



**City of Chicopee
City Council
Public Safety Committee**

Members

Robert J. Zygarowski, Chair
Frank Laflamme, Vice Chair
Jerry Roy
Gary Labrie
Derek Dobosz

APPROVE 5/19/2021

**MINUTES
October 14, 2020**

The following are the minutes of a public hearing held Wednesday, October 14, 2020 at 6:30 PM in the City Council Chambers, Fourth Floor, City Hall Annex, 274 Front Street, Chicopee, MA 01013.

Members Present Zygarowski, Laflamme, Labrie, Dobosz

Not Present Roy

Also Present Dan Garvey (Asst. City Solicitor), Councilor Courchesne, William Jebb (Chief of Police), Councilor Tillotson (called in), Councilor Krampits, Lonny Dakin (Deputy Chief Police Department), Marybeth Costello (School Committee), Councilor Galecki, Councilor Balakier, Donald Lamothe (School Committee)

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM

In compliance with the Open Meeting Law the Chairman asked if anyone in the audience was recording the meeting. Hearing none the meeting continued.

Valarie Bell from Channel 1 was present recording the meeting.

Councilor Laflamme motion to combine both orders – Councilor Zygarowski 2nd the motion – motion passed

ITEM #1

BE IT ORDERED the Public Safety Committee meet with the Chief of Police to discuss speeding and traffic throughout the City and review of the Police midnight shift.

Donald Lamothe 164 Meadow Street stated that he has lived there for thirty eight years and this summer the motorcycles have been ridiculous. He stated that it's like a race track. He stated that they are doing 60 miles per hour. They do it repeatedly. He stated

that some of them do not have head lights and some of them are not wearing helmets. He stated that cars speed by with their radios so loud I can't hear the TV. He stated that it's time we start enforcing some of the ordinances.

Marybeth Costello 66 Voss Ave stated that parents have voiced their concerns on students walking along main streets. She stated that they've noticed an increase in speeding and traffic violations. She wants to thank the Police Department for their hard work; it's not an easy task monitoring these speeders.

Public Input

David Rossi 106 Memorial Drive stated that the speeding and traffic issues that we are facing on; Memorial Drive, Olko Circle and the surrounding streets in the Litwin Lane area. He stated for the last few years we have been experiencing a significant volume in traffic based progression of life. He stated that there is an excessive amount of speed with disregard for the residents or for pedestrians in the road and for the stop signs. This area is saturated with young kids, retired residents and a large group of families. He stated on his street there are two autistic children and there are foster care homes. He stated he has worked with the Police Department and he is here to see if we can simply get some help.

Mae Ehrnfelt & Emilia McDonald 99 Academy Street stated that they are concerned of lack of transparency. Mae Ehrnfelt stated that it was difficult to navigate the City's website to find information between the city and the public.

Steven Wilco 24 Marion Street stated he would like to see a civilian review board for the City Council and Police Department.

Darlene Ran 259 Chicopee Street stated that according to article 16 of the Chicopee code there is supposed to be a Police Commission made up of five individuals of the City Council. She wanted to know who was responsible for the energetic materials that was disposed of and caused families to be displaced.

Councilor Labrie stated he receives a lot of calls about speeding. He stated that they are going faster on the side roads. He gets complaints from the noise of cars with turbo boosters.

Councilor Tillotson stated that we never implemented the Police Commission because it was never completed to determine the qualifications for these people that were supposed to serve. He stated that the speeding and the cut through are definitely a problem.

Councilor Balakier stated that he is getting complaints of racing on Springfield Street and Fairview Avenue. He stated that the motorcycle activity there has gotten out of hand. He stated that he's not sure if a combination of cruise controls and speed traps will help.

Councilor Courchesne read a letter from a constituent about pan handlers and homeless. Letter attached

Councilor Courchesne stated that the speeding is bad throughout the city.

Councilor Dobosz stated that since he has been elected there has been speeding issues. Memorial Drive is very bad. He stated that the motorbikes are an issue. He stated that he's getting calls about breaking into cars.

Councilor Krampits stated that there is speeding in Ward 5 on main roads and side streets. He gets calls from residents about noise coming from one particular house. He stated that it's a daunting task to try to be everywhere at once.

