

**City of Norwalk
Health and Public Safety Committee of the Common Council
October 28, 2021**

ATTENDANCE

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; Broderick Sawyer, Fire Marshal; Tom Reich, Fireman; Susan Zecca, Deputy Police Chief; Thomas Roncinske, Police Lieutenant; Brian Weeks, Epidemiologist

I. WELCOME AND ROLL CALL

Mr. Sachinelli called the meeting to order at 7:03pm and called the roll as indicated above.

II. APPROVAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 23, 2021 MEETING MINUTES

****** Ms. Shanahan moved to approve the minutes of the September 23, 2021 meeting.**

****** The motion passed unanimously.**

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The following was submitted as official record for public comment.

From Larry Losio:

All - The following quote is excerpted from an article in today's Hour under the headline "Norwalk police staffing crunch puts stress on patrol, chief says"...

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"Extra duty assignments such as providing traffic control for construction projects, road races, and security at festivals also 'puts a huge strain on available officers,' he added." - with "he" being Chief Kulhawik...

<https://www.thehour.com/news/article/Norwalk-police-staffing-crunch-puts-stress-on-16556994.php?t=ecdd5e7305&src=nwkhpdsecp>

In light of the difficulty that the NPD is having finding and hiring qualified officers to fill department vacancies (a challenge faced by departments around the country), isn't now the right time to reconsider establishing a force of "Traffic agents" - as has the town of Westport- to handle extra-duty assignments such as monitoring construction sites, road races and other tasks that don't require the full training required for a law enforcement officer?

When this was last proposed and considered by the CC some 3 or 4 years ago, I believe, the arguments against doing so were, IMO, flimsy and insubstantial. (I'll refrain from sharing my perspective here of why it wasn't enacted/passed by the Council at that time, but will gladly share my opinion in spoken conversation.) But putting aside whatever the historical reasons were for not establishing a force of Traffic Agents back then, I believe a compelling case can be made for doing so now - with the key reasons in support of doing so including: access to a larger pool of candidates; freeing up police officers to focus on tasks/missions that require greater skill; reducing pressure on, and incentive for, police officers to work unreasonable amounts of overtime and extra duty; cost savings to the City and taxpayers; etc.

Would appreciate knowing whether any of the four of you (the members of the Health and PS Committee I've corresponded with in the recent past) think that reconsidering a proposal for instituting a force of "Traffic Agents" has any merit under these changing circumstances...

Thanks and Regards,
Larry

IV. NEW BUSINESS

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Action Item: Fire Department

1. Authorize the purchasing agent, Sharon Connors to issue a purchase order to Fitness Showroom Distribution, for the purchase, delivery, and set-up of fitness equipment at five fire stations (Bid # 4153) for the amount not to exceed \$52,752.85. \$47670.85 will be paid by the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program and the remainder \$5082 will be from account # _013120-5341.

Mr. Reich discussed getting the grant to replace aging equipment.

****** Ms. Shanahan moved to approve this spending.**

****** The motion passed unanimously.**

Action Item: Police Department

2a. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all documents necessary to apply, accept and implement grant funds from the 2021 Bureau of Justice Assistance Bullet Proof Vest Partnership Grant in the amount of \$20,000.00.

Lieutenant Ronciske discussed the need for new vests.

Action Item: Police Department

2b. 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 Bureau of Justice Assistance Bullet Proof Vest Partnership Grant, pursuant to funding.

****** Mr. Keegan moved to accept the spending on action items 2a and 2b.**

****** The motion passed unanimously.**

Discussion Item:

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Fire Inspectors

Mr. Keegan discussed unsafe apartments that have more people living in them than is safe.

Mr. Gatto mentioned that there are eight inspectors, but due to increased need two part time inspectors are needed.

We had two part time inspectors, but they have left. There is a need to have two part time inspectors reinstated. There is approval for reinstating them.

Ms. Shanahan asked how the inspections were conducted. Mr. Sawyer explained how the annual inspections in multi-family units are conducted.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Action Items

3a. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all documents necessary to apply for and accept grant funds from the Department of Justice under the FY2018 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant, in the amount of \$36,609.00.

3b. Authorize the Police Chief, Thomas E. Kulhawik, to execute any and all agreements, documents, instruments and amendments thereto as may be necessary to implement all programs through the FY2018 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant pursuant to such grant funding.

****** Mr. Sacchinelli moved to approve the spending for items 3a and 3b.**

****** The motion passed unanimously.**

4a. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all documents necessary to apply for and accept grant funds from the Department of Justice

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under the FY2020 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant, in the amount of. \$33,741.00.

4b. Authorize the Police Chief, Thomas E. Kulhawik, to execute any and all agreements, documents, instruments and amendments thereto as may be necessary to implement all programs through the FY2020 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant pursuant to such grant funding.

****** Ms. Revolus moved to approve the spending for items 4a and 4b.**

****** The motion passed unanimously**

Discussion Items

1. Police Update & Discussion

Ms. Johnson discussed an email sent by a resident concerning adding additional traffic agents.

Deputy Chief Susan Zecca discussed staffing issues in the police department. There are 169 officers down from 181, with a number of officers out with long term illnesses and disabilities. The department is actively recruiting.

Ms. Revolus asked about training and support systems that may be available to new officers. Deputy Chief Zecca explained the support systems in place.

Mr. Keegan asked about how officer absenteeism affects coverage. Deputy Chief Zecca explained how patrolling is the top priority and sometimes marine or school officers need to be reassigned.

2. Fire Update & Discussion

Fire Chief Gatto updated the committee on the number of September calls, rescues and fires, etc. The total number of incidents was 5563, a significant increase over last year.

Twelve new recruits have been hired.

Fire Chief Gatto discussed that the department bought four tiles at the Stepping Stones Museum wall of heroes. The tiles will display the Fire Department logo.

3. Emergency Management Update & Discussion

Ms. Deluca discussed Hurricane Ida. FEMA relief should be approved in the next week.

Ms. Shanahan thanked Ms. Deluca for all her assistance with the flooding in her district.

Ms. Deluca discussed the UCONN Circa Climate Resiliency School wants to put in heat sensors to measure extreme heat situations and how they will affect the city. More information will be available soon.

4. Health Department Update & Discussion

Ms. D'Amore discussed the focus will shift to more non-COVID related tasks, including climate change and community health.

The health department is going through a reaccreditation process to renew their national accreditation.

There are two Moderna booster clinics being set up next week.

Ms. Revolus asked who had responsibility for cleaning, keeping dust down, etc. during construction. Ms. D'Amore said the Health Department will address safety issues as they relate to residents.

Mr. Keegan asked about events at the Norwalk schools. Ms. D'Amore gave an update on state guidelines.

Mr. Weeks gave good news on COVID levels. Fairfield County is in the moderate category.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

****** Ms. Revolus moved to adjourn the meeting.**

****** The motion passed unanimously.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:26pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Chaple
Telesco Secretarial Services