
MIDDLETOWN POLICE DEPARTMENT

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PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION

MINUTES – POLICE

MONDAY, JUNE 20, 2016

7:00 P.M.

MIDDLETOWN POLICE DEPARTMENT

(COMMUNITY ROOM)

AMENDED

1. Meeting Called to Order by Chairman Robert Santangelo

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councilman Robert Santangelo, Chairman
Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta
Councilman Carl Chisem
Councilwoman Deborah Kleckowski
Councilman Philip Pessina

STAFF PRESENT: William McKenna – Chief of Police
Captain John Lozefski – Administrative Commander

STAFF ABSENT: Michael Timbro – Deputy Chief of Police

2. Approval of Minutes – May 16 2016

Councilman Philip Pessina corrected an oversight on his part when he acknowledged the Color Guard for volunteering at the 95th Annual St. Sebastian’s Feast; explaining that he should’ve also thanked and congratulated the Motorcycle Unit members (*Sergeant Sebastiano Bartolotta, Officer Peter Botsacos, and Detective David Woolard*) for volunteering at the same event, and apologized for his oversight. Councilman Pessina moved for approval of the Public Safety Commission (PSC) Minutes for May 16, 2016; Seconded by Councilman Carl Chisem. There being no discussion or objection, Motion passed.

3. Public Hearing – Matters on the Agenda Only

None

4. Correspondence

a. Billy Prevatte – Letter

He was not present.

Chief William McKenna went over the “Atta Boys” he received.

- Sergeant Daniel Smith, and Officers Steve Froberg and Ryan Jeffries dealt with a hostile situation;
- IT Staff Nelson Rivera and Officer Richard Batts’ handling of the computer system going down over the weekend;

4. Correspondence (cont'd)

- Officer James Remotti, while off-duty (*in Windsor Locks*), witnessed a robbery in progress, identified the suspect, and called the police, which resulted in connecting the suspect to several robberies and solving said robberies within the Hartford County area;
- Detective Derek Puorro (*as Vice President of Union Local #1361*) wrote a letter to the Editor regarding the gun carrying laws, which caught the media's attention;
- Officer Daniel Schreiner and K-9 Otto recognized a description of a Southington bank robber and the vehicle, and apprehended the suspect;
- Officer Remotti and others were able to identify and arrest four (4) suspects throwing large objects at vehicles on South Main Street in the Blue Road area;
- Officer Brenda White detected a large amount of drugs while investigating a car accident, resulting into a search warrant for an out-of-town residence and eventual arrest for a drug factory.

Chief McKenna advised that at the July 13, 2015 PSC Meeting (*with the previous PS Commissioners*), a "Justification Analysis" presentation was given, where Lieutenant Jaime Del Mauro did research from the FBI and PERF (*Police Executive Research Forum*) to do an analysis on where the Department should be with sworn officers; that through that presentation it was determined that Middletown should be at 124; that this topic was not addressed again. He explained that for the last two (2) years, the Department's approved 114 was 'frozen' to 111; that now the three (3) additional positions are no longer frozen; that instead, they're only funded for 111. Chief McKenna asked if the "Justification Analysis" could be presented at the next PSC Meeting. Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta made a Motion to add this item to next month's PSC Agenda; Seconded by Councilman Philip Pessina. There being no further discussion or objection, Motion Approved.

5. Monthly Reports (Attached)

Chief McKenna briefly went over the reports and further explained overtime and the added calls for service that need to be addressed (*Mezzo Grille was specifically discussed*). A brief Q&A followed; and Lieutenant Paul Maturo supported everything that Chief McKenna stated regarding additional manpower.

6. Old Business

a. Firing Range – Noise

Chief McKenna said he's spoken with Carl Erlacher (*Director of Finance*) several times; that at 3:00PM on this date they spoke again with Bond Counsel. The project could be split into two (2) bonds / two (2) phases: A Building Phase of Construction (*for the structure*); and An Environmental Phase, which could mitigate any hazards to the water supply; also, put up a bullet catch with a filtration system, so the water there will never be jeopardized. The Cost: \$750,000.00 per Phase. After a brief Q&A / discussion, Chief McKenna asked the following:

- If approved, shouldn't the Construction Phase move forward with the City's Public Works / Engineer as oversight?
- Would a Building Committee still be needed for oversight?

