

MILFORD CITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
November 21, 2016

A Meeting of the City of Milford Police Committee was held in the Joseph Ronnie Rogers Council Chambers at Milford City Hall, 201 South Walnut Street, Milford, Delaware on Monday, November 21, 2016.

— PRESIDING: Chairman James Burk

IN ATTENDANCE: Committee Members:
Councilmembers Owen Brooks Jr. and Katrina Wilson

City Manager Eric Norenberg & City Clerk Terri Hudson

Chairman Burk called the Committee Meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

Certified Police Officer \$5,000 Recruitment Bonus

Chairman Burk advised that Chief Brown is having a very difficult time attracting certified police officers. They have been posting the openings recently and have had no response. As a result, the Chief has come up with a new recruitment tool to attract certified officers versus hiring someone that will have to go through the academy.

Chief Brown advised that they have advertised on two different occasions for a certified officer since the contract was signed. He believed that once the contract was signed, Milford would begin to attract certified officers. But they immediately began to advertise but have not received any applications. A second advertising was done three to four weeks ago and there have still not been any applications received.

— As a result, he would like to offer a \$5,000 sign-on bonus because Milford's starting pay is still low as can be seen in the comparison chart included in the packet. He said the departments that start with lower salaries offer take home cars which is something that is not in Milford's near future. He said that take-home cars are a big deal to Millennials and the smaller departments are attracting certified officers in lieu of a higher salary and better benefits.

The Chief is confident the \$5,000 bonus will attract a great deal of interest.

He said if they can't hire a certified officer, his staff will have to immediately begin the hiring process in order to get someone into the next academy that starts in March. They will have to work hard to get all those things accomplished in time. That candidate would then spend six months in the police academy and be on FTO for at least three additional months. It would be at least this time next year before they would actually see that officer on the street.

The Chief then reviewed the expenses of sending someone to the academy. He said there is a cost of \$5,030 which includes \$1,500 for food, \$400 for physical fitness clothing, \$530 for departmental clothing and \$2,600 in ammo. The pay and benefit of that recruit while in the academy is \$62,500.

He noted that providing that certified officer with a \$5,000 bonus would eliminate all those additional costs. That officer could also be released and put on the road within a month's time.

Chief Brown also pointed out that having one candidate in the academy creates a shortage over that six-month period which generates a great deal of overtime. He said there is no way to calculate those costs but because one shift is short, any officer that calls out due to sick or annual leave, creates a need for someone to be called in and paid overtime.

Chairman Burk asked what stipulations would apply to this bonus and specifically, the time of service. Chief Brown said they would be required to sign a three-year contract at a minimum. The sign-on bonus would not be paid until the FTO program is completed and that officer has been released and on their own for at a minimum of two months. That ensures the officer is going to work out.

Chief Brown stated that the Teamsters' union fully supports the bonus. However, there are a couple officers who do not

like the idea but only out of jealousy.

Chairman Burk asked if the current members are feeling the stress of being down one officer; Chief Brown stated yes. The Chairman recommends selling the idea by informing them this will prevent them from pulling additional shifts until they are up to full staff. Chief Brown stated he has done that and has informed the other officers the hiring process would need to be started by his staff immediately in order to get an applicant into the academy in March. He told them it would take at least nine months until that new officer is able to pass everything and be released for regular duty.

Chief Brown also noted that because the academy is so highly rated, recruits frequently drop out. If that were to happen in this situation, his staff would have to start the hiring process again. That second officer would not be on the street until the summer of 2018.

He has explained that the majority of officers at the department support the bonus because they understand it is the easiest and quickest way to fill that one vacancy.

Councilwoman Wilson stated that she reviewed the packet and it appears to be self explanatory adding that the cost to put someone into the academy is astronomical.

Chairman Burk agrees this will give Chief Brown an officer that can hit the road almost immediately. He pointed out there could also be other officers that may want to retire over the next few months. That would leave two spots that need to be filled. He agrees that these certified officers move around and certainly understands they have to do what is best for them.

