

ORANGE MAKES KEY PERSONNEL CHANGES

BY WALTER ELLIOTT

ORANGE: The 61 council meeting attendees came away from City Hall Jan. 4 noticing that John Rappaport was back as Police Director and that Claude Wallace was still filling in for Municipal Clerk Dwight Mitchell. Council President/West Ward Councilman Hassan Abdul-Rasheed publicly introduced Dieter Lerch - and asked Legal Research Officer Dwayne D. Warren for means to dismiss Chief Financial Officer Jack Kelly.

Wallace, for the second straight council meeting, took Mitchell's place on the dais after the council approved his substitution by 7:18 p.m. He and Rasheed proceeded to conduct both the council's conference and regular meetings until their 11:40 p.m. adjournment.

Council Vice President/South Ward Councilman Edward Marable, Jr. had introduced Wallace at the previous meeting when city elders realized they needed a qualified and certified municipal clerk to conduct the sessions. Business Administrator John Mason, after the adjournment, explained that Wallace will be called upon on to substitute for former councilman Mitchell on a per-meeting basis.

"Dwight Mitchell suffered injuries from an automobile accident," said Mason. "He'll be back when he feels sufficiently ready."

Mason and Rappaport himself confirmed that the latter is back as police director. Rappaport's leave of absence was actually a blizzard-prolonged vacation.

"I was on vacation," said Rappaport during a five-minute council recess. "When I got held up coming home by the storm, Capt. Aric Webster and Mayor Eldridge Hawkins

were named acting executive officer and acting director until I got back."

Hawkins, who triples as acting Orange Fire Director and is also a West Orange Police Department officer on leave, may have been too earnest as acting police director. That is the charge leveled by two OPD members during the public speaking segment.

A lieutenant and a civilian employee said that the mayor personally visited their residences to confirm their being out sick. The pair derided the visit as an unprecedented "bed check." Hawkins was not present at the Jan. 4 council meetings.

Rappaport was present but was not called to the public lecture or the public television cameras by Rasheed. Rasheed, however, took a moment to introduce Dieter Lerch as the city's budget consultant. The council hired Lerch, of Fair Lawn, to help their budget committee with the immediate spending plan crisis and to help create a two- to three-year plan. Lerch, during the recess, said that he also has East Orange among his clients.

Rasheed meanwhile asked Warren, towards the regular meeting's end, to seek how to end the city's contract with Kelly. Kelly, with council consent, had downshifted from long standing full time status to part time last spring in part because he has added Jersey City and one other municipality as his clients.

While Kelly had committed himself to be in City Hall Saturdays, at least one public speaker asked if his time card record can be reviewed. Questions on his due diligence have also prompted a Jersey City councilman to call for his resignation last summer.