Officials say Salem police chief suspended for outburst

Two weeks:
Several town officials have confirmed the chief won't be back on duty until Oct. 6.

By APRIL GUILMET

Union Leader Correspondent

SALEM — Police Chief Paul Donovan was given a two-week suspension after a verbal outburst at a board of selectmen meeting earlier this month, town officials have confirmed.

Donovan will return to work Oct. 6.

In the meantime, Deputy Chief Shawn Patten will oversee the department according to several town officials who spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to discuss personnel matters.

Calls made to Town Manager Keith Hickey requesting additional information, including whether Donovan's suspension would be paid, weren't returned Friday afternoon.

But during an interview on Thursday, Hickey said the police chief “had been paid that day for a full week of regular pay for last week's hours.”

Hickey also confirmed that the board had met in private session on Sept. 22, but declined to say what had been discussed at that meeting.

Minutes from that meeting have been sealed and Hickey said those minutes are therefore exempt from RSA 91-A, otherwise known as the state’s Right-to-Know law.

Residents attending or watching a local access broadcast of the Sept. 17 selectmen meeting reported hearing Donovan utter a profanity while engaging in verbal discourse with Selectman Stephen Campbell.

The following day, Campbell vented his frustrations via his Facebook page.

“A little after an hour and 20 minutes, you hear a staff member say ‘he is full of ...’,” Campbell posted on Sept. 18. “I believe the reference was aimed at me.”

During an interview with the Union Leader this week, Campbell identified that “staff member” as Donovan.

A video of the Sept. 17 meeting is posted on the Salem Government Channel 23 website, though a musical soundtrack played during intermissions drowns out most individual conversations.

About an hour into the video, Donovan can be seen talking and gesturing.

Things get more heated later when the police chief and Campbell butted heads during discussion on a $1000 budget item for a police administrative assistant.

After adjourning for a brief recess to allow town officials to look up some numbers, a visibly agitated Donovan can be seen getting up from his seat at the podium and moving into the audience as Patten takes his place before selectmen, concluding the discussion on police funding needs.
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