

**PUBLIC SAFETY STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING  
THURSDAY, AUGUST 12, 2021, 6:30 P.M.  
MINUTES**

**1. Call to Order**

A. The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Chairwoman Carol Anderson Blanks.

B. Attendees – Mayor Shari Cantor, Deputy Mayor Leon Davidoff, Councilor Lee Gold, Councilor Chris Williams, Town Manager Matt Hart, Police Chief Vernon Riddick, Police Officer Robert Riccobon, Fire Chief Greg Priest, Assistant Chief and Fire Marshall Michael Sinsigalli and Assistant Fire Marshall Robert Grimaldi.

**2. Business Items**

A. Meeting Minutes June 2, 2021 – At the top of the minutes it says 6:35 and the call to order stated 6:30, which may need to be corrected; otherwise, the minutes were accepted without objection.

B. Proposed Public Safety Forum with Town Manager and Chief of Police – Mr. Hart reported there have been some concerns from the citizenry and residents regarding various crimes that have occurred in the community and throughout the capital region over the past few months. There have been property crimes including thefts of catalytic converters and the theft of a motor vehicle where there was a 2-year-old occupant some weeks ago. More recently there have been complaints regarding late-night/early-morning activity in the town center as well as a semi-organized ATV ride through the community and other capital-region towns. There is a proposal for community conversations or forums with members of the community regarding public safety, preferably in person but understanding the current situation in a virtual format utilizing Webex. Mr. Hart and Chief Riddick would like to do a small presentation with a few opening remarks with the bulk of the time reserved for Q&A with members of the community. Tomorrow morning there is a meeting with the Elmwood Business Association, Park Road Association and the Home Design District on New Park Avenue. The intent of the meeting is to talk about the work the police department is doing to address property crimes and how to work collectively with them to better deal with some of these things and to take questions and address any issues and/or concerns.

Sessions are being scheduled for West Hartford Center and Bishop's Corner. Chief Riddick and Mr. Hart are contemplating a conversation with the larger community next Wednesday evening, August 18, around 6:00. Chief Riddick stated the intent of the community conversation is to hear from the public regarding their concerns so fact can be separated from fiction and attempt to allay fears as many times rumor and innuendo can run amuck. Sometimes during these types of conversations, there may be a resolution that had not been thought of previously.

Mr. Hart mentioned he, Mayor Cantor and Chief Riddick recently met with the State Delegation to talk in particular about youthful offenders including detention centers, information sharing among departments, the differences between detaining and taking someone into custody and the need for a police department to be able to hold a juvenile for a longer period of time than what is presently allowed under State law. There was a discussion about the State Pursuit Policy and how that might need to be amended. The legislators did inform them that the General Assembly has formed a bipartisan, bicameral special committee to review all of the issues and Mr. Hart, Mayor Cantor and Chief Riddick will be presenting their recommendations to the delegation and they believe the delegation will give them due consideration.

Chief Riddick

C. Fire Department Efficiency and Effectiveness Study – Mr. Hart introduced Chief Priest and Assistant Chief Sinsigalli as the lead presenters regarding the presentation about Fire Prevention.

Assistant Chief Sinsigalli went through a presentation titled Fitch Report Workshop Prevention Division, which was a PowerPoint presentation. The current staffing levels of the Fire Marshall's Office include the Fire Marshall, Deputy Fire Marshall and Fire Inspector. The Office is supported by a part-time staff assistant and five fire officers who work on overtime assignments performing fire inspections. There are three specific duties; enforcement, plan review and fire investigation. The Fitch organization evaluated the Fire Marshall's Office as part of their evaluation of the Fire Department. Based upon that evaluation, Fitch found the division needed to complete 1881 inspections each year to meet statutory mandates and the current staffing level was not adequate to meet the mandates. They recommended the addition of two full-time fire inspectors. The study was limited and only focused on initial inspections. The necessary activities for abating fire code violations including reinspections and the abatement process were not included, neither were the statutorily assigned duties of performing plan reviews and construction inspections, fire investigations, or the mandatory training to maintain Fire Marshall certification nor were the duties and responsibilities as assigned by Town policy.

