

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Wednesday April 8 2020, 2020

Virtual Zoom Meeting

7:00 PM

Committee Members Present: Alderman Mark Bettencourt, Alderman William Nash and Alderman Joseph A. DeLucia.

Committee Members Absent: None.

Administration and Staff Present: Mayor Peter Nystrom and Alderwoman Stacy Gould, City of Norwich; Chief Patrick Daley and Captain Jim Veiga, Norwich Police Department; General Manager Chris LaRose and Eric McDermott, Norwich Public Utilities; and Robert Rautio, American Ambulance.

Volunteer/Central Fire Departments and Others: Taftville Chief Timothy Jencks and Assistant Chief William Hadam; Norwich Chief Keith Wucik, Jason Balletto and Kyle Seitz; East Great Plain **Chief Keith Milton**; Occum Chief Carroll Spaulding; Laurel Hill: Chief Aaron Westervelt and Captain Pete Clark; and Yantic Chief Frank Blanchard.

Citizens Present: Edward Martin, William Hayes, Captain Pete Clark, Chief Frank Blanchard, Chief Timothy Jencks, Mayor Peter Nystrom, Chief Aaron Westervelt, Alderwoman Stacy Gould, Chief Keith Milton, Melanie Moore, Chief Carroll Spaulding, Lynn Brett and Kyle Wilson.

- I. **Call to Order and Quorum:** Alderman DeLucia called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM. There was a quorum present.
- II. **Citizen Comment:** Edward Martin of 136 Hunters Road Lot 23 stated he first felt that the existing report was only about 24 years-old opposed to the publicized 31 years and he did not understand the urgency to push a new report through at this time opposed to after the COVID-19 crisis is over. Mr. Martin stated that while a report may be needed he felt it the timing was inappropriate and dishonorable to the volunteers and members who are on the front lines risking their lives.

Williams Hayes of 93 Lafayette Street stated as a taxpayer he did not feel the fire department study needed to happen at a time when the country is dealing with a lot and it would be more appropriate to allow the public to attend meetings in regards to the report. Mr. Hayes also noted the cost the report would have on taxpayers. Mr. Hayes stated he did not feel the study could be completed within

the 90 days requested the Committee postpone it for a few months.

Pete Clark of 46 Perry Avenue stated he was also concerned with the cost as when a study was required in regards to the trucks it involved more money.

Chief Frank Blanchard of 151 Yantic Road stated a lot of the information being sought in the study is already available through assets within the City such as ISO reports and encourage the Committee to reach out to current and former chiefs for assistance in acquiring documents. Chief Blanchard reiterated that the timing is not ideal and was concerned with how high of a cost the study would be. Chief Blanchard offered his assistance to the Committee.

Chief Timothy Jencks of 134 Providence Street seconded what Chief Blanchard had stated in that all of the information is available. Chief Jencks recounted that the departments had recently spent over a year working with the City Manager to develop an apparatus schedule that required a 3.2 million dollar bond approval by voters as the cost increased. Chief Jencks stated he also felt the timing was not ideal with the ongoing COVID-19 virus and that the City's focus should be on acquiring proper PPE for responders as well as training for response to potential cases. Chief Jencks stated another current concern should be how to get local government functioning back to a level where the public will feel comfortable returning to municipal buildings.

Mayor Peter Nystrom of 100 Broadway stated he feels the timing of the study is wrong as the pandemic is very serious with over 14,000 people deceased nationally and the study would cause additional unneeded stress to the first responders who are at a high risk of exposure. Mayor Nystrom added that many citizens are currently out of work and in turn may not be in a position to pay taxes by their due date which would affect the City's budget and in which case he would hate to see taxpayer funds go towards a study. Mayor Nystrom stated he felt the study could wait for a calmer frame of time

Chief Aaron Westervelt of 16 Laurel Circle Drive stated he would like to reiterate other points including timing and cost. Chief Westervelt stated the City could use this time to assist residents and first responders with getting through the pandemic opposed to a report where the City may not even have funds available to address any issues developed from the report. Chief Westervelt also offered his assistance to the Committee and reiterated residents should be the first priority not a study.

Alderman Stacey Gould of 1 Meadow Lane stated it was her sincere request that the committee postpone action on the resolution until the pandemic is over

perhaps 6 to 8 months, maybe sooner, in light of what is happening across the country.

Chief Keith Milton reiterated what has been stated in that it is not the proper time and would be an unneeded stress for first responders. Chief Milton stated the cost is also a concern and as other chiefs have stated they are not against a study at another time and will help in acquiring information that is already available.

Melanie Moone of 130 North Wawecus hill road stated she felt the timing is not right and that the study would be frivolous spending by the City that could be better put towards PPE as first responders are not properly protected to go on calls.

