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Police, chief at odds over pay

By Andy Smith
Staff Writer

ATKINSON -- The police union has offered to charge less for working details at nonprofit community events than those for private parties. But Chief Philip V. Consentino says their rate is still too high and unacceptable.

In an ongoing dispute over how much police should get for detail work, selectmen received a letter from the union Friday, saying officers should receive \$20 an hour for events like a Girl Scout car wash or the Lion's Club flea market. The union has filed grievances against Consentino, questioning his handling of those details.

Selectmen hope to resolve the dispute between the two sides and keep it from going to arbitration.

At present, officers receive \$30 an hour, at a minimum of four hours, to cover details for private entities, which are billed by the police department. Consentino does not bill for local nonprofit details. Instead, officers are paid for those details out of the department's operating budget, at their regular hourly rate of pay.

Consentino said yesterday the department has always provided that free service to local organizations, and he refuses to charge them.

"I have said from day one, they cannot be so greedy and go after the nonprofit organizations in town," he said. "That's all I've ever asked. And that's what I've been doing for over 27 years."

Officer Steven E. Isola, president of the Atkinson Patrolmen's Association Local 563, declined comment, saying it was premature to discuss the negotiations.

But he has previously stated that officers' regular pay rates are insufficient for the details. He would also like to see formal procedures in place to dictate who receives the reduced rate

How can selectmen resolve this with one of them is party to this action

and who receives the detail assignments.

A reduced pay rate for details is somewhat unusual in a community. Plaistow Police Chief Stephen C. Savage, who also serves as president of the New Hampshire Association of Chiefs of Police, says two separate rates can generate too much confusion over how much officers should receive for each detail.

There is no departmental policy about providing free details in Plaistow, Sandown, Derry or Danville.

But it is not unusual for departments to occasionally provide a free detail, either at the officer's regular pay rate or on a volunteer basis.

Danville Police Chief Wade H. Parsons said his officers donate their time to cover the Memorial Day Parade. And Plaistow donated officers to work Timberlane Regional High School's make-up prom earlier this month.

Consentino said he expects his officers to have a commitment to the community. He said the community details are only needed about seven times a year.

"It's not like I'm asking them to work for free," he said. "I'm offering them the opportunity to help out some of the local groups at their regular rate of pay. But I'm sure not going to pay them \$20 an hour to go out there and do something for our community. For some of these events they should be donating their time anyway."

Consentino said the officers do quite well with details, and should not be complaining. He noted that Isola himself made \$60,812 in 2003. Only about \$40,000 of that came from his base pay. Consentino said most of the rest was from details.

Selectman Fred Childs said last night he does not understand what the big deal is. He agreed with Consentino that he is not asking for a lot.

"I don't know what the big problem is," he said. "They're only being asked to do it a half dozen times a year, and it's not like it's for free. I don't see why they're so upset."

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