

City of Beloit
Police and Fire Commission

Police and Fire Commission Complaint Process

The Police and Fire Commission (PFC) is an independent body established by state law (Wis. Stat. § 62.13) and City Ordinance (Section 1.88 of the Code of General Ordinances). The PFC consists of five (5) citizens who serve rotating 5-year terms. The PFC has specific powers and duties pursuant to state law regarding hiring, promotion, and major discipline of police and fire personnel.

The PFC does not exercise general supervision or general oversight regarding the day-to-day management of the police department or the fire department. Similarly, the PFC does not have the authority to adopt rules governing the internal control and management of the police department or the fire department.

In disciplinary matters, the PFC acts as a quasi-judicial body. This means that the PFC conducts proceedings in which it hears evidence, weighs the evidence before it, and makes a determination of whether just cause exists to impose discipline. The PFC does not directly or actively investigate complaints. Rather, the PFC sits in judgment much like a court.

A case is usually commenced before the PFC when charges (or a complaint) are filed against a subordinate by the chief of a department or by an “aggrieved person” (which may include a citizen if he or she is an “aggrieved person”). A formal complaint to the PFC commences an adversarial proceeding in which the person filing the complaint (the “complainant”) must present his or her case against the named respondent to the PFC. If the PFC decides in favor of the complainant, it may impose penalties consisting of suspension or reduction in rank, suspension and reduction in rank, or discharge.

In order to impose penalties, the PFC must determine that just cause exists to support the complaint based on seven (7) standards, to the extent applicable. The seven (7) standards are as follows: (1) Whether the subordinate could reasonably be expected to have had knowledge of the probable consequences of the alleged conduct; (2) Whether the rule or order that the subordinate allegedly violated is reasonable; (3) Whether the chief, before filing the charge against the subordinate, made a reasonable effort to discover whether the subordinate did in fact violate a rule or order; (4) Whether the effort described under subd. 3. was fair and objective; (5) Whether the chief discovered substantial evidence that the subordinate violated the rule or order as described in the charges filed against the subordinate; (6) Whether the chief is applying the rule or order fairly and without discrimination against the subordinate; and (7) Whether the proposed discipline reasonably relates to the seriousness of the alleged violation and to the subordinate’s record of service with the chief’s department.

Chapter II of the PFC’s Rules and Regulations governs Disciplinary Complaints. A copy of the PFC’s Rules and Regulations can be found here: <https://www.beloitwi.gov/index.asp?SEC=B90D54E4-C295-43F4-91E9-B7E724433B4A&DE=899475CC-0A7B-4E91-B6F7-51854B0A07BE>. The PFC also has a standard, optional citizen complaint form, available at the same webpage.

It is important to note that each department has an internal complaint process that is separate and distinct from the PFC’s complaint process. A citizen who does not intend to file and pursue a formal disciplinary complaint with the PFC may wish to file an internal complaint directly with the applicable department. For information regarding the police department’s complaint process, contact Laurie Hazeltine at (608) 364-6807 or visit <https://www.beloitwi.gov/police>. For information regarding the fire department’s complaint process, contact Debbie Rykowski at (608) 364-2900.