Councilor Laflamme stated that the Chief is always available. He stated that we have eleven hundred streets in the City of Chicopee and we don't have a large amount of Police Officers to cover that many streets. He stated that if there's a bad area in your ward to let the Chief know and he can put an officer up in that area at a certain time of day if possible. He stated that he gets a lot of calls from constituents on noise and speeding. He was at the Pride Station and there was over one hundred motorbikes there, some were not registered and they were not wearing helmets. He stated that by the time the Police get there they are gone. He stated that you can't chase them because of liability. He stated that they are from different cities not just Chicopee. He agrees we have speeders everywhere throughout the city.

Councilor Laflamme stated that he gets a lot of calls about the cars stored at the Police Station. He stated that we only have two spare cars and the resource cars are stored there. He stated that since covid-19 situation the officer has to return that car to have it cleaned, so those cars are backed up in there also. He stated that they have to prioritize what they have. He stated that the city is safe and they are doing a good job.

Councilor Zygarowski stated that we have a great Police Department but are limited with the shortage of officers.

Chief Jebb stated that this is a difficult time in law enforcement. He stated that we went from hero's to zero's almost overnight. He stated that he will answer the questions but he does not want to divulge the inner workings of the Police Department and compromise the safety of any officer.

He stated that Chicopee is the second largest city in Western Mass. He stated that Holyoke and Springfield are dealing with some serious issues. He stated that last year in the city we issued almost ten thousand tickets and sixty thousand calls for service. He stated over the years the benefits and the entry level pay has diminished to a point where our department is not a desirable place to work. We have lost members to other departments that are smaller and pay a greater amount of money. He stated we hire ten officers; the Academy started him at three people. He stated we lost seven people before the second week in the academy; some due to the culture, declinment of our country at this time relative to law enforcement, paying benefits and other individuals that couldn't maintain the standards of the academy. He stated in the state of Massachusetts we cannot issue citations based off of cameras. He stated that we have systems that we can monitor traffic which would help us in the future if we have a problem street. He stated the Ward Councilor forward him the information when notified by one of their constituents and he will get it to the traffic bureau and they will conduct a traffic study. He stated that they gather data for a week and see what time is more problematic and they will work on enforcement efforts based off of that.

Chief Jebb stated that his budget was cut for one million dollars. Part of the budget cuts that we sustained were the loss of four new cruisers. He stated he is only receiving two for this fiscal year. He stated that these cruisers go twenty four seven, three hundred

and sixty five times so the cars don't last but a couple of years. He stated that we rotate certain cars based off of the districts. He stated that three cruisers that are only intended for SRO's that are not capable to go into our fleet, sit in the parking lot. He stated that we underwent a massive construction of the Safety Complex but they lost space in their garage. They had to expand their evidence and file rooms. The majority of the spare cruisers are no longer housed in the garage. He stated every cruiser they own will be outside.

He stated that we are in the middle of a crisis relative to covid-19 and we are trying to police the city as safely as we can while safeguarding the men and woman in uniform. He stated that our normal operating procedures have been modified to protect our compliment of officers because, if they can't come to work we can't do our job.

He stated they are targeting the calls for service and limiting our exposure to the public.

Chief Jebb stated that they are not ignoring bad behavior but we are not as proactive as we were this same time last year. He stated that this will change when this crisis is hopefully under control. He stated that we are short staffed and it's difficult when you are a civil service community to try to get officers in place. He stated when we have a vacancy it takes a year to fill and right now we have about twenty five vacancies. He stated we are working on getting some laterals from other departments but we have to be in a position to be competitive.

Chief Jebb stated that if there are any issues or concerns that you want to address with me, you can call my office and we will set up a meeting. He stated that we are going to do the best that we can to ensure that the City of Chicopee is a safe city, and he stated "it is a safe city". He stated we are having some nuisance crimes with an increase of breaking into motor vehicles. He stated that we have caught several people and held them accountable for their actions.

Chief Jebb stated it is no longer illegal to panhandle. He stated that aggressive panhandling is illegal. He stated we cannot stop people from standing on corners holding their signs. He stated that we have identified all the homeless areas within the community. He stated that we have gone out and met with the individuals and we try to get them the services that we think would benefit them and get them out of those situations. He stated we have Veterans organizations services and Mental Health services staff with us and we do our best to try to get people out of those situations. He stated that unfortunately many of them- that's their choice, they like being homeless and they didn't want our help. He stated it is not a crime to be homeless. There are areas where they can set up their tents and there is nothing we can do. He stated that we try to restrict any illegal activity that would happen in those homeless situations. We work with them and try to maintain some sense of compliance relative to navigating through neighborhoods and not defecating on people's lawns.

