

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES
Regular Meeting via ZOOM App
Wednesday October 14, 2020
7:00 PM

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

Committee Members Absent: None.

Administration and Staff Present: City Manager John Salomone, City of Norwich; Eric McDermott, Norwich Public Utilities; Robert Rautio, American Ambulance; and Chief Patrick Daly, Norwich Police Department.

Volunteer/Central Fire Departments and Others: Norwich Battalion Chief Marc Benjamin; Taftville: Chief Timothy Jencks; Laurel Hill: Chief Aaron Westervelt; and Occum Chief Carroll Spaulding.

Citizens Present: Joanne Philibrick.

- I. **Call to Order and Quorum:** Alderman DeLucia called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM. There was a quorum present.
- II. **Adoption of Previous Meeting Minutes:** Alderman Nash made a motion to approve the previous minutes. Alderman Bettencourt seconded. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.
- III. **Citizen Comment:** Joanne Philibrick of 10 Elm Avenue, expressed her concerns regarding the lack of COVID-19 updates posted to the City of Norwich website and noted that at a city-held press conference a few weeks prior it was stated links would be posted for citizens to acquire more information and that had not occurred. Joanne Philibrick also commented that during that same press conference it was stated city basketball hoops would be taken down and that also had not occurred. Joanne Philibrick questioned why there was not a call station located outside of the police station, similar to those at firehouses, given that the police station was closed during a time of crisis. Joanne Philibrick noted that the police station did have signs outside asking for citizens to call however not every has a cell phone and that should not be a deterrent in seeking help. Joanne Philibrick finished by stating she hoped the City Manager would address the website updates.
- IV. **Old Business:**
 - a. **COVID-19 Resurgence Impacts:** City Manager John Salomone stated

a meeting had occurred earlier that day regarding if the City would remain in Phase 3, which the governor had implemented about a week prior, or revert back to Phase 2. City Manager Salomone stated after discussion between staff, the Board of Education and Uncas Health District, the recommendation was made to stay in Phase 3 due to consistent contact tracing that has occurred and being that most increased infections have not occurred at restaurants or event venues but within families and informal sporting events. City Manager Salomone stated the City has a good rapport with the local restaurants and that Norwich Community Development Corporation assisted in a two-way conversation with restaurants who are expanding to 75% capacity so that they are well aware of their responsibility to maintain social distancing and other parameters necessary. City Manager Salomone noted that many restaurants were not large enough to expand to 75% capacity while utilizing social distancing. City Manager Salomone stated the City also had good communication with the local houses of worship and that they were very successful in the first rationing of church events so those were permitted to continue. City Manager Salomone reported that the State was encouraging the City to be more aggressive in its enforcement of any violation of the policies set forth by the governor's executive orders, which the City was gradually doing. City Manager Salomone stated Norwich schools would gradually phase into hybrid learning after three weeks after one more week of distance learning with a goal to have full in-school learning by the week of November 9th. City Manager Salomone reported that contact tracing has shown that the schools themselves have not been the cause of increased virus, but that it was caused from home settings and non-home events. Alderman DeLucia asked if both Norwich Free Academy and Norwich Public Schools were opting to remain at 100% distance learning until the 23rd which would put them at hybrid learning the 26th to which City Manager Salomone responded that was correct. Alderman DeLucia asked if the schools would be able to maintain social distancing. Alderman Bettencourt stated he shared Alderman DeLucia's concerns and that the City needed to be cognizant of citizens' concerns. City Manager Salomone reiterated that the spread was caused more from family and non-sanctioned events and that the City would be not increasing any sporting events in Phase 3. City Manager Salomone stated the City would be continuing an intense testing regime with assistance from the state and encouraged all citizens to receive testing whether or not they have symptoms. Alderman DeLucia asked if the schools interviewed parents on their feelings on returning to school to which City Manager Salomone responded he did not want to speak for Superintendent Kristen Stringfellow but he was aware of parents with concerns and that more

were opting for at-home learning, however there were a lot of parents lacking day care to utilize that option. City Manager Salomone discussed potential challenges with the upcoming holiday season.

V. **New Business:**

- a. **Discussion and Possible Action – Expanding the Volunteer Firefighter Tax Abatement:** Alderman DeLucia asked if the expansion should include retired career firefighters, opposed to just to volunteer retirees. Alderman Bettencourt responded that based on statutes the expansion could even include ambulance services, etc. but he felt the current focus should be on getting the credit to retirees so they had more benefits than just the Firefighter’s Retirement Relief Fund. Alderman Bettencourt stated he needed to get an exact number from Attorney Mike Driscoll on who would qualify. Alderman DeLucia stated he was hesitant to make a blanket recommendation without corporation council weighing in to determine what groups, under the statute, the Committee should recommend. Alderman DeLucia stated corporation council could vet the set of groups and then get a fiscal analysis based on that recommendation. A decision was made to leave the item on the agenda until the next regular meeting for further discussion.

VI. **Department Updates:**

- i. **NPU Update:** Eric McDermott reported that NPU had rolled back to critical and emergency work due to the uptick in COVID-19 cases. Eric McDermott stated NPU had not experienced a direct impact to emergency responses and their leadership team meets daily as the situation evolves. Eric McDermott stated reservoirs were currently at 75% capacity with rain forecasted in the near future however the City is at Drought Response State 1. Eric McDermott clarified 70% would put the City at voluntary conservation and 60% capacity would require mandatory conservation. Eric McDermott stated NPU was continuing flushing with the business park on the schedule for that week being the conclusion.
- ii. **American Ambulance** Robert Rautio reported 817 responses for the month at the emergency level with 249 ALS and 568 BLS. Robert Rautio stated it had been the busiest September for QAA since 2001 with the most frequent call for difficulty breathing and other unclassified BLS calls. Robert Rautio stated that was a reflection of the current uptick. Robert Rautio reported that AA assisted with the evacuation of 49 residents from Three Rivers Health Care to other facilities. Robert Rautio stated staff was well with no infections or

investigations and that they were still monitoring out of state travel. Robert Rautio stated their PPE storage was strong and that AA was continuing to deal with and track widespread community infection rates throughout the City.

- iii. **Police Department Update:** Chief Patrick Daley reported that two shootings had occurred the past Sunday night and that two guns had been recovered Monday night, one from inside of a stolen car. Chief Daley reported that NPD had also assisted RI police with a search and seizure warrant on Cliff Street that resulted in the recovery of an assault weapon and that NPD was also dealing with two active missing person investigations. Chief Daley stated two officers had tested positive for COVID; one still on quarantine and the other returning the following one. Chief Daley stated all officers had been encouraged to get tested and receive their flu shot. Chief Daley stated three officers were off on FTO with one remaining and had some members starting the police academy. Chief Daley reported 10 fentanyl overdoses had occurred in the past two months and the NPD was still handling an active murder warrant. Alderman DeLucia asked if the overdoses were an uptick to which Chief Daley responded there was an increase since the past fall and they were not yet sure of the cause but were addressing it with state and federal partners. Alderman DeLuci asked if the crimes were related to the overdoses. Chief Daley stated typically there is a drug related nexus to most crimes. Chief Daley stated in regards to the citizen comment that there is an intercom button to the side of the police department entrance that can be pressed for assistance.
- iv. **Emergency Management Update:** Chief Marc Benjamin reported COVID-19 testing was continuing and that a site would be set up for the following day from 9AM to 11AM at the City Manager's building. Chief Benjamin stated there are other satellite test sites as well that had not been used as much as the standard test sites so ask members to spread the word and that the scheduled reverse 911 call should assist in that. Chief Benjamin stated EM had reached out to Laurel Hill Fire Department in regards to reactivating their CERT team to assist EM moving forward. Chief Benjamin stated they would be providing PPE to the registrar of voters for the upcoming election concerns.
- v. **Fire Department Updates:**
 - **Norwich:** Chief Marc Benjamin reported 270 calls for the month

- 180 fire and 90 EMS - with mutual aid provided four times and received twice. Chief Benjamin reported an average response time of 3 minutes 16 seconds with an average 16 ½ minutes spent on scene. Chief Benjamin stated two members had been affected by COVID with one back to work with a full recovery and the other asymptomatic member scheduled to return the 28th. Chief Benjamin stated members were self monitoring for symptoms due to the members affected so it was significant to keep the firehouse closed and isolated.