Chief Carroll Spaulding of 44 Taftville-Occum road wished to reiterate comments of the other chiefs that it is not the time for a study which will drastically affect all departments and the City needs to focus on pandemic a lot faster than it is. Chief Spaulding stated everyone should be working to keep up with PPE for first responders to ensure they are protected.

Lynn Brett of 123 Old Canterbury Turnpike stated she is not a volunteer but a taxpayer who is concerned with the timing of this type of agenda during a pandemic and felt it was shameful to push through a study without giving taxpayers a chance to voice their opinions. Lynn Brett stated she also was curious what revenue would be used to fund a study and felt in-person discussions should be open to the public before pushing through a study. Lynn Brett suggested road repairs if there is a City funding available opposed to using it for a study.

Kyle Wilson of 14 Pine Street stated while he understood what the study would research he did not understand the motivation for it or what the study would achieve. Kyle Wilson agreed that the timing is not ideal and questioned how it was possible for the City to afford this study.

Public comment closed at 7:40 PM

III. **Old Business:** None.

IV. **New Business:**

a. **Discussion and possible action on 2020 Fire Service Study RFP resolution** **referral:**

Alderman Mark Bettencourt made a motion that the Public Safety

Committee forward a favorable recommendation on the resolution regarding an RFP for an analysis of the City's Fire Service. Further, the Public Safety Committee recommends that the City Council consider amending the resolution so that the last paragraph reads:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWICH, that the City Manager is hereby directed that the RFP and analysis of the City's Fire Service should be completed by November 30, 2020.

Alderman Bill Nash seconded.

Alderman Bettencourt stated that while he would prefer not to do the study the Committee had tasked the departments with acquiring some of this information to attempt to develop an improved replacement schedule with the City Manager but that did not occur as intended so it is now necessary to go forward with the resolution. Alderman Bettencourt stated that although the country is in a pandemic he would like to see government move forward and it would be the City Council's vote on when and where to allocate funding. Alderman Bettencourt unless in the meantime if the chiefs can meet with the City Manager to develop a more workable option he does not see a way to avoid the resolution and with the amount spent on the fire service each year it would be amiss to not take a review. Alderman Nash stated he was glad to hear the chiefs state they have the information that is needed for the study. Alderman Nash wanted to ensure to all listening that while he agreed it may not be the best time for the study it has already been ongoing for 18 months during which time he had been asked at each City Council meeting what the progress was and his answer had been the same without any information actually going to the City. Alderman Nash stated that may be a failure of the Committee due to follow up. Alderman Nash stated while he did agree in principle to the study being conducted he was concerned with funding and would like to see the matter postponed until around July that way the Committee would have a better snapshot of how much money the City might have available for a study. Alderman Joe DeLucia stated the resolution that is before the council right merely directs the City Manager to develop and distribute the RFP to the answer basic questions can the study be done in 90 days, is the information needed available and what the cost would be to the City. Alderman DeLucia stated the resolution does not call for any extra work for first responders simply the City Manager and until those basic questions are answered none of the work that is a concern to citizens can begin. Alderman DeLucia stated he felt the concerns of additional work on the firehouse is premature and wished to clarify the motion is to send a favorable recommendation back to

the City Council along with a recommended amendment to the resolution itself.

Alderman DeLucia and Alderman Bettencourt voted in favor. Alderman Nash voted in opposition. The motion passed.

b. Department Updates:

- i. **NPU Update:** Eric McDermott reported emergency pandemic plan has been implemented with all employees others than the water and waste department are working from home with no change to their emergency response capability. Eric McDermott stated their leadership team continues to meet daily and respond to information as it develops. Eric McDermott reported NPU has two employees out sick with one in quarantine for safety measurements and the other being non-COVID related. Eric McDermott stated NPU did have questions as to what other departments were doing for PPE as far as when to wear masks and entering homes. Eric McDermott reminded chiefs that NPU has put out a request for monthly unmetered water reports and that reservoirs are currently at 100% capacity.
- ii. **Emergency Management:** Chief Keith Wucik reported Emergency Management has been dealing with COVID-19 virus and is in constant communication with DMHAS and other state agencies. Chief Wucik reported the EOC has been partially open for over a month and they are working to get PPE to services that need it in the City but like elsewhere in the country it has been very difficult to acquire.
- iii. **American Ambulance:** Operations Director Robert Rautio reported 635 calls for the month of March which was a surprising 20 calls down from February with most being basic level and attributed the drop to the Governor's instructions to stay home in regards to unnecessary hospital trips. Director Rautio reported two members had tested for COVID-19 and came back negative with another two members in quarantine due to contact with family members who were potentially affected. Director Rautio reported American Ambulance began internally tracking suspected COVID-19 cases and came across 33 since March 22. Director Rautio stated AA has worked closely with Uncas Health Department and fire departments in case they respond to a call but that they have seen a decrease in fire responses with no negative outcome in an effort to decrease their exposure. Director Rautio reported American Ambulance has been

working with the Department of Health to distribute PPE to EMS workers regionally.

- iv. **Norwich Police Department:** Chief Patrick Daley reported 365 calls for service for the past month with a 20-25% decline in service calls that he attributed to the COVID-19 virus. Chief Daley stated that day NPD began issuing surgical masks to officers to wear while in contact with the public that they will reuse as PPE supplies are limited. Chief Daley wanted to thank Mayor Nystrom for donating masks the day before and Chief Wucik for his stellar work as an active role during these trying times. Chief Daley stated NPD has switched to online reporting to limit contact between officers. Chief Daley reported two officers were in precautionary isolation due to travel but that NPD is doing well on staffing. Chief Daley stated all recruits are using a temporary remote classroom in the station's basement due to the temporary shutdown of the police academy. Chief Daley again commended Chief Wucik and all officers and members for working to the best of their ability under pressure and the current PPE situation. Chief Daley stated per the governor's guidelines for essential employees that that City distributed the night before NPD did lock their lobby and are working on installing a camera and door buzzer as they are not allowing the public in the lobby.

v. **Firehouse Status Updates:**

- **Taftville:** Chief Timothy Jencks reported a total of 52 calls for the past month and that Taftville closed the station down after last month's meeting. Chief Jencks stated all training has been suspended and while they are moving to online courses the cost is higher than expected but they are managing. Chief Jencks stated Taftville has had a decrease in emergency medical calls which cuts back on potential exposure and as of the previous week any member in contact with a patient must wear a mask. Chief Jencks stated PPE has been an ongoing issue and he has made a few trips across the states to other chiefs to barter for supplies. Chief Jencks stated Taftville is closely following CDC guidelines and has disinfected apparatus after each call. Chief Jencks reported the Rescue truck is in Florida where COVID-19 is prevalent so they are experiencing a delay.
- **East Great Plain:** Chief Keith Milton reported 61 calls for the past month and that EGP has also ceased regular monthly

training due to COVID-19 but they are conducting some training online. Chief Milton stated routine maintenance for apparatuses with the repair for the ladder truck progressing however he did not have a definite completion date as the manufacturer has caused a delay with parts due to COVID-19. Chief Milton reported the new truck should be leaving South Dakota around the 29th of the month after having radios and equipment installed. Chief Milton stated EGP has some PPE on order and has also received supplies from American Ambulance. Chief Milton one member was sick in self-quarantine but had tested negative for COVID-19.

- **Occum:** Chief Carroll Spaulding stated membership was well and morale good evening with the suspension of training and all functions. Chief Spaulding stated Occum is only responding to calls and decontaminating equipment with some members completing online training. Chief Spaulding reported 15 calls in the past month with a 30% decrease in medical calls due to American Ambulance handling most calls. Chief Spaulding stated Occum is doing okay with COVID-19 gear primarily needin N-95 masks like others.
- **Yantic:** Chief Frank Blanchard reported Yantic is consumed with COVID19 like others. Chief Blanchard stated membership was solid and their apparatus was on the road. Chief Blanchard reported Yantic also migrated to online training as much as possible.
- **Laurel Hill:** Chief Aaron Westervelt reported the biggest item for the past month for their truck is the completion of a punch list of warranty work with the hope of having it back at the station by next Friday. Chief Westervelt stated Laurel Hill had already done substantial training on the truck prior so it should be in service relatively soon after returning. Chief Westervelt stated like others they are short on N95 masks which they have on order but are backdated. Chief Westervelt stated similar to other departments they have implemented new policies including cancelling monthly trainings and video or teleconference meetings.
- **Norwich:** Chief Keith Wucik reported that Norwich responded to 125 calls last month which was a decrease as well as a drop in EMS calls with fire about the same. Chief Wucik stated Squad A

still is in need of replacement. Chief Wucik reported the retirement of one captain with a replacement promotion and the promotion of Kyle Seitz to lieutenant. Chief Wucik stated the department conducts daily COVID-19 updates with crews including training and cleaning. Chief Wucik stated both stations had been locked down for the month, administrative staff had been reduced, the Fire Clerk and Fire Marshals were at home and Training Safety Officer Jay Balletto was operating three days at home and two in the office. Chief Wucik reported Norwich was in a similar situation as other departments with PPE and that he had been working closely with Emergency Management to get supplies distributed to all City departments in need including fire, NPU, etc.

- V. **Next Meeting:** Wednesday, May 13, 2020 – Location TBD
- VI. **Adjournment:** Upon a motion by Alderman Nash, seconded by Alderman Bettencourt, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:14 PM.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Katherine Rose*