He stated that as far as transparency the Chicopee Police Department has been very transparent in the last six years; we worked very hard to inform the public on social media what is happening in the city. He stated unfortunately our program was suspended. He stated that we have a new PIL and we are trying to ramp up our social media platform again and hopefully inform the public what's going on within the city.

Chief Jebb stated that the motorcycles are prevalent in other communities. He stated that last week there were two or three hundred motorcycles going down Meadow Street. He stated that on East Main Street he found himself in the middle of a group of them

and when he hit his lights they scattered. He stated that they are a group of kids that are mostly not Chicopee residents. He stated that they are a plain nuisance and a public safety issue. He stated that we are limited in what we can do relative to pursuant policies we also have to consider public safety. We cannot pursue motorcycle or dirt bikes do to the high probability of a serious accident. We are working on ways to try to combat that and are working with other agencies to eliminate that.

Deputy Chief Dakin stated that before covid-19 hit we reconstructed the department and put a Captain in charge of the traffic because we knew it was a serious issue. The problem now is the manpower you have to prioritize. He stated that C3 is still there even though there is pressure to close that because of manpower. He stated that we are managing the emergency calls and that is not lost. Traffic has taken a step back because of Covid and manpower. He stated that there is a better responsibility structure now, but he will have to manage it with uniform he won't have his own men.

Councilor Zygarowski stated that he saw the bikes coming from Springfield and Holyoke. He stated that they are speeding towards Willimansett in the breakdown lane out of control.

Councilor Courchesne was concerned for the Officers and inquired about the reserve program.

Chief Jebb stated that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has allowed the City of Chicopee based off of our population to have twenty six Reserves or Special Officers. He stated that he wants to incorporate those men and woman into our everyday workforce. He stated that he has to be cognitive with the contract agreement between the city and the supervisor and Patrolman's unit. He stated that he's working with the unions to address that issue to come up with a plan but, he doesn't want to violate the contract and put the city in a unique situation.

Public Input

Someone in the audience asked what is the difference between a Special and Reserve Police Officer.

Chief Jebb stated that a Special Police Officer is an individual that joins our Police force and their intent is to be a Special Police Officer. He stated that they go through all of the same training as a Police Officer. He stated that a Reserve Officer is someone who has taken and passed the civil service test and is a Special Police Officer now elevated to a Reserve Police Officer status. He stated that there is a whole process that which we have to hire. We have to go through a traditional civil service process. He stated when we have a reserve force; the Mayor and I can pull those individuals from the reserve force and circumvent the civil service process. He stated the process is to see if the person would be suitable for fulltime employment because we are working with them, they're out on the streets and they are doing the job. He stated then we can hire them directly circumventing the other process.

Councilor Laflamme stated that they can evaluate their street smarts verses a civil service test. They are already being trained to see how good they are out on the streets. He stated that's a big bonus for the City of Chicopee

Mae Ehrnfelt inquired about the energetic material.

Chief Jebb stated unfortunately the individual had passed away and members of the family discovered that he was disposing of gun powder in his back yard and it had compiled a very large amount. He disposed of the old gunpowder in a pile.

Councilor Laflamme stated that the Chief will be adding our city ordinances as part of the Police Officer training.

Councilor Labrie stated that he thinks our Officers do a great job on the streets everyday with the circumstances they face.

Councilor Zygarowski stated that if there is a problem he meets with the Chief once a week. The Chief has an open door policy. He stated that our Police Department is the second largest in Western Mass but we are short of help and we're trying to do the best we can.

Place on file

Councilor Laflamme motion to approve – Councilor Zygarowski 2nd the motion – motion passed

Committee vote 4 – 0 favorable

ITEM #2

BE IT ORDERED THAT the Chief of Police meet with the Public Safety Committee to discuss any and all concerns of residents. He stated he feels strongly that there needs to be an opportunity for residents to have some accountability for our leaders. He stated that the blue line flag representing our Police Department emerged as a controversial and oppositional stance. He stated it sets up the Police against the citizens.

Councilor Laflamme motion to combine both orders – Councilor Zygarowski 2nd the motion – motion passed

Place on file

Councilor Laflamme motion to approve – Councilor Zygarowski 2nd the motion – motion passed

Committee vote 3 – 0 favorable

ITEM #3

Minutes – February 19, 2020

Councilor Laflamme motion to approve the minutes of February 19, 2020 – Councilor Zygarowski 2nd the motion – motion passed

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 PM