fund pays for a contract with international security firm Securitas. It uses three staff members, known as ambassadors, for the job.

The Fairbanks City Council voted to allocate an additional $75,000 to the Community Service Patrol in its 2014 budget at Monday night's council meeting.

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