

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

March 23, 2022 @ 3:00 p.m.

Committee Members present: Councilor Martin Pepin, Chairman
Councilor Kenneth S. Vincent, Vice Chairman (arrived @3:10)
Councilor Denis Messier
Councilor Nancie Cameron

Administration/Staff present: City Manager Bob Belmore
Finance Director Scott Smith
Police Chief Timothy McLin
Fire Chief George Kramlinger
City Clerk Jonathan Slaven

Chairman Pepin called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councilor Messier made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 13, 2022 meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron and passed 3-0.

UPDATES: POLICE, FIRE, AND EMS

Police

Chief McLin stated his department has five open positions after hiring two new officers who will be attending the Police Academy in June. He announced the promotion of John Sunderland to Captain of the Investigations Division. Chief McLin also mentioned that the Police Academy is trending towards a day-time, less military style of training. Chief McLin has also been meeting with every member of his staff individually to ensure cohesiveness during a transition of leadership.

Manager Belmore noted he recently approved emergency funds of approximately \$14,000 for the Police Department's communication system, that is the communications antennae and related equipment. Councilor Messier asked if a total upgrade may be more appropriate to which Chief McLin informed him of grants being sought for the actual communications dispatch center in the future.

Fire

Chief Kramlinger stated he and his crew are continuously improving and training and the state of his department is very good. He also updated the Committee on construction of the new Fire Station stating interior walls are nearly complete, the slab for apparatus bay to be poured next week, and phase 2 planning has already started its early stages. Chief Kramlinger mentioned two of his officers have recently completed their cold-water training and represented the City well.

EMS

Paul Robidas stated that the volume of calls continues to increase significantly, most likely due to Covid. He mentioned a good attitude in dealing with the stresses of increased calls to the warming center on Willand Drive, but also noted some issues with staff retention. Councilor Messier inquired

about the number of trucks dedicated to Somersworth on a daily basis. Mr. Robidas stated Somersworth has one 24-hour truck and one 8-hour truck.

WILLAND DRIVE HOMELESS SHELTER SERVICE DEMANDS

Councilor Pepin informed the Committee he put this item on the agenda in order to see if we could get a better idea for the impact service calls from Police, Fire, and EMS are having on the Community and City Budget.

City Manager Belmore stated that in discussions with leaders from all three departments it was decidedly difficult to quantify a specific cost. Chiefs from all departments stated that calls for service are Not being stacked. Belmore added that they are also not necessarily seeing delays in service due to calls to the warming center, but would allow the Chiefs to elaborate on this. Manager Belmore stated what is happening with increased calls to the warming center is taking away police, fire, and EMS readiness, active patrolling/monitoring traffic, and Community policing. He stated the group used an average figure of \$48.42 for salary and came to an average monthly cost of \$5,077.70 for police responses to the Willand warming center. Belmore clarified that this is not an added cost to the City since this number is already being paid to the officers on duty and that the real added cost to the City is the opportunity cost of having officers pulled away from readiness, wear and tear on vehicles and equipment, and the cost of gas.

Chief McLin echoed Manager Belmore's comments regarding the reduced readiness of his staff due to excessive calls to the warming center on Willand Drive. His men are taken away from being ready to respond to calls as they come in, monitoring impaired drivers and thefts just to name a few. Chief McLin stated his staff frequently respond to disturbance calls, overdoses, and other calls which involve medical issues and end up taking a significant amount of time to resolve.

Councilor Pepin stated he has had local business staff inform him they do not feel safe walking to their cars. He stated the issue is much larger than the small City of Somersworth is able to take on and that it seems other towns and cities are dumping their problem on us because we are the only place to go.

Chief Kramlinger stated his department has been increasingly vulnerable due to calls for service to the shelter and echoed the sentiment of increased calls for medical service to the center. Stewart's Ambulance Chief, Paul Robidas stated he has seen significant abuses of service including people feigning illness just to get a ride in order to get close to the hospital. He stated at the end of the day, it is his department's duty to transport people, but it is taking away from responding to potentially serious calls. Mr. Robidas stated there are many times he is not being reimbursed for service also.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Vincent made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Messier and passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk