

CITY OF LACONIA - CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING
PUBLIC SAFETY
March 2, 2020
6:30 P.M.

3/2/2020 - Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Cheney called the meeting to order at the above date and time.

2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

Chairman Cheney lead the Salute to the Flag.

3. RECORDING SECRETARY

Cheryl Hebert, City Clerk

4. ROLL CALL

City Clerk Hebert took the roll with the following Councilors in attendance: Bruce Cheney and Henry Lipman

Chairman Cheney noted that two (2) Councilors were in attendance and quorum had been established.

Not present: David Bownes

5. STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Scott Myers, City Manager

Glenn Smith, Finance Director

6. PUBLIC SAFETY (Cheney (Chair), Bownes, Lipman)

6.A. Proposal for a Traffic Unit

Councilor Cheney explained the reason for having this meeting tonight is to express the need for a new Traffic Unit within the Laconia Police Department. After meeting with Chief Canfield a few times, Councilor Cheney sees a real need for a new Traffic Unit.

Chief Canfield noted for the record that Police Commissioner Whittum is present this evening.

Chief Matt Canfield presented a PowerPoint Presentation to the committee. He submitted a copy of the PowerPoint as well as a graph to the committee and into the record.

The major points within the presentation are the need for additional police officers, changes of policing over the past 20 years, tactical incidents, the use of technology, and training requirements. By implementing a new Traffic Unit, it would begin with two (2) dedicated officers and three (3) within one year. By increasing the number of officers there would be proactive directed and targeted enforcement for crime reduction, preventative crime reduction strategies, allow for more thorough investigations of lower level crimes, improve public perception and rankings of crime within the City, help with recruitment and the retention of police officers, and it is in line with the City Council goal setting. The current staffing levels of sworn police officers are 43. The ideal number of sworn police officers would be 50. Chief Canfield explained the areas of focus with additional officers would be to have three (3) officers for the creation of a traffic unit, one (1) school resource officer assigned to the three (3) elementary schools, one (1) detective to be used as a hybrid position as a drug/street

crimes detective, and then two (2) to four (4) additional officers assigned to patrol.

Chief Canfield discussed some of the many changes in policing over the past 20 years and explained the workload increase due to these changes. Chief Canfield would like to hire, at first, two (2) additional officers, with a third hire within one year. Some of the proposed Traffic Unit Enforcement Goals would be; emphasis on enforcement to change driver behavior, deal with major complaints such as; speed, distracted driving, crosswalk violations and improve quality of life in neighborhoods. The Chief explained that most crime travels via motor vehicles which with proper enforcement would reduce other crimes.

Councilor Lipman asked for a better explanation in relation to the areas of concern on the graph as to how a Traffic Unit will help. Chief Canfield explained that many crimes are done via motor vehicles and by increasing more patrols it will help reduce those crimes.

Councilor Cheney explained that back in the 70's and 80's it was insisted that there be four (4) motor vehicle stops, per shift, per officer which lead to thousands of stops in a course of a month. It was stated at the last Police Commission meeting that stops are down to 600 to 700 per month. The consequences of that is that motor vehicle issues are becoming outrageous. The reason for this proposal is to help with these issues and to have more police presence throughout the entire City.

Chief Canfield agrees with Councilor Cheney, that by having a new Traffic Unit, there will be a direct correlation of traffic enforcement, blue lights, and a reduction of crime.

Councilor Cheney is in hopes that by getting an active Traffic Unit, with a display of blue lights, as well as with the other officers, it will help with more visibility of the police throughout the City.

Councilor Cheney also stated that the Council authorized the use of walking patrol in the downtown area a few years ago, but it hasn't been seen. Chief Canfield explained that when the department is short officers, and needs to hire, that lag time is at least a year plus it takes another officer to fill that vacancy.

City Manager Myers spoke of the JAG Grants that have been received and asked for the Chief to explain how the Department utilizes those monies. Chief Canfield explained that these grants are typically used on the officers off time.

Chief Canfield explained there is a Cops Hiring Grant that is available, with the deadline of March 11 which covers up to 75% of a new hire for three years and if it is the will of the committee, it will be applied for. Councilor Cheney requested the Chief to apply for that and meet with the City Manager and have follow up available for the next Council Meeting.

City Manager Myers explained those grants are typically need based, staffing levels, and call volume and based off of what was presented tonight the department would score pretty high.

Chief Canfield stated he would probably apply for two (2) or three (3) positions with this Grant.

