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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
REGARDING SUPPORT FOR THE FIRE DEPARTMENT**

I recently became aware of a social media post disseminated by the Professional Firefighters of Londonderry Local 3160 (“3160”) on March 30, 2024, attracting considerable attention, concerning a response to Mallard Lane on March 30, 2024:

Working Fire Transmitted on the orders of Derry Ladder 3[.]

Due to a budget freeze enacted by the Town Manager we are operating in drop down mode, meaning our response was significantly diminished as only Engine 1 & the Battalion Chief were available

Since I became Town Manager, support for our public safety departments has been my first priority, and this includes the Londonderry Fire Department. LFD is not operating in “drop down mode[.]” LFD is currently budgeted for 12-member battalions, with minimum staffing at 11 during the spending freeze. Three of four battalions are currently staffed at 12, although this can differ based on employee leaves. The fourth battalion will be staffed at 12 as soon as the budget allows, which I expect will occur later this fiscal year.

Battalion 3 had 11 working members on March 30, 2024. While over the past year, LFD has consistently hired overtime to hold staffing at 12 if one or more battalion members is on leave, this has not been the historic practice before 2023, and the current budget approved by the voters does not support this given the vacancies LFD had early in the fiscal year. In fact, staffing was sometimes allowed to drop below 11 in the past—to 9 as recently as 2016—to adjust to budgetary conditions.

The Mallard Lane call was dispatched at 11:58 a.m. When the working fire assignment was transmitted at 12:03 p.m., companies were committed to a motor vehicle accident (11:27 a.m.) and a medical call (11:56 a.m.). A 3160 member commented, “[Shout] out to Derry Fire for coming to Londonderry and extinguishing our fire due to our towns [sic] budget freeze and drop down staffing!” Again, there is no “drop down staffing,” as we employ 12 firefighters in three of four of our battalions. LFD’s response was not “significantly diminished.” On the contrary, two companies responded faster than if they had been in quarters, and LFD Engine 1 arrived on scene at 12:05

p.m., 2 minutes after the first Derry company arrived. The medical call cleared simultaneously with the Mallard Lane call being dispatched, allowing Engine 2 to proceed to the scene faster than if they had been in quarters. It is therefore incorrect, as the 3160 post asserts, that Engine 2 was unavailable to respond to this call.

The fire was knocked down quickly. It is not surprising that Derry's response to this particular fire scene was faster than Londonderry's because Derry Station 3 is 1.1 miles away from this scene, whereas the closest Londonderry station is 5 miles away. Mutual aid is *always* called for a building fire in Londonderry, and mutual aid is the norm in the fire service. Last week, Londonderry both provided and received mutual aid multiple times, underscoring the importance of these partnerships.

My staff and I became aware that LFD's overtime expenses were trending significantly over budget, and in January we learned the cost control measures adopted by LFD earlier in the fiscal year had not been effective to reverse this trend. At this time, LFD's \$723,000 overtime budget was almost fully expended just over halfway through the fiscal year, and LFD was running a projected deficit of approximately \$487,000, bringing the Town's total projected surplus to dangerous levels. Because of the significant time remaining in the fiscal year, and in order to ensure sufficient funding for all of our departments, including police and DPW, with the Town Council's awareness, I instituted a budget freeze across all town departments. This is important because it is illegal to overspend the town's total approved budget by even one dollar. Ensuring there is enough money to fund all of our services and programs on the last day of the fiscal year is one of my most important obligations.

Weekly LFD overtime that was averaging \$20,000-\$30,000 per week has come down to less than \$10,000. The freeze is working, and it has brought LFD's projected deficit down to around \$226,000. Under the leadership of Chief Kim A. Bernard, the Londonderry Police Department—already trending under budget when I instituted the budget freeze—has frozen its own hiring, training, and all other expenses, to ensure the Town can meet its total bottom line, and I have heard not one complaint from a single LPD employee. I cannot thank Chief Bernard enough for his leadership and professionalism. He has made tough decisions, unpopular with his workforce, that will offset other departments' deficits, and allow the Town to meet its obligation to not overspend its bottom line budget by not one dollar.

During this freeze we have continued to approve LFD requests for vehicle and equipment maintenance and other needed purchases. In March, I approved LFD filling a staffing vacancy during the freeze. And we have staffed all battalions at 11 or 12. When I communicated the freeze to the LFD Administration, they requested the ability to take an engine company and an ambulance out of service when staffing levels are at 11 out of concern for the wellbeing and morale of the workforce and to avoid 2-person engine companies. I supported this request, making it clear that operational decisions about firefighting are within the Fire Department's sole purview.

The two budgets I have proposed to the Town Council since I became Town Manager include significant increases for LFD, including doubling the training budget which had not been increased

since 2017, adding \$66,000 for vehicle maintenance, \$18,000 for station maintenance, \$12,000 for the safety program, and \$126,497 for overtime. In my first two years in office, I have proposed and the Town Council has approved \$524,798 in budgetary increases for LFD, an increase of 6.5%. When this year's Article #15 proposing \$495,000 to hire additional firefighters is included, the budgetary increases the Town Council and I have supported rises to \$1,019,798, or 12.7%.

I am also proud that over the past two years, the Town Council and I have supported other significant LFD requests, including:

- \$709,969 in contract increases, which were ratified by the voters in 2022;
- \$495,000 in funding (year 1 expense) for additional firefighters to staff each battalion at 13, which the voters approved in March;
- \$120,000 in funding to equip each riding position with an infrared camera;
- \$146,135 in funding to purchase 4 mechanical lifts to move patients in and out of ambulances;
- \$44,360 in funding to purchase an additional command car in order to ensure there is a backup when one is out of service;
- The addition of a second deputy fire chief;
- The creation of the assistant fire chief position;
- \$2,255,928 in funding to purchase 2 new fire trucks;
- Funding firefighters to obtain paramedic schooling and credentials;
- \$173,293.88 in funding to equip each vehicle with a "minimum load out" of gear and equipment; and,
- \$275,000 in funding for the fire equipment and vehicle purchase capital reserve accounts.

My staff and I have worked closely with the Fire Chief to fill staffing vacancies. In the two years I have served as Town Manager, we have hired 17 firefighters. It took 4 years and 10 months to hire the 17 firefighters before that, meaning we have more than doubled the pace of hiring since I took office. While LFD has been plagued by unfilled positions for years, the Town Council and I have supported filling each vacancy and we have retained these new employees.

Our support for LFD does not end with funding decisions. The Town Council, my staff, and I have been proud to attend fire academy graduations, pinning and promotion ceremonies, retirements, and other important events that recognize the exceptional men and women of the Londonderry Fire Department. The Town Council and I will remain committed to supporting our Fire Chief, command staff, and the members of 3160. We will continue to do so as careful stewards of the taxpayers' money that has been entrusted to our care, and we will balance LFD's needs against the needs of our other vital first responders, the Police Department and DPW Department, whose work is equally important.