- **Taftville:** Chief Timothy Jencks reported 162 calls since the beginning of August with mutual aid provided 22 times and an average response time within 6 minutes from leaving the firehouse to the time on scene. Chief Jencks stated the new rescue had arrived but was not in service as they were dealing with an issue with the radio vendor. Chief Jencks stated Taftville was working with NPU on moving poles to open up the station parking lot. Chief Jencks reported that every month Taftville reviews its operation plan in regards to COVID and that the station had returned to Phase 1 with the building limited to members responding to calls. Chief Jencks stated membership was healthy and that they were doing well on PPE.
- **Yantic:** None
- **Occum:** Chief Carroll Spaulding reported 37 members with 1 new application received and 125 calls for the year. Chief Spaulding reported 30 calls for the past month with mutual aid provided 15 times. Chief Spaulding stated two members were in EMT class, one in Firefighter 1, one in Firefighter 2, and two attending instructor class that Saturday. Chief Spaulding stated Occum held their Chicken BBQ Fundraiser the previous month and that it was successful while following social distancing guidelines. Chief Spaulding stated the firehouse was closed for drills and meetings but that no members had been affected so far. Chief Spaulding noted Engine 41 replacement as a critical need. Alderman Bettencourt asked the status of the firehouse building. Chief Spaulding stated it was doing well and that Senator Cathy Osten has secured an \$80,000 grant for Occum firehouse repairs. Chief Spaulding stated they had not received any funds yet as Senator Osten had been working with the state comptroller to release the funds. Alderman Bettencourt asked what the plans for the funds were. Chief Spaulding stated the firehouse lightning needed to be

upgraded to LED, the heart in the stairwell stair chair needed to be repaired, the downstairs bathroom needed to become handicap accessible and an entry lock key code or key FOB system needed to be installed to replace the cost of making physical keys.

- **East Great Plain:** Alderman DeLucia read into the record a report sent by Chief Keith Milton stating:
 - EGP responded to 84 emergency responses in September
 - We had 9 overlapping calls
 - EGP went mutual aid 9 times and we received aid 1 time
 - Had our routine monthly trainings
 - Apparatus had routine maintenance. E 52 was out of service for about 5 days for different issues, including issues with front suspension, pump and electrical issues.
 - Our PPE supplies are good for the virus. All members are taking precautions on all calls and we are limiting only certified EMS responders to ems emergency responses
 - 1 member is currently isolating as they had to travel out of state, but has been tested and is awaiting the results
 - Getting quotes for asbestos abatement project in the hall
 - EGP is receiving a drone that is being donated from a company called Airborne Works through a program called National Public Safety Drone Donation Program. The donation of the drone is made possible by Autel Robotics and Foxfury Lighting. This will be an asset to Norwich and will be available for any department. The donation will be made on Monday Oct 19th 11am at EGP.

- **Laurel Hill:** Chief Aaron Westervelt reported 78 calls for the year with an average response time of just over 5 minutes. Chief Westervelt stated membership was doing well with no members out and all taking precautions when responding to calls. Chief Westervelt stated PPE was doing well and training had been ongoing via ZOOM when possible otherwise social distancing was utilized. Chief Westervelt reported that Engine 62 had been out of service for two days then again for an alternator issue, putting it out of service for about a week total.

VII. **City Manager Update - 2020 Fire Service Study Contract:** City Manager John Salomone reported interviews were held with various city officials and chiefs interviews were originally scheduled for October 5th and 6th but had been rescheduled to the 25th and 26th due to the spike in COVID-19 cases. City Manager

Salomone stated things were on schedule otherwise as they did a work-around regarding the interviews and had statistical work done prior.

- VIII. **Public Safety items for future discussion:** Alderman Bill Nash asked what the City was doing in regards to Halloween. City Manager John Salomone stated Human Services Director, Lee-Ann Gomes, was working on that currently but the City was taking a fairly conservative stance as they don't want to encourage any type of crowds to gather. City Manager Salomone stated the City wants to do something enjoyable but to also keep them safe so they are leaning towards a virtual program.
- IX. **Next Meeting: November 12, 2020, via ZOOM App, unless otherwise notified.**
- X. **Adjournment:** Upon a motion by Alderman Nash, seconded by Alderman Bettencourt, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:16 PM. All voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Katherine Rose*