Further study was warranted and using the NFPA Standard 1730 as a tool, an evaluation of the statutory workload was undertaken and compared to the number of staff hours available. NFPA 1730 is the standard regarding organization and deployment of fire prevention, inspection, code enforcement, plan review, investigation and public education operations. This study involved the past seven years of data capturing inspections, plan reviews and fire investigations as well as an inventory of buildings under the jurisdiction of the fire codes. The State has a priority for inspections based upon building occupancy classification. Buildings where people live and places of assembly and educational occupancy require annual inspections. Non-residential occupancies, such as stores and offices, require inspections every three years and manufacturing establishment inspections are required every four years. Using NFPA 1730 as a guide, the estimated number of hours required to complete the statutorily mandated tasks is 7695 hours. These hours do not include inspections, plan reviews, or fire investigations. The available staff hours were reviewed,

deducting time for vacation leave, some sick time and required training hours, and each full-time staff position had an annual net time of availability of 1422 hours per year. The aggregate availability of current staffing is 4267 hours annually. This leaves a deficit of 3428 hours, which equates to almost 2.5 full-time positions.

There has been some progress made since the Fitch study. The position of Deputy Fire Marshall was created, the company officer inspection program was revised in September 2020, instead of doing reinspections for clearing minor inspections photographic evidence as proof of compliance is being accepted. In addition, the activities module in the ESO program has been purchased to allow for tracking of tasks not associated with a specific property and inspections are now being completed using iPads, which decreases the amount of time needed to do the reports. There have been some challenges. The company officer inspection program is challenged by the availability of inspectors, which is subject to seasonal and operation overtime influences. The collective bargaining agreement does not permit the use of part-time inspectors. The number of required inspections continues to grow with new construction projects. Some aspects of the duties performed, such as fire investigations and code complaints, are emergent in nature and require significant time to complete. The Fire Marshall's Office is the only Town agency required to regularly inspect commercial properties, multi-family residential properties on an annual basis and all other occupancies in Town except one and two-family dwellings on a regular basis.

Mr. Hart addressed the recommendation of the Fitch study of adding additional resources to the Fire Marshall's Office. The plan is to work with Chief Priest to develop a phase-in plan to add additional positions over a period of time, perhaps beginning with the next budget year.

### **3. Communications**

Mr. Hart reported there were no communications.

### **4. Staff Reports**

A. Fire Department – Chief Priest reported the submitted for and received a \$350,000 FEMA grant, which will go towards the training of fire officers or developing fire personnel and will allow for 3 certification classes. There is a 10% town match but when looking at the totality of the financial impact to the Town that is very minimal to be able to accelerate the learning and training of the fire officers.

B. Police Department – Chief Riddick briefly touched on the Action Plan for Community Engagement and Trust. First, they continue to conduct and participate in community engagement efforts. The community resource officers are attending an eight-week Connecticut Institute for Youth Police course, which is facilitated by the University of New Haven. Graduation is in the next couple of weeks then the officers will engage with youth from urban environments and hear their concerns and view on policing, which is an opportunity for the police officers to share their views and then collectively work together to demystify policing and separate fact from fiction. Next is to review existing use of force policies. Officers have attended a six-session de-escalation training and confidence course,

which was conducted by a jujitsu instructor and the importance is using verbal judo to try and calm people down to gain compliance or control. Next is ensuring all permissible departmental policies are available online. To date, eight policies have been posted. Next is the transparency of the police department. The Department is becoming more data-driven. There is an administrative captain in that position as well as a sergeant once they get online with the body cams who will be assisting with the data analysis; what crimes are occurring at what times, who, what, where, when and how.

