

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE  
COMMITTEE MEMBERS PARTICIPATED REMOTELY VIA ZOOM VIDEO  
CONFERENCE  
CITY STAFF PARTICIPATED FROM THE CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
October 13, 2020 @ 4:30 p.m.

Committee Members present:      Councilor Martin Pepin, Chairman  
   Councilor Kenneth S. Vincent (left at 5:31 p.m.)  
   Councilor Crystal Paradis  
   Councilor Nancie Cameron

Administration/Staff present:      City Manager Bob Belmore  
   Police Chief David Kretschmar  
   Fire Chief George Kramlinger  
   City Clerk Jonathan Slaven

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Chairman Pepin called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

*Councilor Vincent made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 7, 2020 meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Paradis and passed 4-0, by voice vote.*

ORDINANCE NO. 7-21, AMEND CH.6, CITY OFFICIALS

Councilor Pepin said he wanted to have a discussion to learn the reasons for the proposed amendments to Chapter 6.

Mayor Hilliard said that the proposed language change came as a compromise after a conversation with Councilor Gerding. He stated the purpose was to broaden the scope of the Public Safety Committee while reinforcing confidence in the Public. He said this is not to infringe on the work of the Police Department or infer they are not doing a great job. He said it is an opening the opportunity to engage in open conversations at the legislative level. He reiterated that it is the job of the City Manager to oversee City staff, including the Police Chief. The amendment to Chapter 6 is not an attempt to allow this Committee to dictate what the Police Department does. He said he knows our Police Department is operating at the level we want, but if we do not have the opportunity to have conversations, we are setting ourselves up for failure. Mayor Hilliard stated that the climate of policing is always changing and the amendment is a proactive way to allow us the flexibility to hold constructive conversations now and in the future.

Councilor Pepin stated that after reading the language change in depth and having conversations with the Mayor and other Councilors, he understands more why it is a positive change.

Councilor Vincent stated that he has respect for the idea behind the language change, but thinks this is a reaction to a problem he doesn't think we have.

Councilor Cameron stated she spoke with Councilor Gerding and Mayor Hilliard about her concerns of the Committee micro-managing the Police and Fire Departments. She indicated she was better with the language change after it was explained that it is a way for more open communication.

Councilor Paradis said she appreciates Councilor Vincent's comments about being reactive to the climate, though she sees the change as more of an attempt to be *proactive*. She further explained that by adding "in Public trust" and "continuously improve" it reinforces that we are looking toward a further horizon.

Councilor Vincent stated he appreciates the conversation, but wants reassurance the language is not about changing current rules to allow the Public Safety Committee to give direction to the Police and Fire Departments. Mayor Hilliard stated this was never the idea and per City Charter that is the responsibility of the City Manager.

***Councilor Cameron made a motion to support language from the Government Operations Committee in Ordinance No. 7-21 amending Chapter 6, City Officials. The motion was seconded by Councilor Paradis and passed 4-0 by voice vote.***

***Councilor Paradis made a motion to further amend Ordinance No. 7-21 to add, "to be proactive". The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron and passed 4-0 by voice vote.***

#### FIRE DEPARTMENT STAFFING LEVELS

Councilor Pepin said he wanted to have a discussion regarding staffing levels due to concerns about manpower when mutual aid personnel are already being utilized by their respective communities.

Chief Kramlinger said that the City is fully invested in the Seacoast Mutual Aid District and follows a system where additional resources assist on calls upon request. He stated the City, and surrounding municipalities, also utilize an auto-aid program where career officers from neighboring Cities and Towns are dispatched to a call to provide direct assistance or station coverage. He further explained that Somersworth provides this assistance to neighboring municipalities when they are in need of additional resources. Chief Kramlinger stated that what makes this system work is the City of Somersworth's investment in the career force of the Fire Department. He said that the Department now has four full-time firefighters on at a time and studies show the greatest increase of a Fire Department's efficiency when going from three to four full-time firefighters on a shift. Chief Kramlinger explained that he is extremely satisfied with the crew he has now and believes it to be the best and most well-trained crew the City has ever had.

Councilor Pepin thanked Chief Kramlinger for his explanation and said that his concerns come from times when he was a firefighter. He said he remembers times when he was called out to emergencies where the surrounding communities were so busy with their own calls, they couldn't send resources out for mutual aid. He said he has the highest respect for the on-call firefighters and would hate to see the call department go away.

Councilor Vincent said he understands that four full-time firefighters help, but having additional men with the call service is very important. He said he thinks the role of the call firefighters needs to increase. He said he feels that they should be utilized more and train with the full-time staff.

Councilor Pepin stated that he and Councilor Vincent are passionate because they worked with call departments. He also stated that he feels the call department is necessary and can be useful when looking to hire full-time firefighters. He said that while he hopes the call department does not go away, he respects the dedication and work of Chief Kramlinger and if he does not feel the call department is necessary, he supports him.

#### POLICE & FIRE: CALLS FOR SERVICE DEMANDS

Chief Kramlinger stated that EMS and Fire Department calls are both listed together on his reports. The City Manager provided the Committee with a chart summarizing the calls for service in the past year, which were include in his proposed FY 2021 Budget book.

Councilor Paradis said she noticed that EMS calls were high and inquired if there was a certain category of EMS call that accounted for the majority. Chief Kramlinger said that the report generally does not break the calls out further than what was provided due to HIPPA laws. Councilor Pepin added that the breakdown of calls is hard since the calls are extremely varied.

Councilor Paradis asked Chief Kretschmar what the major category of calls for the Police Department was. Chief responded that it is non-crime related incidents, however those calls can be anything including animal calls, motor vehicle lockout, drug overdose, medical calls, suspicious persons, and much more. Councilor Paradis asked about concerning trends within these calls. Chief Kretschmar replied that if his department notices trends and or there is something concerning, it is brought to the of the City Manager. Manager Belmore stated he would alert the Council if appropriate.

#### MISCELLANEOUS

No miscellaneous items discussed.

#### ADJOURNMENT

*Councilor Paradis made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron and passed 3-0 by voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 5:33 p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,

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Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk