

**PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES**  
**Regular Meeting via ZOOM App**  
**Wednesday August 12, 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 and Purchasing Agent Bob Castronova, 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 Scott Merchant; Taftville Chief Timothy Jencks; Laurel Hill: Chief Aaron Westervelt; **Occum:** Chief Carrol Spaulding and Yantic Chief Frank Blanchard.

**Citizens Present:** None.

- I. **Call to Order and Quorum:** Alderman DeLucia called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM. There was a quorum present.
- II. **Adoption of Previous Meeting Minutes:** Alderman Nash made a motion to approve the previous minutes as written. Alderman Bettencourt seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- III. **Citizen Comment:** None.
- IV. **New Business:**
  - a. **COVID-19 Resurgence Impacts:** City Manager John Salomone stated that City Hall would remain by appointment only protocol until August which means that it is open but an appointment with a valid ID is required for entry. City Manager Salomone stated the City is working in conjunction with the governor's order which has been working well and has yet to reach Level 3. City Manager Salomone stated the process worked well through July tax collections where the City also provided separate tax collection hours as a convenience to citizens. City Manager Salomone reported that incidents of COVID are still low within the state and Norwich but the City is being vigilant on issues regarding private parties and things of that nature that are exceeding social distance practices. City Manager Salomone stated the local basketball tournament had a hiatus but has been expanded to two

basketball courts to limit the number of people at each court. City Manager Salomone stated there was only one patient at Backus Hospital currently with COVID but time would tell if the recent surge would return to the east.

- b. **US-DOJ COPS Grant Update:** City Manager John Salomone stated the City received notice of the grant 6 weeks prior and with Chief Daly it was decided to request a 45 day postponement before the City had to make a final commitment, which was done to make sure the City Council was still comfortable moving forward. City Manager Salomone stated since that time the Chief has clarified the function of the program and the City also received notification that there is a fixed amount for the program at \$125,000 per officer which if not exceeded the program would match. City Manager Salomone stated personnel and salary costs are currently below that amount. City Manager Salomone stated the City will be staggering the acquisition of officers over the next two years. Chief Patrick Daly stated NPD is looking to return deerlighting presence into the schools and a playground presence during the summertime. Chief Daly stated other officers would be assigned to the evening shift. Chief Daly stated based on what was learned at recent protests he feels NPD can do a better job connecting with local youth. Alderman Mark Betterncourt asked how many positions would arise from the grant. Chief Daly responded there would be six total officers hired over a three-year period with three years of funding for hires with a requirement to retain officers for one year. Discussion ensued.
- c. **Discussion and Possible Action - US-DOJ COPS Grant:** Alderman Nash made a motion to forward a favorable recommendation to the City Council regarding the acceptance of the US-DOJ “COPS” Grant award. Alderman Bettencourt seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- d. **Department Updates:**
  - i. **NPU Update:** Eric McDermott reported that NPU is in its second phase of their return to work plan and they are monitoring state and federal guidance. Eric McDermott stated that NPU’s customer service center is open by appointment only. Eric McDermott stated during the peak out the power outage the week prior there had been 8,200 customers without power with 90 percent restored in the first 48 hours and full restoration with 72 hours. Eric McDermott commented on the good coordination with police and fire departments throughout the ordeal. Eric McDermott reported reservoirs at 90 percent capacity and that NPU is halfway through their valve flushing program and expect to be completed by the end of September. Aldermen commended NPU for their efforts during the hurricane.

- ii. **American Ambulance** Robert Rautio reported 775 ambulance responses in last month; 500 of which were advanced level and 250 of which were basic level. Robert Rautio stated AA is only down 21 calls from last year so the COVID impact seemed to have subsided along with the pattern of calls returning to normal. Robert Rautio stated they are continuing to staff to meet demand of the City and surrounding communities. Robert Rautio stated there was no current COVID update and that the state ceased regular PPE deliveries earlier that week. Robert Rautio reported that there was currently no staff currently sick or under investigation and that summer travel was being monitored based on the list provided by the governor. Alderman DeLucia asked if an uptick in COVID cases occurred if the state has provided an indication that they would reinstate PPE distribution to municipalities. Robert Rautio responded that he was not certain and while AA was set up to properly service he was not sure how the other departments were spared.
  