Next is reviewing the organization and composition of the Citizen Review Board. The board is in place now. There have been two orientation sessions. There are some ride-alongs remaining and some virtual shoot-don't shoot use of force scenarios. Next is the pilot program dealing with the body cams, which has been completed. A vendor has been selected, which is Axon. There will be an application for a state grant of 30% but the grant cannot be applied for until funding has been expended and purchases made. This is currently in finance and they are working out the details and making the purchase so the contract can be signed. Next is the 1033 program; 19 rifles were returned to an Army base in Michigan on May 5, 2021. The next item deals with Social Services and the Department working together in partnership. There was an oral panel interview conducted earlier with a potential hire for a social worker. This is part of the collaboration with the Department to go out on certain calls for service where police should not be the point but will provide assistance. There will not be a situation where this person goes into the field and police will not be there to stand in back-up but the first interaction will not be a uniform but somebody trained to provide the assistance; mental health, landlord/tenant, etc.

The last item is to increase minority hires. Currently, there are 13 vacancies but soon there will be 15 with retirement and another situation. There have been a bunch of candidates going through the process. The quality is not necessarily the best. The standards have not been lowered, which helps to run through the list but a good number of people have been coming through. A four-week college Police Academy was instituted several months ago, which was very successful. There were about 24 participants and at least one of the participants over 21 has applied for West Hartford. In addition, the supervisors and command staff went through a community engagement program by the Stratford Police Department. The purpose of this training is to understand the true history of policing, civil rights going forward and providing the personnel the understanding of how certain groups may view police officers and conversely, educating the public on what police do, how they do it, and why they do it. It was an eight-hour block session with good dialogue and an excellent presentation. As this filters down to the line officers, it will improve relations and the ability to interact with the communities and continue to break down barriers, which hopefully will entice people to be part of the family of the West Hartford Police Department.

Chief Riddick addressed recent situations with catalytic converter thefts and the ATVs going through town. Regarding the ATVs, this is not a frequent occurrence and from time to time it does occur. Regarding the catalytic converters, in early 2020 there was a discussion pre-pandemic that an Auto Theft Task Force be implemented and there was some success but as COVID came in it had to be pulled back and reallocate the resources. Currently, the State has funding from the recovery money and there is a total of \$5M that is going through the State

to the towns for the regional task force that West Hartford is participating in. Several hubs are receiving this money. So working with them, two officers will be added to the task force and they will deal specifically with violent crimes, stolen motor vehicles and catalytic converter thefts. Two police officers are part of the statewide narcotics task force. This increases the reach and utilization of resources and partnerships. There is also an officer as part of a federal violent crimes task force stationed here, so there is not only access to him but access to that entire task force to come in and address some of the violent crimes and vehicle thefts. Regarding the catalytic converters, we could publicize what people can do to protect their catalytic converters; purchasing the shields, having better lighting, and strategically parking vehicles and getting information out regarding crime prevention strategies and techniques.

There have been issues reported with regard to the Center detail with the restaurants; the crowds on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights and the trash out there. There is a Center detail and there are four to six officers, a minimum of four, as deterrents so there are no fights and to ensure quality of life issues do not occur. Over the last couple of weeks, the drone has been utilized to see what is going on and who is dumping trash. There was a fight that was going to occur and a drone was up and officers went in and prevented the fight from happening. There is going to be a press release regarding a tip line and email, so people can provide tips for a variety of crimes; ATVs, catalytic converters, stolen motor vehicles, whatever the issue is and the phone number will go to the detective bureau and for two of the shifts someone will be answering the phone but regardless there will be an answering service and there will be an email. That will be rolled out very soon. Regarding the camera program, to date 70 businesses have been reached and spoken to about the camera program with solicitation of information from them regarding their problems and some solutions they may have to the quality of life and quelling some misinformation.

