

**CITY OF NORWALK  
HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE  
SEPTEMBER 23, 2021  
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

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ATTENDANCE: Nicholas Sacchinelli, Chair; Dominique Johnson; Thomas Keegan; Diana Revolus; Lisa Shanahan

STAFF: Deanna D'Amore, Director of Health; Michele DeLuca, Deputy Director Emergency Management; Gino Gatto, Fire Chief; Thomas Kulhawik, Police Chief; Robert Sirico, Chief Animal Control Officer; Brian Weeks, Epidemiologist

OTHERS: Daniella Arias and Margaret Watts, The Norwalk Partnership

**I. WELCOME AND ROLL CALL**

Mr. Sacchinelli called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. and called the Roll as indicated above.

**II. APPROVAL OF THE JUNE 24, 2021 MEETING MINUTES**

- \*\* MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED**  
**\*\* MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MR. SACCHINELLI)**

**III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No members of the public wished to comment this evening.

**IV. NEW BUSINESS**

Action Items

Police Department

**\*\* MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS NECESSARY TO APPLY, ACCEPT AND IMPLEMENT GRANT FUNDS FROM THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION UNDER THE HIGHWAY SAFETY GRANT FOR DISTRACTED DRIVING HIGH VISIBILITY ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM, IN THE AMOUNT OF \$50,000.00**

**AND TO AUTHORIZE THE POLICE CHIEF THOMAS KULHAWIK TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL AGREEMENTS, DOCUMENTS, INSTRUMENTS AND AMENDMENTS THERETO AS MAY BE NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THE 2021 DISTRACTED DRIVING HIGH VISIBILITY ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM, PURSUANT TO SUCH GRANT FUNDING.**

This is a 100% grant from the State. The Police Department has had great success with this program.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MR. KEEGAN MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS NECESSARY TO APPLY, ACCEPT AND IMPLEMENT GRANT FUNDS FROM FEMA UNDER THE 2021 PORT SECURITY GRANT.**

**AND TO AUTHORIZE THE POLICE CHIEF THOMAS KULHAWIK TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL AGREEMENTS, DOCUMENTS, INSTRUMENTS AND AMENDMENTS THERETO AS MAY BE NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THE 2021 PORT SECURITY GRANT, PURSUANT TO SUCH GRANT FUNDING.**

This grant targets funding for the SCUBA team. The equipment gives them one of the leads in the area as far as dive capability.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MR. SACCHINELLI MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE FIRE CHIEF GINO GATTO TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL AGREEMENTS, DOCUMENTS, INSTRUMENTS AND AMENDMENTS THERETO AS MAY BE NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THE 2021 PORT SECURITY GRANT, PURSUANT TO SUCH GRANT FUNDING.**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Fire Department

**\*\* MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS NECESSARY TO ADOPT THE ‘WESTERN CT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (WESTCOG) MULTI-JURISDICTION HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN UPDATE 2021-2026’ AS PREPARED BY THE WESTCOG AND APPROVED BY THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA).**

Ms. DeLuca reviewed the item and explained that this is an item they do every year. This allows them to apply for mitigating funds when they become available. The current plan expires in December and this one will get them through 2026.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**DISCUSSION ITEMS**

1. Mental Health and Substance Use

Mr. Sacchinelli explained that Ms. D’Amore organized this presentation at Ms. Revolus’ request.

Ms. Arias and Ms. Watts gave a presentation outlining the services provided by The Norwalk Partnership, as well as pre-COVID and during COVID mental health statistics. It was noted that there is a lot of depression and suicide, resulting in a need to create a healthy environment. Ms. Watts talked about friendship benches that are staffed by volunteers. She said it is critical for the City to address the needs of high risk people.

Ms. D’Amore said there is a link to The Norwalk Partnership on the City’s website.

Ms. Revolus suggested getting digital signs and installing them in strategic areas. Ms. Johnson noted that the young people in the LGBTQ community suffer. She asked the members of the Community to reach out to her as the LGBTQ Common Council person. She noted that it is difficult for people in the Community to find health care.

Mr. Sacchinelli said he will share the documents with the members of the Common Council. He added that he will make contact with the representative at the SoNo Collection regarding suicide prevention. He suggested that everyone take advantage of suicide prevention training. It is available to everyone over the age of 16.

## 2. Coyotes

Mr. Sacchinelli explained that Mr. Keegan introduced this topic.

Mr. Keegan said that he had been seeing various neighborhood groups encountering wildlife and it seems that people do not know what to do in that situation. He said he had a conversation with the Animal Control Officer and it was an eye opener.

Mr. Sirico explained that coyote have always lived in Norwalk. He said that coyotes are curious and intelligent. There have been a lot of complaints about them, but he never had one try to attack a person; however, in the past one to two years, two small dogs were taken. The dogs were in their yard and ran over and initiated contact with the coyote.

It is not uncommon for coyote to be out during the day. They are an important part of our ecosystem. Without them, there would be an overabundance of rabbits, rats and deer. They also keep Canadian geese in check. By nature, coyote stare at people because they are curious; it is not a threat. Their comfort zone is about 20 – 30 feet from a person.

