



POLICE COMMISSION

49 Plumtrees Road, Connecticut 06801 • Phone: (203) 743-5500 • Fax: (203) 748-1333

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
BETHEL POLICE COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, Oct 19, 2011
BETHEL POLICE DEPARTMENT-CONFERENCE ROOM

ATTENDING: CHAIRMAN NICHOLAS ELLIS
COMMISSIONER CHRIS MCCOLLAM
COMMISSIONER BILL OCHS
COMMISSIONER HUGO GRECO
COMMISSIONER DAN GROSSO
CHIEF JEFFREY W FINCH

RECEIVED

2011 OCT 21 A 11: 08

TOWN OF BETHEL
TOWN CLERK

Chairman Nick Ellis opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.
First Selectman Matt Knickerbocker was in attendance

1. General Public Comments:

Sandra Cortopassi, Employee Union Local 424 – Unit 45 President, read a statement outlining member's opposition to regionalization of the dispatch center. To make the Commission aware of the negative impact of such a move on the service and public safety the residents of Bethel have come to expect, Ms Cortopassi stated several items the Commission should consider in formulating its input including: 1) Relevant cost factors driving the exploration of regionalization, if they are in themselves sufficient to offset quality of service; 2) Polling of resident opinion given pros and cons of regionalization; 3) Opinion and recommendations of the Chief and Captain concerning this matter.

Officer Christos read a letter to First Selectman Matt Knickerbocker prepared by Police Union President George Bryce. In this letter Pres Bryce related member concerns over moving the dispatch function to another location which will impact shift supervisor ability to deal with emergencies, natural disasters and multiple 911 calls. Service issues arising from the possibility of an empty lobby become important when victims in duress show up seeking help and advice. Union members stressed how officer safety would be compromised. Cost savings cannot "outweigh operational and safety concerns". Pres Bryce also requested a response from the office of First Selectman within 5 days. Off Christos added comments of his own concerning the validity of the many rumors flying around. Many other service and safety issues are involved including sick call-ins; extra duty hiring and filling; Emergency Services Unit, Canine Unit, Accident Investigation Team and other specialized unit requests. Special services which one town offers and another does not such as motor vehicle lockouts. Dispatch accountability, warrant hard copies, software integration, address history searches, response codes, all need to be addressed.

Dispatcher Jason Shuttleworth mentioned that many things a regional dispatch center cannot do as well as local dispatch. Old cases accessed locally in old databases, have

been a help during response and investigation. Where regionalization works, the counties are "light years ahead of us" in such things as mutual aid compacts which add uniformity to many proceedings. In Fairfield County, Police is entirely separate from Fire and EMS. "Regionalizing one part of it will cause more problems than it is worth". Mr Shuttleworth invited the First Selectman to spend some time witnessing dispatch operations from emergency to routine tasks. Keeping dispatchers in the "decision loop" is also necessary to plan one's future in the uncertain atmosphere generated by "wild rumors".

First Selectman Matt Knickerbocker stated for the record that at no point did he say the effort has fallen apart. Ridgefield pulled out because of a different system and the separation of Police and Fire dispatch. Mr Knickerbocker stated he has not to this point endorsed regionalization. But as the chief elected official he cannot ignore the State's suggestion that a way can be found to save taxpayers \$250K to \$500K per year. The latest 3% tax increase in face of a 1.1% budget increase was due to \$200K less revenue from State sources. Mr. Knickerbocker stated he would be "irresponsible" if he did not investigate a taxpayer saving which could close this gap. The Technical matters as raised are important and serious and are still being examined at this point. There would not be a dark lobby because off-hour staffing would be included in the cost. Communication specialists are contacting the involved dispatch centers, looking at CAD systems and evaluating the cost and feasibility. The First Selectman stated he is still gathering data in order to make a full presentation to the Police Commission and the Board of Selectmen, if recommended at all. No recommendation will be offered or vote taken without the Police Commission being informed. The five day period for the response requested by George Bryce is not possible. Preliminary numbers will be produced for 5(a) "Dispatch Regionalization" under New Business. The validity of any recommendations by the communication specialists will be based on savings weighed against "operational challenges". Mr Knickerbocker stressed calmness and invited inquiries on this matter to avoid rumors. Nothing will happen without information being provided well in advance.

2. Review Past Minutes 9/21/11

Motion by Comm McCollam to accept the special meeting minutes of 9/21/11; seconded by Comm Ochs – unanimous.

3. Budget Report

Snare poles for police cars answered Comm Och's question about one expenditure item. Chief Finch reported overtime expenses as including \$35K dispatch overtime since July. A new dispatcher is in training but not yet on her own. Chairman Ellis asked if filling a ninth dispatcher position would close the gap between dispatcher base pay and a dispatcher or officer working overtime. Chief Finch answered it would not significantly. Motion by Comm Greco to approve the budget report as presented; seconded by Comm Grosso – unanimous.

