

**PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE VIRTUAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 2021, 6:30 P.M.
MINUTES**

1. Call to Order

A. Meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chairwoman Carol Anderson Blanks.

B. Attendees – Mayor Shari Cantor, Deputy Mayor Leon Davidoff, Councilor Ben Wenograd, Councilor Lee Gold, Councilor Chris Williams, Councilor Beth Kerrigan, Councilor Mary Fay, Town Manager Matt Hart, Police Chief Vernon Riddick, Assistant Chief Lawrence Terra, Officer Nicholas Roman, Lt. Daniel Moffo, Fire Chief Greg Priest, Assistant Chief Hugh O’Callaghan, Assistant Chief Michael Sinsigalli, Mr. Robert McCue, Mr. Vince Avarista, Ms. Harriet Roman, Mr. Nick Roman, Mr. Joann Pappaceno, AJ and Chris.

2. Business Items

A. Proclamation in Recognition of Retired Police Dog Axel and Officer Nicholas Roman – Mayor Cantor read a proclamation thanking K9 Axel and Officer Nicholas Roman for the apprehension of numerous suspects actively burglarizing vehicles during the overnight hours in West Hartford and thanking K9 Axel for protecting the West Hartford community and ensuring both he and Officer Roman safely finished their shifts together. Mayor Cantor on behalf of the Town Council and the residents of West Hartford recognized and congratulated Officer Nicholas Roman, #297, and Axel on their partnership and on K9 Axel’s storied career of providing invaluable service to the Town of West Hartford.

B. December 8, 2020 Minutes – The minutes were accepted without objection.

C. Discussion Concerning Panhandling – Mr. Hart briefly touched on two items regarding the panhandling; the ordinance and a research assignment being conducted regarding a signage program that the Scottsdale, Arizona, has utilized in the past regarding panhandling where signs were placed at key thoroughfares and other places frequented by panhandlers and the signs encouraged motorists to make contributions to charitable organizations as opposed to the panhandlers themselves. Regarding the ordinance; it prohibits aggressive panhandling and outlines a definition of aggressive panhandling but the ordinance also prohibits panhandling on public transit as well as within close proximity (within 25 feet) of an automatic teller machine (ATM) and prohibits asking for money from an occupant in a motor vehicle, which is very significant as many if not most of the contributions that are made to someone panhandling in the public right-of-way are from an occupant of a vehicle. Corporate Council is currently reviewing what other cities and towns have and the legality of the provision and then recommendations will be brought to the Committee for the next meeting.

Chief Riddick mentioned some of the provisions in the ordinance are less than state statute and closing some loopholes that exist in statute, specifically just a vehicle being stopped in traffic without the individual walking in the roadway, which would be needed per statute, because just leaning over to a car would be a violation, so that is helpful. There are programs that could be utilized to get people the help they need, those who need it. Regarding the signage program, this was assigned to the Community Relations and there is a meeting set up to discuss a partnership and delve into the outcomes of the Arizona program; has it been successful, has it met the goal they set in the beginning, etc.

D. Fire Department EMT Recruitment Initiative – Mr. Matt Hart commended Chief Priest and Chief O’Callaghan and the members of their team for putting together the initiative.

Chief Priest went through a PowerPoint presentation regarding the EMT initiative. Chief Priest briefly went over the history of the hiring practices for the fire department including that prior to 2000 it was not required to have prior fire experience and everyone was sent to the Fire Academy. From 2000 to 2013, Firefighter II certification was required with less emphasis on EMS. Since 2013, no one has been hired without paramedic level certification. There are fewer candidates to fill vacant positions possibly because of the entry level criteria as they need to have Firefighter II and paramedic licensure and employer competition for cross-trained candidates. We have been unable to fill the vacancies due to attrition through retirement, separation, etc. Vacancies lead to increased overtime. Vacancies cost the Department a significant amount of money as it is the equivalent of filling an overtime position on a fulltime basis. Currently, 62% of the Department’s overtime is related to its vacancies. There were nine vacancies, one position was just filled. Approximately 20% of the Department is eligible for retirement. Regarding the diversity of the Fire Department, about 91% of the Fire Department is considered to be white and the other 9% are people of color; 85% of the Department is white male.

The current recruiting efforts in place include sending people to the Fire Academy so they did not require basic level Fire Service training, which removed the barrier of certification obtained through the volunteer fire service. There is an open and continuous hiring process so people can continue to apply. There is a diverse recruitment committee for the purposes of developing new outreach materials, strategize recruitment locations, and looking at future fire service trends on improving diversity, equity, and inclusion inside of the fire service. There is outreach to the paramedic schools with an intern program at the University of New Haven and a paramedic ride along program.

E. Establishment of a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program – Mr. McCue explained who CERT is comprised of; a group of volunteers made up of residents, business owners and town staff that receive special training to assist during town-wide emergencies and special events. The goals of CERT are to increase preparedness of the community during the time of an emergency and be a force multiplier during emergencies, they can relieve Public Safety officials or DPW or others who are vital to respond to an emergency, and to increase community engagement, i.e. get the public involved with government to give them a sense of connection to the Town and to give Town officials and the government a better sense of connection with residents. CERTs are required to have a

specialty by the State in order to receive funding. This CERT will receive special training in Emergency Shelter Operations. The State will support local teams with a \$2200 grant each year for training and equipment. An email has been established for the team, CERT@westhartfordct.gov. The goal is to have the team started by the spring with deployment by early summer.

