

## **PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES**

Special Meeting via ZOOM App

Wednesday April 15, 2020

6:00 PM

**Committee Members Present:** Alderman Mark Bettencourt and Alderman Joseph A. DeLucia.

**Committee Members Absent:** Alderman William Nash.

**Administration and Staff Present:** City Manager John Salomone, City of Norwich.

**Volunteer/Central Fire Departments and Others:** Taftville Chief Timothy Jencks and Yantic Chief Frank Blanchard.

**Citizens Present:** Alderwoman Stacy Gould (by phone), Mayor Peter A. Nystrom (by phone), Joanne Philbrick, Melanie Moon, Steven Caisse, Robert Allen

- I. **Call to Order and Quorum:** Alderman DeLucia called the meeting to order at 6:08 PM. There was a quorum present.
  
- II. **Citizen Comment:** Joanne Philbrick of 10 Elm Avenue asked the Aldermen in attendance what the goal was of adding the study onto the last City Council meeting agenda and stated she felt it was irresponsible to address it at this time. Joanne Philbrick also asked how the study would be funded. Joanne Philbrick noted there were already reports in existence such as the Tallman report, a detailed survey distributed by Alderman Gerald Martin and that the chiefs had already been meeting with the City Manager all of which providing no results so she questions how this new study would differ. Joanne Philbrick stated while there may be issues within the fire service that need to be addressed it would not be the proper use of taxpayer money at this time. Joanne Philbrick stated the City just went through a bond issue, in which voters appropriated 3.2 million dollars for fire trucks and communications, where a good portion of the funds was wasted due to inaction by leadership, not the departments. Joanne Philbrick recommended pushing off the study for a year or so and questioned the purpose in sending out a RFP now if there wouldn't be intent to act on it.

Melanie Moon of 130 North Wawecus Hill Road stated she was aware of many emails that were sent to the Aldermen that had not been addressed at the previous meeting and felt that tonight's meeting would not affect the decision already made by the Aldermen. Melanie Moon reiterated her position from the previous meeting that it is irresponsible of the City to be spending taxpayer money on the study at this time.

Chief Frank Blanchard of 151 Yantic Road stated he agreed with the statements made and wished to address comments made by the Aldermen at the past meeting. Chief Blanchard stated much time and effort was put into the fire study done by the chiefs and City Manager. Chief Blanchard continued that to his knowledge the study was done without any direction from the Public Safety Committee and over the course of a year the City Manager held many meetings where valuable information was put together. Chief Blanchard stated he was aware that the City Manager distributed the report and the Public Safety Committee did not respond with any directive. Chief Blanchard stated while he is not against a fire service study he does not feel that during the middle of a pandemic is the appropriate time.

Steven Caisse of 31 South A Street stated as the former chief of Taftville Fire Department he had sat through many fire safety studies and does not see how this one would further the information gathered by the City Manager and the chiefs. Steven Caisse stated he did not feel the City should be looking at a study during the COVID-19 crisis.

Chief Timothy Jencks of 134 Providence Street reiterated his comments at the last meeting that it is irresponsible of the Council to be pursuing the study at a time when the future is uncertain. Chief Jencks, stated as Chief Blanchard did, that a lot of effort was put into the study the chiefs had developed with the City Manager without any directive from the Public Safety Commission. Chief Jencks stated he had looked through previous minutes and could find where City Council had instructed the decrease of the City fleet, as was stated at the previous Public Safety Committee meeting, and questioned if that referred solely to the fire service. Chief Jencks stated he felt it was irresponsible to conduct the study at this time during the COVID-19 crisis.

Robert Allen of 151 Yantic Road stated first he wished to clarify that at the previous virtual Public Safety Committee meeting the public was in fact prompted for a password so any issues with access was not a fault of citizens. Robert Allen questioned if the study was an avenue for the Public Safety Committee to push the CCD tax through the City.

Alderwoman Stacy Gould of 1 Meadow Lane stated in response to the Aldermen's statement that the study needs to be conducted for an assessment in response to dispatch assignments; the chiefs already have such plans in place and make those decisions based on community need to ensure that the fire departments suppression capabilities encompass deployment of personnel, equipment and resources for the initial alarm and additional assignments. Alderwoman Gould

continued that the City's fire departments all have in place automatic aid and mutual aid agreements. Alderwoman Gould stated the City's qualified consultants, the fire chiefs that live and work in the community with over 60 combined years of fire experience, are making those decisions. Alderwoman Gould stated it is unnecessary to reinvent the wheel unless the Commission is suggesting the chiefs are knowingly and purposely putting lives in danger. Alderwoman Gould added that in response to the Aldermen's comments about standardizing the response time date that all departments report their incidents to the State of Connecticut and the National Fire Incident Reporting System via emergency reporting. Alderwoman Gould stated the State collects this information to be used partially by the Insurance Service Office to create ratings for the fire departments to determine property insurance costs. Alderwoman Gould stated Norwich has one of the highest ratings possible and if the Commission is challenging the validity of the response time information from the departments it should be discussed now. Alderwoman Gould stated it is common knowledge that there is a communication issue with the IMC Bridge so it is unnecessary to have a consultant provide that information. Alderwoman Gould continued that in February 2019 the City Council asked City Manager John Salomone and the City's fire chiefs to facilitate an analysis of the City's fire apparatuses including an inventory and replacement schedule and that information was provided to the City Council on September 3, 2019. Alderwoman Gould stated the six-month old report included an inventory, a priority of replacement schedule, estimated replacement costs, capital funding sources, a hypothetical funding schedule and a hypothetical apparatus reduction schedule. Alderwoman Gould stated while the existing study may not be perfect the work is already completed so it would be logical to build upon that as the City Council and the Public Safety Commission can access that report and should instruct the City Manager to put that information into a concise report that can be studied to determine how to move forward without expanding taxpayer dollars at this time.

Public comment closed at 6:29 PM

### III. **Old Business:**

- a. **Discussion and possible action on 2020 Fire Service Study RFP resolution referral:** Alderman Mark Bettencourt it would be his preference to not conduct the study at this time as there is enough information currently available however the issue is that the organizational structure of the fire service is such that each unit looks after its own interest without it those necessarily being in conjunction with the City's when it comes to financing. Alderman Bettencourt stated it is not his intent to move the CCD tax throughout the City. Alderman Bettencourt stated while he feels each chief operates great within their individual department he does

not feel as though the organizational structure exists to deal with the issues at hand without making sacrifices within some of the fire houses and he is not sure those issues can be reasonably discussed or decided upon by the chiefs and City Manager alone that is why he is interested in conducting the study. Alderman Bettencourt responded to citizen comment by stating every RFP states in its final wording that it does not have to be awarded and the City does not currently know what the cost of the study would be. Alderman Bettencourt stated he would not be interested in pursuing the study if it will be an exhorhant cost. Alderman Bettencourt stated there would be future opportunities to discuss the study and its cost at City Council meetings as funds would need to be allocated for it.

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 Joe DeLucia seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

- IV. **Adjournment:** Upon a motion by Alderman Bettencourt, seconded by Alderman DeLucia, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 6:36 PM.

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Katherine Rose*