Commissioner Whittum thinks the numbers of incidents that happen within the City directly relates to the services that are offered within the City. There is City Welfare, an outstanding school system, great medical facilities, and these all tend to draw a certain population here which may draw to the numbers.

6.B. Presentation by Fire Chief Kirk Beattie

Councilor Cheney explained that Fire Chief Beattie approached him after a goal setting meeting and asked to meet with this committee.

Chief Beattie reviewed a PowerPoint presentation. A copy of the presentation was submitted into the

record. Chief Beattie explained that what he is presenting tonight is a snapshot of what he will present during budget time. Discussed were some statistics from 2019 in regards to incidents by district (Central/Downtown South Laconia, North Laconia, Lakeport, Weirs, Mutual Aid, etc.), types of incidents, and apparatus movements over the past year. Chief Beattie also showed a comparison of Laconia to other communities with a relative population.

Chief Beattie also gave some highlights on staffing levels and promotions: Deputy Shawn Riley retired, Captain Bean to Deputy of EMS, Lt. Vaillancourt to Captain, fire fighter Lewandowski to Lieutenant. There were five (5) new fire fighters hired and out of the five, three (3) just finished probation.

Chief Beattie also explained that the Weirs is also running down with only staffing two (2) personnel per shift (averaged eight (8) shifts at 12 hours shifts).

Chief Beattie stated in the last three (3) years, eight (8) fire fighters have left for another department or returned to the department they came from for either same pay and less work or high pay with less work. The Chief brought up the decrease in paramedics. This is being worked on but is still a struggle. The starting pay increase plan has been approved but as of right now has not helped. There is one (1) fire fighter currently in Paramedic school, one scheduled to begin in the fall, and the Chief is working to find alternative funding for increasing the number of members in school. Currently the department runs a nine (9) member shift, running down to eight (8) and this is happening 60% of the time. Chief Beattie is proposing for the 2021 Fiscal Year to increase funding in the overtime line to be able to bring back staffing to a full nine (9) at all times. Then the next phase would be to increase to 10 on duty 24/7; adding a paramedic car to increase the options of other duties. Ideally the Chief would like to see staffing increased to 11 to 12 at all times.

Chief Beattie updated the committee on recent Capital Budget purchases. The ambulance replacement has been ordered and should be delivered mid to late summer. The engine replacement was ordered but won't be delivered until early 2021, and Boat 3 is replaced and is in service.

Some upcoming larger Capital items that are being requested are the SCBA (breathing apparatus) replacement due to them being outdated, Weirs Ladder replacement or refurbished (better to be replaced), and the renovation of the Weirs Station.

Councilor Lipman requested during budget time, that the Chief prioritize what his requests are. Chief Beattie stated the his top request is going to be the increase of staffing.

City Manager Myers stated the the larger CIP items are over a six year period.

Councilor Cheney asked if the SCBA equipment needed to be replaced all at once. It was explained for safety concerns it does. If one person is using an older model and the air level alarm goes off at 25% percent and the newer model alarm goes off at a different percentage that could cause major safety issues. With the purchase of the new air packs, they are full warranty for the life of them (15 years).

Councilor Cheney asked if it is better to add a full time position to staff rather than increasing the overtime line?

City Manager Myers explained the department would need four (4) hired fire fighters to cover four (4) platoons to always staff at 10 to drop to nine (9) including salary and benefits. If only two (2) were hired, then there would be two platoons at 10 and two platoons at nine (9). Chief Beattie explained that increasing the overtime line is a tenth of the cost than hiring another employee.

Chief Beattie explained that to send someone with no fire fighter experience to the academy is about a four (4) month process but that doesn't come with EMS. It takes about one year to 18 months to have everything that is needed to become a fire fighter. The State of NH requires multiple certifications before the Fire Department can even consider hiring someone.

Councilor Cheney stated that over the past 20 years, he has seen that when the economy is good, public safety suffers.

City Manager Myers explained that both Chiefs have submitted their budget proposals and they include some of these things and obviously the Council prioritizes.

Councilor Cheney asked if there are Fire Grant monies available for positions. Chief Beattie stated there is a Federal Government Safer Grant but there is no guarantee to keep the personnel afterwards and it wasn't applied for this year.

7. Any other business that may come before the Council

8. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the committee and hearing no other comments, Chairman Cheney adjourned the meeting at 7:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted

Bruce Cheney, Chair