- iii. **Police Department Update:** Chief Patrick Daley reported 173 calls for service during the recent storm. Chief Daly stated two officers were designed by Uncas Health District as significant exposures but came back with negative COVID tests. Chief Daly reported the department is currently dealing with speeding mopeds in town, a rash of recent car thefts and two open homicides that they are making progress on. Chief Daly discussed the recent accountability bill and the need for positive encouragement at this time. Chief Daly reported he had three officers out on COM and eight out service total which was causing some staffing issues with officers trying to take regular vacations. Chief Daly also reported receiving a resignation and two transfers possibly due to the recent accountability bill.
  
- iv. **Emergency Management Update:** Battalion Chief Scott Merchant congratulated everyone who worked together during the recent storm to manage downed power lines and other issues. Chief Merchant reported that EM was continuing to distribute PPE and coordinate with local agencies. Chief Merchant stated that the Deputy Emergency Manager had resigned the past month so a new deputy has been assigned during the interim. Alderman DeLucia asked if EM had a similar debrief and review process as NPU to determine improvements in regards to the recent storm. Chief Merchant responded that he was aware of conversations in progress with that as the end goal. Alderman Bettencourt asked if communication was an issue in responding to road closures. Chief Merchant responded he believes EM is working to stay on top of real time data through their system. Eric McDemott of NPU

stated normally road closures are managed through the EOC application which NPU has access to but the City does not which was not realized until halfway through the storm which will be addressed for the future.

v. **Fire Department Updates:**

- **Norwich:** Battalion Chief Scott Merchant reported 209 incidents for the past month including 65 fire and 40 overlapping with mutual aid provided three times. Chief Merchant stated the average response time was at 3 minutes 16 seconds. Chief Merchant reported that the main event in the past month was the Prospect Street fire. Chief Merchant reported Squad A replacement as a critical need. Chief Merchant stated no personnel were currently out due to COVID and that both stations were still closed to the public. Chief Milton stated NFD was in the process of finalizing their project to replace the windows at headquarters. Chief Milton reported all training was still being conducted but outdoors to abide by COVID restrictions.
- **Taftville:** Chief Timothy Jencks reported about a dozen calls during the storm due to road closures and due to the overload at dispatch Taftville began receiving calls on their house phone. Chief Jencks reported 69 calls for the month of July which was an increase from last month but still a 55 call drop from the past year, likely due to COVID restrictions. Chief Jencks reported that Taftville provided mutual aid seven times including a fire in Jewett City, the Prospect Street fire and twice activating their dive team. Chief Jencks stated Taftville's rescue truck was due to leave Florida that Friday and should arrive at the station within two weeks. Chief Jencks stated training was ongoing and that they were seeking out additional outdoor training sources. Chief Jencks reported that the station parking lot was partially completed. Chief Jencks stated they were following COVID updates closely as well as monitoring vacations. Chief Jencks stated all apparatus were in service except the Squad Pickup Truck as the emergency lights were not working so the vehicle had no rear protection but new lights were on order and then the truck would go to East Great Plain. Chief Jencks stated ladder and pump testing had been scheduled.
- **Yantic:** Chief Frank Blanchard reported an average call volume for the month and that all members were in service and on a full training schedule.

