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Mayor Duffy's new staff to cost taxpayers more

Brian Sharp
Staff writer

While Mayor Robert Duffy's senior staff members collectively might have the most impressive résumé of any team to lead City Hall, they also are shaping up to be the most highly paid.

Duffy has put nearly all of his senior staff at the top of the city pay scale, according to salary information the *Democrat and Chronicle* obtained through a Freedom of Information Law request.

Eleven of his 14 permanent appointments are new to City Hall, many having served as top executives in the private and nonprofit sector. Duffy awarded the group a collective 3 percent raise over their predecessors, many of whom left after a decade or more on the job. Thus far, the salary bill has risen more than \$54,000 over former Mayor William A. Johnson Jr.'s administration.

The dollar increase is minimal when looked at in the context of the city's \$403.4 million budget. However, it has miffed some City Council members, who froze their and the mayor's salary in December citing "difficult economic times." Bringing new hires in at the top of the pay scale, they say, sends the wrong message — to longtime City Hall employees, and with the city seeking additional state aid to avoid deep budget cuts.

Duffy said he does not view his appointees as new hires given they are former CEOs, presidents and directors.

"I have gone out and recruited a staff that has the skills and abilities to bring about some of the changes we want to see in our community," Duffy said. "I would welcome anyone to criticize. ... I also welcome them to weigh in and judge the results these people bring over the next four years."

City Council on Thursday confirmed several of the mayor's appointees without comment. It has no say on salaries.

New culture: 'Priceless'

"You kind of get what you pay for," said Otis White, president of Civic Strategies Inc., a strategic planning firm in Atlanta that works with local governments on public policy issues. "If it's to go about things as they've always been done, you've been cheated. If it's to fundamentally go about things in a different way and create a new culture in City Hall, then it's priceless." The mayor's team includes the former president and CEO of RGS Energy Group Inc., the former president of the Center for

Governmental Research, the heads of Ibero-American Action League and Wilson Commencement Park, and top executives from Xerox, WXXI Public Broadcasting and the YMCA of Greater Rochester.

Duffy described the group as "the most high-powered professionals I could put together. I expect a lot from them. ... You'll see them early in the morning, late at night; you'll see them on weekends."

His staff already has addressed the future of the high-speed ferry, has lobbied Albany for \$35.5 million more in state aid — Duffy and other upstate mayors will meet with Gov. George Pataki on Wednesday — and is working on a possible restructuring of the Neighborhood Empowerment Teams.

Duffy still must name a permanent police chief and commissioner of economic development. Both senior staff posts currently are filled on an interim basis. With second-tier appointments, Duffy has held steady or decreased salaries for new NET administrators but raised the deputy commissioner of parks, recreation and human services from \$84,736 to the same \$98,520 salary paid other deputy commissioners.

Wrong message?

"There are some issues there. Who are we fooling?" City Councilman Adam McFadden said of Duffy's new hires earning equal or higher pay than their tenured predecessors.

Nonprofit tax filings and other public records indicate many of Duffy's senior staff received sizable pay increases by coming to City Hall. Duffy, however, insists that most earned more or were being recruited by private-sector employers who could pay more than he could offer. Some salary adjustments dealt with inequities in city payroll, he said.

The higher salaries are not included in the \$26.6 million budget gap projected for next year, officials said, so those getting raises will have to find the money by cutting elsewhere in their department.

Ultimately, McFadden said, the issue is not about the people chosen, and the salary differential is not going to break the bank. The real issue, he said, is that "it sends the wrong message to staff people who have been working in the system 15, 20 years. We're saying we are broke and plan on cutting budgets, and then you bring people in at the top bracket."

City Councilwoman Carolee Conklin wrote Duffy on Jan. 19, raising concern about his salary decisions. Duffy wrote back but said he has not spoken with Conklin or McFadden directly. He has met with City Council President Lois Giess about the matter.

Giess said of greater interest than senior staff pay is Duffy's intent to reorganize parts of city government. That could affect the much larger total payroll. The city now spends \$240 million annually for employee pay and benefits, more than 60 percent of its budget.

As for the pay changes so far, Giess said, "You don't want to create two classes of people on your

leadership team."

Duffy echoed that position, saying: "I don't want an environment where we're creating jealousies and competition, because that takes away from the teamwork we are looking for."

Seeking results

Duffy said he expects to make his final appointments and decide who stays and who goes in about 100 other appointive positions in March. In the months ahead, he also expects to make a case for realigning some parts of city government.

He will address the broader employment picture when he unveils his budget in mid-May.

In the end, these salary questions will be answered with results, said Paul Ferber, a political science professor at Rochester Institute of Technology and former chairman of RIT's department of public policy.

"If you want competent management of a complicated, multimillion-dollar enterprise, you have to pay people something in line with what they are going to get in the private sector for comparable jobs," Ferber said, though noting that the city cannot match those salaries.

Edward Ciaschi, the city's new human resources director, retired in May from Xerox, where he was vice president for human resources in the company's largest department by revenue. Before layoffs at Xerox, his responsibilities involved a staff of 45,000. City staff numbers 3,300 full-time equivalent employees.

Ciaschi is one of those who earned more before coming to City Hall. While he won't discuss dollar figures, Ciaschi said that if he were "looking at jobs based on salary, this (the city position) wouldn't have been on the radar. ... I look at this job as an opportunity to give back to the community I live in. I don't think a lot of people get an opportunity like this."

BDSHARP@DemocratandChronicle.com

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