

Hobart's Ex-Fire Chief—the Focus of a Police Investigation—Signals Intent to Retire

May 19, 2011



THURSDAY, JAN. 12, 2012

FOLLOW-UP: State audit cites Hobart for sale of fire truck, exercise equipment

Hobart's former fire chief—the focus of a police investigation into the

questionable sale of municipal equipment—has signaled that he intends to retire, city officials said.

Capt. Bill McCorkle, who was chief until last year, is “both old enough and has enough years on the department to draw a pension,” one of the officials told the Better Government Association on Thursday.

“He put in his papers,” the official said. However, “he was not requested to do so.”

The revelation comes a day after the BGA, a Chicago-based civic watchdog, and the *Post-Tribune* revealed that McCorkle had sold off some exercise equipment bought with an \$89,000 federal grant. He also sold an old Fire Department snowmobile.

The gear apparently all went to firefighters for cash—at bargain prices, and with little or no accounting.

Hobart police are trying to determine whether any rules or laws were violated, and where the money and material (which included a pricey VersaClimber and Bowflex) ended up.

Other city equipment, including at least one computer, also may be missing, and police have expanded their line of questioning based on recent inquiries from the BGA and the *Post-Tribune*.

McCorkle, 52, did not return phone calls placed Wednesday and Thursday.

But in an interview earlier in the week he admitted selling the snowmobile and the workout equipment—although he insisted that he funneled the proceeds back in the department. He said the gear he off-loaded was either broken or not being used.



He hinted in the interview that retirement was on his mind, not only because of the mess he found himself in, but also because he was upset that colleagues on the force were apparently the ones making the allegations to the BGA.

“I’m disappointed and heartbroken,” McCorkle said. “I don’t think I want to be a part of this any more...Some guys I guess want blood.”

McCorkle’s annual base salary was \$46,927, with \$2,970 additional based on his rank and \$2,650 extra for his length of service, according to city records. He stands to collect roughly \$49,000 a year through his pension.

It wasn’t immediately clear when his retirement would take effect. He’s been on the force for 25 years, and served as chief for five of those years.

Hobart Fire Chief Brian Taylor couldn’t immediately be reached for comment.

Hobart Mayor Brian Snedecor said Wednesday evening Taylor relayed to him that McCorkle had submitted his retirement papers.

Snedecor said earlier in the day that, even though he was on vacation last week, he “directed the Police Department to initiate an investigation” once the BGA and Post-Tribune started raising questions.

“I certainly want to be proactive on this,” he said.

Former Mayor Linda Buzinec, who was in office in 2007 when McCorkle apparently started selling the municipal equipment, told the *Post-Tribune* that her policy was that any unused or unclaimed items within the city departments would be sold at police auctions.

“It was usually police stuff, unclaimed items, but I would go to all department heads and ask if anyone else had anything to get rid of,” Buzinec said. “There would be a paper trail.”

She said she wasn’t aware, until now, that Fire Department material had been sold by McCorkle.

This story was written and reported by Robert Herguth, BGA Editor of Investigations, and Karen Caffarini of the Post-Tribune.