After a brief discussion, both questions were answered in the affirmative.

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6. Old Business (cont'd)

a. Firing Range – Noise

Councilwoman Bartolotta made a Motion that this be moved forward to the August Common Council Meeting with a presentation; Seconded by Councilwoman Deborah Kleckowski. There being no further discussion or objection, Motion Approved.

b. Wharfside Commons

Chief McKenna said that extra patrols are doing very well; that eight (8) out of the nine (9) families that were on the eviction process with Richmond Group are out. One (1) family is fighting it. A brief Q&A followed.

c. Animal Shelter

Chairman Santangelo advised that after speaking with the Mayor's Office, it was decided that in order to move things forward, a Building Committee would be created; that sometime this week, he (*Santangelo*) will get together with Joe Samolis (*Mayor's Chief of Staff*) and Captain John Lozefski to get this started.

7. New Business

None

8. Public Hearing Reopened – Other Matters

Brenda White (Lifelong Middletown resident and 29-year veteran of the MPD)

Officer White spoke about increasing the minimum manpower in patrol. She said that the current standard in the minimum manpower is an issue for police, safety, and the general public. She then gave a history of when she started at the MPD:

- **69 Officers increased to 111 in 29 years;**
- **The minimum manpower throughout the City has remained the same;**
- **Vehicles...She doesn't want to discuss this, as she believes most are aware;**
- **Policing has changed dramatically over the past 15 to 20 years, having the middle manpower of the cars that they do have on any given day is not enough, making it an Officer Safety issue, as well as a safety issue to the residents, businesses, and visitors of this city;**
- **After describing a call for service to which she and other Middletown Police Officers responded, and where back-up from Cromwell was eventually needed, she went on to say that a minimum of eight (8) vehicles should be on the road at all times. (*This has also been Chief McKenna's stance, as he made this public in 2011 with the Hartford Courant and Middletown Press, along with then PS Councilman Thomas Serra.*)**
- **The District in which the aforementioned disturbance took place is 11.8 square miles – the size of Cromwell – and one (1) officer patrols it.**
- **If any adjoining District and car is tied up, the nearest back-up is over six (6) miles away. Example: Disturbance on Atkins Street. Back-Up coming from Main Street (7.1 miles). This is the same distance as Atkins Street to Marshalls in Wethersfield.**
- **Chief McKenna requested an increase of minimum manpower by two (2) officers per shift.**

8. Public Hearing Reopened – Other Matters (cont'd)

- If the minimum manpower is increased by one (1) on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays would cost \$855.00 per day, multiplied by three (3) = \$2,565.00. Increasing the minimum manpower by two (2) officers per shift on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays would cost \$1,710.00 per day, multiplied by four (4) = \$6,840.00; totaling to \$9,405.00 per week; and \$489,060.00 per year.

Chief McKenna went on record to say he did not know any sworn personnel was going to be present at this meeting.

Derek Puorro (Vice President of the Middletown Police Union Local 1361)

Detective Puorro stated that since he brought the seriousness of the safety issues the officers are currently facing to the PS Commissioners' attention last month, he asked his membership to inform him of any time from that day forward of any situation that is unsafe due to lack of manpower, or any time no one is available due to everyone being tied up on calls. He listed the following:

- **May 14th** Five (5) officers from the Evening Shift were held over until Midnight because they were overwhelmed with calls;
 - **May 19th into May 20th** There was a large Rap Battle held at the Italian Society. One (1) person was arrested when they showed up displaying a handgun. When the event ended, hundreds of people poured out onto the streets and a fight broke out. Officers were severely outnumbered and were faced with a hostile intoxicated crowd that refused lawful orders to disperse. A large group in this crowd was known local gang members. People in the crowd were chanting "Hands Up! Don't Shoot!" They were spitting at the officers' feet; calling the officers part of the female anatomy, the "N" word, homosexual slurs, as well as calling them racists. Officers were also threatened with physical violence. Not the first time this has happened; won't be the last.
 - **May 21st 3:43 A.M.** A member sent him a screen shot of the computer screen that showed the calls for service. Every unit was tied up; nobody available.
 - **May 22nd 7:30 P.M.** One (1) officer was Downtown on a Domestic, requesting back-up. The only available unit was on Middle Street because everyone else was tied up. The officer who works District 5 on Day Shift reported that he was out with a car on Footit Drive with three (3) occupants; had to wait ten (10) minutes for his back-up to arrive, as the closest available car was from the North End. He said that this was just the most recent example, but he often has to wait a long time for back-ups to arrive.
- May 25th Evening Shift.** There was a shooting, multiple fights and disputes, two (2) Felony Car Stops, and a separate gun call involving a man with a rifle on Main Street. Less serious calls had to be held for quite a while, as there was no one available. An off-duty officer called in to Dispatch that there was a fight about to break out on Main Street and he was advised that there was nobody to send.
- **May 27th**. Another Rap Battle on Vine and Church. 100 to 200 people were involved. The owner locked himself in the basement and called 9-1-1 when the disturbance occurred.

8. Public Hearing Reopened – Other Matters (cont'd)

Again, there was a very hostile crowd toward the Officers. After that disturbance was finally taken care of, officers had to go to Court Street for fights that broke out there after Mezzo Grille let out. Officers again reported severely being outnumbered in a very dangerous situation.

- **May 30th Wharfside Commons.** A large fight broke out; the entire Shift responded, as well as Portland, Cromwell, and the State Police being put on stand-by; large groups surrounded the initial officers, creating another dangerous situation. Two (2) calls for service came during this time, to which one could respond.
- **June 12th.** There was a large disturbance at the Masonic Temple – Approximately 75 people. A large part of that crowd wound up going to Traverse Square where another noise complaint came in. A report of 50 people fighting at Inverness Square and Highlands came out after that. During that time, the Officers had to respond to a woman who locked herself in the bathroom with a knife, trying to kill herself.
- **July 13th.** Detective Puorro was working when he heard Dispatch call Sergeant Vincent Mazzotta, advising him there were three (3) calls pending and there was no one to send; they were looking for advice.

Detective Puorro ended by saying their minimum manpower numbers are woefully inadequate. Some of these incidents are occurring on a weekday, so that Band-Aid of putting an extra officer on the Evening Shift Thursday through Saturday didn't help these officers who had to deal with these situations. He stressed the importance of increasing the minimum manpower and also invited them to participate on a Ride-A-Long.

Paul Maturo (Lifelong Middletown citizen and 25-year veteran with MPD)

Lieutenant Maturo reiterated what the previous speakers said regarding the Department's minimum manpower (*and lack thereof*). He stated they've been running around with six (6) cars and three (3) beats; that they're in a different world; that they need to take a serious look at what Chief McKenna and the Department are asking of the PSC members; that they're tapped out; that it's time, for Officers' Safety, as well as the communities in Middletown.

After a brief discussion, the PSC gave their full support to Chief McKenna to do what needs to be done to have Officer Safety and Community Safety; and to put a plan in place and come up with some numbers.

William Gallitto, Attorney with Hartford's Gordon, Muir & Foley LLC

He's representing Amber Zawistowski and Brett Gallitto, 25 Connery Road, Middletown, and they have a serious noise issue with their neighbor at 19 Connery Road; and they have some issues with Police response. After giving a brief history about their move to the neighborhood and the physical closeness of the houses there, he explained that the neighbor plays very loud music, and often brings out a big speaker (*at least 3½' high*); that it belongs at Palmer Field or in a night club, not at a residential neighborhood; that attempts to fix this situation have fallen on deaf ears. His clients have brought noise meters and, to their knowledge, they've never seen a police officer bring their own noise meters. He cited the Noise Ordinance, and went into more details. After a discussion, Chief McKenna said that from this day forward, they will red-flag the residence and address the situation.

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9. Meeting Adjourned...

Next Public Safety Commission Meeting: Monday, July 18, 2016, at 7:00 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,



Rosa B. Perichi
Recording Secretary