There are also bobcats and black bears in Norwalk and Fairfield County. Coyote are skittish and do not want to have conflict with a person. They look for smaller animals they can subside upon. The number one way to deal with a coyote is hazing it and making yourself as big and intimidating as possible. Make noise and back away; a coyote may watch, but will not go after a person. They do not look at people or pets as food sources; they are curious.

People and dogs are bit or injured by racoons more than by any other animal. They are very confident and will break into people's homes.

Mr. Sirico suggested people call 911 if there is an emergency and that call will get forwarded to his office.

Ms. Johnson asked if people should be more mindful about keeping their dogs on a leash. Mr. Sirico said that there are a lot of issues with people who allow their dogs off leash. He recommended keeping a dog on a leash. Coyote are very intelligent and curious. If it sees a dog and the owner is not very close, it will go over to the dog to see what it is. He added that it is important to stay outside with your dog. He said that it is important to have wildlife and an effort should be made to coexist with wildlife.

Ms. Revolus suggested adding this information to the walkability and educating people about what is growing and living here.

Mr. Keegan said he will follow up and ask Animal Control to provide handouts to people renewing their dog licenses. He said that Mr. McQuaid is in support of this.

Mr. Sacchinelli asked how to tell when there is something wrong with a coyote. Mr. Sirico said that it is normal for an animal to run away. For the most part, if it looks fairly clean, it is ok. He said Animal Control responds to concerns and tries to educate the public on how to coexist with wildlife.

Ms. Revolus asked if Animal Control offers teaching opportunities for youth. Mr. Sirico said that in the past he had opportunities to speak at the schools. They also do Q & A for Post Office workers. He said that it is good to explain to children the importance of nature; it is a good subject to pursue. He said he would be very interested in offering teaching opportunities for youth.

## **V. OLD BUSINESS**

### **Discussion Items**

#### **1. Police Update & Discussion**

Chief Kulhawik thanked Mr. Sirico. He said there has been a lot of talk about funding for the School Resource Officers. He said that he and the School District and the Mayor are committed to the School Resource Officer program. They are dealing with staffing shortages and are working on getting the staffing level back up.

On the COVID front, the Police Department is mostly back to normal. They do not have one person out with COVID.

Ms. Revolus gave a shout out to the School Resource Officers, especially Officer Cornell. She asked about Officer engagement with the community. Chief Kulhawik said the use of force simulator has been installed and they are just starting to roll out officer training. He said he plans to invite Common Council members to experience the simulator.

Chief Kulhawik highlighted various Officer engagement events, including backpack distribution and the National Night Out event. He said that as COVID is getting better, they will start more personal contact.

#### **2. Fire Update & Discussion**

Chief Gatto reported that during the month of August, the Fire Department responded to 717 calls, which comes to 23.1 calls a day. The Fire Marshall's office made 140 inspections and sent out 93 notifications. The Fire Marshall's office brought in \$2,429.

During the month of August, there were seven positive cases of COVID. All were able to return to work and there are no cases at this time.

During the month of August, the Fire Department finished the first group of interviews and gave 12 conditional offers of employment. By the end of October, they will interview for the February Fire Academy class.

Chief Gatto announced that Assistant Chief Basso will retire on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Mr. Sacchinelli asked if there were any issues with fireworks this year. Chief Gatto said there were no incidents related to fireworks this year.

### 3. Emergency Management Update & Discussion

Ms. DeLuca reported that since the last meeting, there were three hurricanes: Elsa, Henri and Ida. Ida caused the most residential damage. Everything was sent to the State and Ms. DeLuca said she is hopeful that some assistance will be provided to the residents. Hurricane season runs to November 30<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Shanahan said that she and Mr. Livingston will follow up with Ms. DeLuca regarding several streets in their district that experienced extensive damage from flooding.

Ms. Revolus asked how much of the flooding is caused by land misplacement. Ms. DeLuca explained that you lose some of the sponge when a large home replaces a smaller home. In addition, there has been an unprecedented amount of rainfall. Ms. DeLuca said she can ask for a better explanation from the Public Works department.

### 4. Health Department Update & Discussion

Ms. D'Amore said that flu clinic information is available on their website. COVID vaccine clinics will continue in the community. Over the summer, the Health Department held over 100 COVID vaccine mobile clinics.

Mr. Weeks shared his screen and gave an overview of the COVID statistics for the last seven days. He said that Delta is the predominant variant. Hospitalizations for the entire state have been on the decline. The availability of the vaccine and the mask mandate has been helpful. While there are decreases, there is a decent amount of activity in the State. The COVID vaccine is one of the best tools to mitigate the risk of transmitting the virus.

Mr. Weeks reported that 67.37% of Norwalk residents are fully vaccinated against COVID. He suggested that everyone check out the weekly COVID report that comes out each Friday.

Mr. Weeks reported that Norwalk has nine West Nile positive pools. The flu season is starting. Connecticut is at the lowest category as far as flu activity.

Ms. Shanahan asked if there were any other variants to worry about. Mr. Weeks said that Delta is running the show. Variants are produced all the time and the more people get sick, the more variants can develop. Delta is more transmittable than the others; nothing is as transmittable. However, people still need to be very concerned about variants.

Ms. Revolus emphasized nutrition and said that diets need to be discussed.

**\*\* MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ADJOURN  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi  
Telesco Secretarial Services