Councilwoman Wilson agreed with Chairman Burk and confirmed this is a one-time deal.

Chief Brown said there is one other drawback because he wanted to talk with the other Chiefs about this first. Milford would be setting a precedent in this situation. Once he pays this bonus, he expects other towns will do the same thing because these departments are all competing against one another. He then referenced the numerous advertisements that other departments have out right now.

Chairman Burk pointed out that once a department completes their contract negotiations, the next department uses it as a benchmark in their negotiations.

Chief Brown said every department is competing for the few certified officers that are available right now. He said it wasn't that way when he was hired, but today police departments are at the mercy of the certified applicants.

Councilman Brooks pointed out it is not an easy job being a police officer today compared to thirty years ago.

Councilman Brooks feels that \$5,000 is a lot of money to give one officer. He also asked if this only a one-time deal; Chief Brown reiterated the new officer will receive this only one time. Mr. Brooks reiterated that Milford will only do this one time. Chief Brown said hopefully but as he stated, this will start a precedent and he is unsure what will happen in the future.

Councilman Brooks asked how often other certified officers stay at Milford after they are hired from other departments and what kind of police officers are they for the most part. Chief Brown said that Milford has done a great job with backgrounds and only choose the best. So far, he feels they have done a good job with the certified officers that have been hired the past several years.

Referring to the starting salary comparison, Councilman Brooks understands why someone who is making \$37,000 in Harrington would want to come to Milford and start at \$45,000 which is an \$8,000 increase for that officer. Chief Brown noted that Harrington has take home cars which is one of the big benefits. He said that is very appealing to the younger officers.

Councilman asked how many officers in Milford have take home cars; Chief Brown stated no one in the patrol division except for the K-9 units.

Chairman Burk likes the idea and feels that when the department has two postings and has not received one application, there is a problem and other things need to be considered. His main objective is to get this tied to some length of service which he noted is basic when it comes to any hiring bonus. That prevents someone from coming here, receiving the bonus and then leaving for another department.

Chairman Burk's other concern is how the union will feel about the bonus.

City Manager Norenberg stated that he met with Chief Brown on Friday and together, they contacted Labor Attorney Gary Simpler who handles the labor relations for the police department. He confirmed that a letter of understanding is needed whereby the Teamsters and City must both sign off. That becomes an appendix to the contract. He said that Chief Brown indicated he wanted to first discuss this with the other Delaware Chiefs. Assuming that the Police Committee and City Council are supportive, it will need to be formalized because it relates to compensation for the officers under the Teamsters' contract.

Mr. Norenberg indicated that Chief Brown stated on Friday there will not be an automatic bonus every time he has an opening. The Chief said it will only apply to specific situations which he will articulate in the letter of understanding. In this situation, Chief Brown has explained the hardship being created because the department is down by one officer. However, it will not necessarily be offered a year or two years from now when other recruitment situations occur. He said the Chief will have it made clear that a bonus will not be provided from here on out.

Councilman Brooks said he does not really like the idea, but will agree to support it. Chairman Burk pointed out that what the City Manager and Police Chief have stated is this will be a one-time deal to see how it turns out as an attempt to bring the department to full staff.

There being no more comments, Chairman Burk moved to recommend to City Council that a one-time \$5,000 bonus be given to the next certified officer hired which will require a three-year commitment and successful completion of the training process.

Ms. Wilson asked at what point the new officer would be paid. Chief Brown feels they should be at the department long enough to get through the FTO program. Chairman Burk restated his amended motion "moved to approve a one-time \$5,000 bonus be given to the next certified officer hired which will require a three-year commitment and successful completion of the FTO program."

Chief Brown added that most of the time the FTO program is not a problem and is basically set up for them to become familiar with the way Milford conducts business and allow enough time for them to get used to the town and familiar with the streets.

Ms. Wilson seconded motion. Motion carried.

There being no further business, Councilwoman Wilson moved to adjourn, seconded by Councilman Brooks. Motion carried.

The Committee Meeting adjourned at 5:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Terri K. Hudson, MMC
City Clerk/Recorder