



For Immediate Release

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Cohoes Seeks to Safely Control Fire Department Overtime Costs in Midst of Fiscal Crisis Due To COVID-19 Related Revenue Losses

Cohoes, NY (July 27, 2020) – The City of Cohoes is seeking to safely save \$100,000+ in Fire Department overtime costs in response to the fiscal crisis due to COVID-19 related revenue losses expected to exceed \$1-million this year.

Following is a statement from Cohoes Fire Chief Joseph Fahd regarding that effort:

“I have been a firefighter for more than 50 years, and Fire Chief in Cohoes since 2003. I would not take any action that would put my firefighters or the Cohoes community at risk. Safety is my highest priority, and safety is Mayor Keeler’s highest priority. That is why there are at least 7 and often 8 firefighters assigned to each shift.

The reality is that we are facing an economic crisis like I have not seen in my 50 years as a firefighter, and it requires us to look at every part of the Fire Department budget, including overtime. The problem we are grappling with is how to safely and effectively control overtime costs. If we do this right, we think we can save more than \$100,000 between now and the end of the year. But, that is going to require the help of our firefighters, because of how overtime is incurred.

These are unprecedented times, and it will take cooperation and collaboration to get through it. Mayor Keeler and I will be meeting with the Cohoes Local 2562 Firefighters Union Executive Board on Tuesday. I am confident that, working together, we will find solutions that will contain overtime costs safely.”

Background:

Mayor Keeler recently announced that COVID-19 related losses to the city are anticipated to exceed \$1-million. Second quarter sales tax revenue to the City of Cohoes is down twenty-five percent (25%) from a year ago, a drop of nearly \$400,000 in just one quarter of this fiscal year. Sales tax revenue represents 27.5 percent of the city’s budget.

In addition to losses in sales tax revenue, Cohoes is facing a 20% reduction in state aid -- \$550,000 – based on the 2020-2021 State budget enacted in April.

The city has also experienced a loss of revenue from building permits due to the halt of construction, and from other permitting and licensing fees due to COVID-19 related reductions in a range of other activities.

In the July 20th announcement on the city's fiscal crisis Mayor Keeler said, "Filling a \$1-million plus revenue gap will require difficult decisions across the board. There are no obvious solutions or easy answers. We are looking in every corner of the budget to find savings, including reducing overtime expenses." Seventy-five percent of the city's budget is personnel expenses, including salaries and benefits. Efforts are underway to curtail overtime in every city department.

In March, Mayor Keeler announced a range of staff reductions, program cuts, and proposed 2020 budget cuts to address the significant actual and anticipated revenue shortfalls resulting from the pandemic. Those included temporary staff furloughs, staff reductions based on attrition, and cancellation of contracts.

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