- **Occum:** Chief Carroll Spaulding expressed gratitude to the utilities companies and reported that membership was up to 42 members with 16 calls for the past month. Chief Spaulding stated Occum was looking at starting again night to boost morale while still utilizing social distancing. Chief Spaulding reported no COVID cases in-house and stated they had sufficient PPE. Chief Spaulding reported Engine 41 had gone down to the City garage for 3 days in June for an entire air system and brake system replacement. Chief Spaulding stated five members were graduating EMT school with three more starting. Chief Spaulding stated Occum would be holding in house pump training on the 22nd of the month and pump and ladder testing on the 25th and 26th.
- **East Great Plain:** Chief Keith Milton was not in attendance but provided a digital communication to Alderman DeLucia stating, “We had 66 emergency calls last month, we are holding our usual trainings, apparatus had normal service work completed, Engine 52 was out of service for a couple of days, our new truck is in and members have been training on it and hope to have it in service in about 2 weeks, New gear extractor washer came in and we had to do some plumbing and electrical work, plus some minor door modifications to get it into the room where it will be, still working on getting bids to have building resided, we are good for PPE for the covid virus, all members are still exercising caution on all calls, no members isolated or quarantined.”
- **Laurel Hill:** Chief Aaron Westervelt reported two new members with three to four potential candidates being interviewed in the next few weeks. Chief Westervelt reported some training had begun along with Fire 1 and EMT school with the reopening of businesses. Chief Westervelt stated Laurel Hill was following CDC rules and had an efficient amount of PPE. Chief Westervelt reported a warranty issue with Truck 61 that was being addressed as the truck can go down any length of time from hours to days but all other trucks were in service. Chief Westervelt stated they were about 60 calls down from the previous year.

e. **City Manager Update - 2020 Fire Service Study RFP:**

City Manager John Salomone reported he submitted a report to the Fire Service Study Selection Committee and Public Safety Committee that afternoon which reiterated the procedure used to make the selection and

then discussed the selection itself. City Manager Salomone explained the selection was done as a team where each member had an equal vote. City Manager Salomone stated a unanimous vote was made to select an Illinois-based organization. Alderman Bettencourt stated his only concern was they had hoped for a lower number but otherwise agreed with the process and decision. Alderman DeLucia stated his understanding, based on conversations he had, that McGrath Consulting Group, Inc. was chosen as their proposal most closely met the standard and items within the RFP. City Manager Salomone stated that was correct. City Purchasing Agent Bob Castronova explained that out of the eight proposals four finalists were chosen who were then interviewed and ranked independently. Bob Castronova stated the Committee unanimously felt McGrath stood out due to its personnel, approach and experience. Chief Frank Blanchard agreed with what had been stated and added that McGrath seemed best suited to address the six items the City Council wants analysed. Chief Frank Blanchard wished to note that all but one of the consultant groups stated they would need more than the 90 days requested to do a thorough study. Chief Frank Blanchard also wished to note the four final consultants noted that a typical study focusing on more than the six items requested by the Council. Discussion ensued. City Manager Salomone noted he did include in the Council resolution and his report to add an additional month of time onto the study.

- f. **Discussion and Possible Action: 2020 Fire Service Study RFP:** Alderman Nash questioned where the funding for the report would come from. City Manager Salomone responded that the City's contingency account would be the only place with available funds which the City comptroller recommended they utilize reserve funds from. Alderman Nash asked if the City Manager foresaw any upcoming items that may also require that funding. City Manager responded that it is hard to project so early in the fiscal year but discussed various funding and grants the City expected to receive and said it is rare the City exhausts the balance of the contingency fund.

Alderman Bettencourt made a motion that the Public Safety Committee forward a favorable recommendation regarding; a) the selection of McGrath Consulting Group, Inc. to perform the 2020 analysis of the City's Fire Service, b) the allocation of funds in the amount of \$81,150 for said analysis and c) the extension of the report deadline to Friday, December 31, 2020.

- g. **Public Safety items for future discussion:** Alderman Bettencourt requested that an ordinance to phase in an increase

of the fire tax abatement to 200 dollars over the next couple years be added  
to the next agenda.

- V. **Next Meeting: September 9, 2020, via ZOOM App, unless otherwise notified.**
- VI. **Adjournment:** Upon a motion by Alderman Bettencourt, seconded by Alderman Nash, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:30PM. checked who did who recording

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Katherine Rose*