

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE  
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
February 7, 2024 – 4:00 p.m.

Committee Members Present:	Councilor Martin Pepin, Chairman Councilor Denis Messier Councilor Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro
Committee Members Absent:	Councilor Kenneth S. Vincent, Vice-Chairman
Administration/Staff present:	City Manager, Bob Belmore Finance Director, Scott Smith Fire Chief, Mark Dellner Police Chief, Timothy McLin Stewarts Ambulance Manager, Paul Robidas City Clerk, Kristen LaPanne

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Chairman Pepin called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

APPROVE THE PAST MEETING MINUTES OF OCTOBER 16, 2023

***Councilor Messier made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 16, 2023 meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Pepin and passed 2-0-1. Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro abstained from the vote.***

POLICE UPDATES

*ACERT Program*

Police Chief McLin explained that the Police Department had an Adverse Child Experience Response Team (ACERT) program prior to COVID-19 that was funded by the United Way, that funding had run out and further grant applications were unsuccessful. The Department was awarded funds through the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Site-based Program (COSSAP) Grant in 2022 which provided an opportunity to renew the ACERT program within the Police Department, however, due to the closure of the Stafford County Family Justice Center who would have coordinated the program, it was placed on hold. Chief McLin attended a conference in Washington D.C. where other police departments reported not being able to move forward with the program due to staffing shortages. It has now been determined that the COSSAP grants funds can be used to hire a police social worker. Chief McLin further explained that \$400,000 in funds has been awarded and will be divided up between seven communities throughout the State for the hiring of the police social worker through the current approved COSSAP grant, and that no additional application is required. Additionally, the team would consist of the same partners including Big Brothers/Sisters, Art Therapy, Equine Therapy, K9 Therapy, etc. Chief McLin hopes to obtain more specific information in the coming weeks and he will report the information back to the Committee.

Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro inquired about a timeframe for the \$400,000. Chief McLin confirmed that the funds have been extended through September 2025 and that he plans to reapply for the grant funds with optimism that more funding will be approved for the State going forward. Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro questioned if the police social worker will be split between the seven communities or if it is the funding that

will be split. Chief McLin clarified that the \$400,000 will be split between each of the communities so that each community can hire their own police social worker.

Councilor Messier stated that he wouldn't feel comfortable with a vote to move forward regarding the funds for hiring the new position without more information, he is concerned with only being able to fund the position through September 2025.

Councilor Pepin and Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro agreed to support the Police Chief in researching more about the funding and the police social worker position.

#### *Facility Air Conditioning System – Resolution No. 33-24*

City Manager Belmore provided the Committee with a memorandum from Police Chief McLin outlining the failed air conditioning system at the Police Station and quotes to replace the system. Manager Belmore inquired about a timeline on the replacement, Chief McLin stated that he doesn't know what the lead time is and for that reason, Manager Belmore suggested moving forward on replacement project. He added that the Finance Committee moved to support the replacement and to fund the project with ARPA funds.

Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro questioned if the failed air conditioning system had any affect on the heating system. Chief McLin responded that the heating system is not being affected.

#### *Communications Repeater Proposed Resolution*

City Manager Belmore reported that the Finance Committee discussed and approved funding to replace the repeater and to install a new base station at the Public Works Facility. He mentioned that he joined City staff and the vendor, 2-Way Communications Services, Inc., to view the site at the former Hilltop School and to discuss the process. He added that the vendor will be double checking the figures provided in their quote. Manager Belmore explained that the project will benefit the Fire, Police and Public Works Departments, as well as Stewarts Ambulance Services through the Police Department.

Chief McLin reported that the quote from 2-Way Communications Services, Inc. came in at \$92,306 and the quote from Motorola Solutions came in at \$32,166 for a total of \$124,472. Manager Belmore recommends that the Committee supports funding the project cost in the amount of \$130,000 which will include contingency funds. He added that this will be discussed at the next scheduled Finance Committee meeting.

***Councilor Messier made a motion to support a Resolution to contract with 2-Way Communications Services, Inc. to replace the radio repeater located at the former Hilltop School and to replace the Public Works Department base station. The motion was seconded by Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro and passed 3-0.***

There was a brief discussion regarding the new Hamilton Street water tank and the possibility of future conversations regarding the installation of City communications antennae atop the new water tank. Councilor Pepin stated that he would prefer things, such as the repeater, installed on City property as opposed to private property. Councilor Messier agreed, however, he would want more information from the engineers of the

project that the tank cover could support such equipment installations but would be open to the conversation in the future.

Chief McLin reported that the new police tasers are now fully being utilized by the Police Department as well as the virtual reality and de-escalation software.

Councilor Messier inquired about the Police Departments replacement dispatcher console and where that stands. Chief McLin reported that the console is not complete, but that all of the pre-wiring has been completed and they are pending a Motorola engineer to install and complete the project.

#### FIRE UPDATES:

##### *Fire Suppression Sprinkler Break*

City Manager Belmore provided the Committee with a memorandum which summarizes the costs associated with the Fire Department sprinkler break. He stated that all of the costs are covered by the City's insurance provider, Primex, except for the \$1,000 deductible. Additionally, the insurance provider will continue to investigate to determine the at fault party regarding the sprinkler break.

Fire Chief Dellner updated the Committee with the ongoing repair and restoration needed due to the sprinkler break, he added that he would expect for all to be completed by the end of February and that the progress this far has been good.

##### *High School / Middle School Fire Safety Inspection*

Fire Chief Dellner reported that the Fire Department, along with the NH Fire Marshal's Office, the SAU 56 Facilities Director and the SAU 56 Maintenance Department conducted an inspection of the High School and Middle School on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024. He noted that the violations found between the two schools were determined to be housekeeping items and that none were found to be life-threatening. Chief Dellner stated there has been a plan established to rectify the violations including a plan to re-inspect the facilities approximately 1-month out.

Chief Dellner stated that the roof leaks have been mostly taken care of and that the fire alarm issue previously raised regarding students not being able to hear the fire alarm when they are positioned within classrooms while the doors are closed, was referred back to the SAU so that they may contact their fire alarm company to complete a test. The Fire Department is awaiting the test results report and any suggestions or improvements that may be needed. Chief Dellner concluded the inspection update noting that the SAU 56 staff have been pleasant to work with during the inspection process.

##### *Grants*

City Manager Belmore provided the Committee with the cover letter of the grant agreement between the City and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) which pertains to a grant that the City was awarded for a Fire Training Tower. He added that the funding for the approval of the Tower came late and was much less than what was required to build it. City Staff requested to re-purpose the grant funds and

recommends utilizing the money on other training avenues and equipment. Manager Belmore explained that the funds must be allocated by August 2025 and spent by August 31, 2030.

Fire Chief Dellner briefed the Committee on his recommendations for training equipment which included a river rescue boat, firefighting training simulator, training props for doors, roofs and fire extinguishers, and an EV car battery suppression system. He added that the funds can also be utilized to cover administrative costs needed to execute the recommended training he is proposing. Chief Dellner stated that he is in the process of obtaining firm quotes in order to finalize his narrative, once completed he will report back to the Committee.

Councilor Messier suggested holding off on making a motion until the Fire Chief is able to provide a formal recommendation with accurate quotes for his request. He added that he likes the idea of the simulator for firefighter training.

### EMS UPDATES

Stewarts Ambulance Manager Robidas provided the Committee with response data comparing calendar years 2022 and 2023, he stated that so far in 2024 he has noticed that calls for service is up. He pointed out significant discrepancies between the years and he explained reasons that included 2022 being the end of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as super utilizers, which are people that tend to make calls on a daily or weekly basis, those who he was happy to report have been since placed in professional care facilities.

Manager Robidas reported that the two new ambulances are complete and now pending State inspection, they are expected to be on the road next week. He added that staff are happy with the new vehicles size which is roomier for them to perform their duties, and he also stated that staffing is good but they could use another 1-2 staff members.

Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro inquired about Manager Robidas' comment about calls for service being up so far in 2024. Manager Robidas commented that part of the increase has been due to the calls for service at or around the Willand Warming Center, and that more people utilizing the Center equals more calls.

### WARMING CENTER UPDATES

Councilor Pepin stated that he added the Willand Warming Center to the Committee's Agenda because he feels that some may not understand how the Center is affecting the City's Emergency Services. He asked Stewarts Ambulance Manager Robidas how the Center has affected his Department. Manager Robidas spoke about the medical billing aspect, he stated that they have significant outstanding billables from those calls which create difficulties for their Department. He explained that the Center is not the only place they are called to and that they receive calls to the surrounding woods and businesses.

Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro inquired about the volume of calls coming directly from the Warming Center. Manager Robidas stated that in the numbers coming from the Center may not be seen as high, however, the concentration of the facility is proving to have high volume. Councilor Pepin asked if those calls are interfering with other emergency calls. Manager Robidas confirmed that they have needed to request mutual aid at times.

Councilor Pepin requested input from the Police and Fire Chief's regarding how the Center has affected their departments.

Police Chief McLin stated that he agrees that a number of calls come in from area businesses with reports of cars having been gone through and panhandling. He made it clear that they are careful to stigmatize and assume that those calls are regarding individuals utilizing the Center, however, he was able to confirm that the Target robbery was committed by someone staying at the Center. Chief McLin provided the Committee with data from January 17<sup>th</sup> to current, he stated that there have been 20 Police Department calls, nine Fire Department calls, and 6 ambulance calls. He added that while it is hard for him to quantify, the increase is perhaps due to an increase in days that the Center is open as well as more people utilizing the Center. Manager Robidas confirmed that his staff are able to determine more accurate numbers of calls coming from the Warming Center due to the medical history conversations of people heading to or leaving the Center.

Councilor Pepin commented that the information that he is receiving regarding the calls for service is “off the wall” and bigger than what the facility is designed for and the Tri-Cities are able to fund. He expressed concern over funding after having sat through the Joint City Council and Somersworth School Board Budget Workshop meeting held Monday.

Fire Chief Dellner shared that in 2022 there were 31 total calls to the Willand Warming Center, in 2023 there were 7 total calls, and 2024 so far has had 10 calls for service to the Center which is starting off high this year.

Chief McLin added that the Police Department staff have a good and effective relationship with the Organization that is operating the Warming Center and they do stop in from time to time and check in, also some of the calls to the Center are made from the individuals utilizing the Center and not from the staff or volunteers at the Center. Chief Dellner agreed that Fire Department staff also make stops to check-in and check for fire safety prevention. Councilor Pepin inquired about the time it takes for police staff to make their follow-up reports. Chief McLin commented that it can take anywhere from 10 minutes for a minor call or up to 2.5 hours if an arrest has been made.

Councilor Pepin reported on updated reports provided by the Willand Warming Center pertaining to what communities’ individuals are reporting coming from. Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro commented that the increase in utilization is due to the housing crisis and not the fault of the Center. Councilor Pepin clarified his issue is not with the Center, but with the funding of the Center being solely the responsibility of the Tri-Cities when it is a larger issue.

Councilor Messier expressed concern with the location of the Center being within a commercial area and he worries it is preventing other development or businesses from coming into the City.

### MISCELLANEOUS

City Manager Belmore provided the Committee with a handout regarding proposed budget cuts that pertain to the Fire and Police Department that he will be presenting within his proposed 2024-2025 budget. He explained that he is also needing to make tough choices to keep the City under the tax cap. He commented that he is proposing to push the CIP replacement of the Fire Department’s breathing apparatus (SCBA) out an additional year and skip FY 2025. He added that Fire Chief Dellner is researching the possibility of the City applying for a Homeland Security AFG Grant, which if it is successful, would seek to cover the remaining \$316,000 to complete the remaining 3 year replacement CIP project. Manager Belmore added that he is proposing the

Deputy Fire Chief position for the entire year in the FY2025 budget, which means we can hire a Deputy Chief as soon as we have a Fire Chief on board.

Manager Belmore spoke about the proposed budget cuts to the Police Department with regards to staffing. He made it clear that he is not cutting police officer positions and only modifying the upcoming budget to fit within the tax cap. He continued to explain that the Department has pretty consistently had 4-6 officer vacancies over the last couple years, and they are currently down six positions. He is, therefore, proposing to have four police officer positions budgeted at 6 months. Manager Belmore stated that if the Department were in a position to fill the vacancies, he would authorize the hiring.

Councilor Messier is concerned with making the cuts and expressed frustration over the Department of Revenue's budgeting process. He also has concerns with the Police Department's staffing vacancies and the need for officers to cover shifts, he worries about burnout. Manager Belmore reassured the Committee that they will not hesitate with new hires when viable candidates come forward.

#### ADJOURNMENT

*Councilor Messier made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro and passed 3-0. The meeting adjourned at 5:03 p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,

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Kristen LaPanne, City Clerk