Chief Riddick also spoke on meetings had with different delegations and Chief Riddick as a few scheduled in the future. One of the things to be presented to the delegations is information sharing. Though law enforcement officials can share information amongst themselves, there is not a mechanism to do that outside of a phone call. Law enforcement is unable to access the judicial database where they can punch in a juvenile's name and find out their prior arrest history. If the juvenile is a repeat offender, then it might dictate whether there is an order to detain, a juvenile summons, or if they are released into the custody of a parent. Another item to be presented is raising the age for juveniles, which should stay where it is. Services need to reach the families. If a kid is out at 2 or 3 in the morning, either the parent is allowing them to be out or they cannot control them and if they cannot be controlled, then law enforcement is forced to get involved in a realm they should not be. There need to be parenting classes and things along those lines. This is out of the scope of law enforcement.

Repeat offenders need to have consequences. The ankle monitoring program has been discussed and putting that into place to see where the juveniles are but part of the problem is the state level is to staff these. It is nice to have ankle monitors but there needs to be somebody to monitor them. There are two juvenile detention centers, there were three. There was mention of potentially expanding the time law enforcement can hold a juvenile.

Currently, it is six hours and within those six hours there is an attempt to find a parent and if this cannot be done, the juvenile has to be released or put in an order to detain if criteria is met. If not, they have to go. If the timeframe can be extended to 24 hours or so, it would be very helpful. This is not for punishment but to give officers time to reach a parent and maybe some counseling or something else in the meantime provided as a deterrent as opposed to catch-and-release.

There was mention about the pursuit policy. There are not too many chiefs in favor of increasing the ability for pursuits. They do not end well. Rarely the car runs out of gas or they crash. The attempt is to take stop sticks, the tire deflation devices, out of the category of roadblocks and boxing-in in categories of higher-level use of force situations and put them into a lower level. When the threshold is not met for a pursuit, which has to be violence or a felony, in a lower-level crime if someone takes off, the tire deflation device could be utilized. Currently, per statute and policy, they cannot be used but with the change, they would be permitted.

C. Town Manager – Mr. Hart brought two items to the Committee’s attention. First was Ms. Rubino-Turco, working in collaboration with the Police Department and others, did organize and conducted a regional panhandling roundtable for staff. This was conducted on July 14. They had over 20 people from area police departments, Hartford Community Court, non-profit agencies and municipal social workers. The Capital Region Council of Governments helped to organize the meeting and they have agreed to convene the meetings on a regular basis, the next is on November 9.

Secondly, Mr. Hart spoke regarding the potential for a mask order, which is informally referred to as a mask mandate. Late last week, there was a communication to the community focused on businesses, non-profits and other establishments to encourage them to require patrons, employees and others to wear a face-covering or mask indoors to reduce the community spread of COVID-19. Many businesses are complying with the request, others are not. Preparation needs to be made to progress to the next step, which would be an executive order issued by the Town Manager requiring establishments in town to require patrons, employees, etc., to wear a face mask or covering indoors. Under the Incident Command System, there is an established executive policy group that consists of the Mayor, the Town Manager, the Fire and Police Chiefs, the Superintendent of Schools, Corporation Counsel, the Health Director, the Public Relations Specialist and the Deputy Emergency Manager. This issue was discussed earlier this week and the decision on a good threshold for West Hartford is once the Red category has been reached, which is 15 cases per day per 100,000 population, then the executive order would be issued requiring face masks.

The most recent data from the Health District shows the rapid approach of that threshold. There were 71 new cases reported last week for West Hartford and Bloomfield had 30. The case rate over the last 2 weeks is at 12.3 for West Hartford and 16.2 for Bloomfield and based on those case rates, West Hartford is in the Orange category and Bloomfield has entered the Red category. Given the trajectory, West Hartford is likely to reach the Red category as early as next week. Corporation Counsel has been asked to prepare an Executive Order, which will be issued if the threshold is reached.

## **5. Future Agenda Items**

There were no future agenda items identified.

## **6. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

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