4. Old Business

a) Monthly Reports

The reports were in the hands of the Commissioners. Motion by Comm McCollam to accept the monthly reports as presented; seconded by Comm Ochs – unanimous.

b) Bethpage Rd

Comm McCollam questioned the installation of sign poles for speed humps on Bethpage in light of the road getting a total reclamation treatment next year. The commissioner also forwarded an alternate suggestion for shutting off Bethpage at Fairchild and Sharon Ct at Fairchild creating two dead-ends to eliminate all transient traffic through that neighborhood. Matt Knickerbocker relayed a resident call wherein he was violently opposed to speed humps as approved by the Commission. This operation was suspended with R. Dibble until issues can be resolved. Comm McCollam stated that for proper installation speed humps should be integrated into the road rather than just being plopped on top where New England weather tends to break them up. The second issue according to First Selectman Knickerbocker was that even seasonal humps are anchored with lag bolts which get broken off in time by the pressure of cars passing over them. Chief Finch asked if he is being directed by the Commission to redo the survey done two years ago asking residents of Bethpage and Oven Rock if they want speed humps installed on Bethpage. Comm McCollam stated the survey should be redone with the alternate suggestion of creating dead ends, including residents of Sharon Ct and Fairchild Dr on the survey list because traffic patterns will change to avoid the humps. Chief Finch stated he already asked Lt Dickinson to look into the issue of dead ends. The Lieutenant has expressed his opposition to dead ends which would force traffic out to Reservoir which already has its own problems at rush hour. Emergency vehicle response into dead ends would also pose safety issues. Chairman Ellis expressed his belief that dead ends are not what this town wants or needs. Comm Ochs could see no reason for revisiting a survey which has already been done and the decision on speed humps made. Chief Finch stated that the survey of residents overwhelming (93%) favored the installation of speed bumps. Motion by Chairman Ellis to move forward on this matter of installing the speed humps; seconded by Comm Greco – motion passes 3 to 1 with Comm McCollam opposed.

Motion by Comm McCollam to add Bonnett Dr and Highview Terr as item 5(d) New Business; seconded by Comm Ochs – unanimous.

5. New Business

a) Dispatch Regionalization

At 7:02 Motion by Chairman Ellis to go into executive session and invite Chief Finch and First Selectman Knickerbocker to attend; seconded by Comm Greco – unanimous.

At 7:40 the Commission came out of executive session.

Per Chairman Ellis: The discussion was over the dispatch system for informational purposes. No decision was made. A recommendation will be forthcoming in a month or two.

b) Simpaug Park Rd

Comm McCollam added this agenda item. This road which once served only the highway garage now serves several businesses. Research indicated it is a Town road and as such should be striped and have standard signs posted. Chief Finch stated that

Lt Dickinson is looking at the road and will make a speed recommendation. Striping is not necessary

c) Animal Control Vehicle

Chief Finch reported that the current animal control vehicle is not worth fixing per the Town garage and recommended that a replacement vehicle be obtained. Currently the Department is researching suitable vans. A \$1,800 reimbursement check for animal care was also discussed.

d) Bonnet Dr and Highview Ter

Comm McCollam expressed concern that the Bonnet Dr dead end toward Highview Ter has a huge bush which hides the sight line of turning vehicles. The recommendation is to have Lt Dickinson look at the problem. Motion by Comm McCollam to have Lt Dickinson look at the bush/sight line for further action by the Town or the homeowner; seconded by Comm Greco – unanimous.

Correspondence

a) Steiner - Donation
Donation to the Union

b) Mr & Mrs Frank – Letter of Appreciation
Complimenting Off Conroy.

7. Chiefs Report

Lynn Morris was selected to be the new youth officer per Chief Finch

A certified officer from North Carolina, originally from Connecticut is being considered for the opening in patrol

Assistant Records Clerk Ferd Miller is retiring. It will be necessary to find a replacement for him in Records and as Commission recording secretary. He will carry on as secretary until a suitable replacement is found. Two applicants for the Records position currently work in dispatch. If one is accepted for the job the Department will be short a dispatcher once more.

Lt Dickinson checked into jake braking with the State and found that it is not illegal and the Town cannot post a sign prohibiting the practice.

8. Commissioner Comments

Comm McCollam stated he has enjoyed his twelve years on the Commission and hopes to return after the next election. He strongly feels every commissioner should be cognizant of the fact that, on the outside, they speak for themselves and unless they have proper authorization, not for the Commission as a whole.

Comm Grosso has enjoyed Commission membership and feels that by this activity he is giving something back to the community.