F. Public Safety Fleet Inventory – Mr. Hart updated the Committee an update on the status of the fleet for both the police and fire departments. Normally the smaller vehicles for both the police and fire departments are purchased through CNRE (Capital Non-Recurring Expenditure) fund budget. The private duty work the police officers do is an important revenue source to help purchase police cruisers and other equipment. The larger fire apparatus, which are very costly and valuable pieces of equipment, are purchased largely through the issuance of General Obligation bonds.

Chief Riddick reported the current police fleet consists of 77 vehicles. According to DPW's assessment, there are approximately 22 that are categorized as in fair or poor condition. No vehicles were obtained in FY 2018, 6 were obtained in FY 2019 6 and in FY 2020 there were 7 obtained. For FY 2021, none have been received. The replacement value based on DPW's assessment is when vehicles reach 100,000 miles there is the concern regarding repairs and vehicles being out of warranty. If the patrol vehicles still have value, they can be placed in other divisions within the police department or somewhere else within the Town fleet. DPW in the past put together vehicle replacement plans; 10 vehicles per year plan and 5 vehicles per year plan. Each plan is different with a possible initial outlay of 10+ vehicles or more. Each year a purchase is not made, the fleet is getting behind and what could happen is there could come a year when 10, 15, or 20 vehicles have to be bought. For FY 2021, there is a current request for nine vehicles and two have been obtained thus far.

Mr. Avarista, mechanic for the Fire Department, briefly reviewed the Fire Department inventory, which consists of 21 vehicles from 7 different vehicle classes. The primary replacement focus is on six vehicles. The main reasons for replacement are the average of 121,000 miles, 70% of the Fire Department fleet is out of warranty, which means any major repair would be more than a vehicle is worth, and public appearance. The three vehicle replacement being focused on are a 2005 Excursion, 2002 Ford Taurus and a 2002 Chevy Astro.

3. Communications

Mr. Hart reported there were no communications.

4. Staff Reports

A. Fire Department – Chief Priest reported four significant fires since the last meeting, two of which involved the loss of life. There was a major fire at a large residence on Prospect and an apartment fire. The ARCH program in collaboration of partnership with the health district has been very successful and continues to run. The outreach and support related to the pandemic is ongoing and continuous and the Department continues to build some programs

and relationships to ensure all members of the community are reached to help them get vaccinated. The Fire Marshall is working on the pilot program for the NFPA Community Risk Reduction. The dashboard information was made available approximately a day ago.

B. Police Department – Chief Riddick highlighted a February 12 incident when the West Hartford Police Department in collaboration with Meriden attempted to serve a Robbery First Degree warrant in Meriden. The individual fled across the highway and was shot by a Meriden police officer in defense of himself. He did not pass away. The individual arrested did have a gun on him and turned towards the officer reaching for the gun, which precipitated the firing of the officer's weapon. The warrant originated from an incident that occurred in West Hartford. The Department utilized on March 1 a high-risk warrant. There was a stranger abduction/kidnapping, which is extremely rare. Another incident occurred this morning where there were multiple shots fired, which is an ongoing investigation. State-wide narcotics are working in collaboration with the police and an officer on the FBI Violent Crime Task Force. The individuals knew each other.

C. Town Manager – Mr. Hart briefly went over the Action Plan for Improving Community Engagement and Trust. Regarding transparency and developing a report around use of force, the Council recently adopted an ordinance regarding a citizen's police review board. Chief Terra and Chief Riddick proposed a training outline for review, which we are discussing and will be a useful tool for the review board members. Regarding piloting or demonstrating various body cameras, this was previously identified as a priority and the police department has been doing that and hope to make a selection by July 1, 2021. They will be applying for a state grant to cover 30% of the cost of the cameras. Regarding the Federal 1033 Program in which the federal government donated military equipment to police departments, it was decided to return the equipment received under the 1033 program. As there are several departments doing the same nationwide, there is a backlog and nothing further has been communicated by the military on this. Regarding reviewing the police department's responsibilities that are more human services related, the police department and management have been reviewing these in consultation with social services. There is now a social worker embedded within the police department.

Chief Riddick went over the next steps regarding the use of force information. Assistant Chief Terra was assigned to a Use of Force Training subcommittee to "be at the table" as the curriculum is developed surrounding use of force. Chief Riddick went over the Interval House and having a social worker embedded in the police department. The worker is starting off at one day a week, which is Monday. Many arrests occur over the weekend, so resources will be there on Monday to assist the victims of domestic violence and the worker will provide training for police officers, i.e. informing them on what Interval House does, the beds they can provide and counseling they can provide for victims. Regarding increasing diversity within the Department, since May 2018 through now 30% of the hires have been persons of color and 26% of the hires were women.

5. Future Agenda Items

There were no future agenda items identified.

6. Adjournment

A. Meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

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