

MILFORD CITY COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
January 14, 2019

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, January 14, 2019.

PRESIDING: Chairperson Katrina Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE: Mayor Arthur Campbell

Committee Members:  
Councilmembers Michael Boyle and Lisa Peel

Councilmember Todd Culotta

City Manager Eric Norenberg, Police Chief Kenneth Brown and  
City Clerk Terri Hudson

Chairperson Wilson called the Committee Meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

*Authorization & Funding Source/Two Additional Full-time Dispatchers*

The Chairperson advised that Chief Brown is asking for two additional full-time dispatchers.

Chief Brown explained he would like to add two more full-time dispatchers for a total of eight. That will allow two dispatchers on each of the four shifts which would prevent using part-time help. It would also put those dispatchers under the supervision of the shift sergeant/supervisor. That will free up a lot of time for his staff officers who are extremely busy trying to schedule part-time dispatchers.

He also said there have also been two eight-hour dispatchers who fill in during the busier times.

He reiterated this has created a lot of additional work for his staff officers.

The Chief explained that running an emergency operations center with only one person is foolish and there should always be at least two people in the building. The 911 centers operate with four dispatchers and that is without the workload Milford Dispatchers have. Though they cover calls for each county, Milford's dispatchers are busier because they also handle people walking into the police department, handle matters for the police officers and handle matters for the City.

Chief Brown said a good example is what occurred on December 14, 2018 at one o'clock in the morning. It was a quiet night and there were two dispatchers working. A caller reported that someone had just broken into his apartment and was holding his family hostage in the living room. The caller said he was able to flee to the bathroom which is how he was able to contact the department through his cell.

When the police units arrive, the officers attempted to get the occupants to come out of the apartments using the PA system though no one complied. The caller continued to give a very descriptive account of what was occurring with the police, emergency vehicles, lights, etc. as well as of the people inside the apartment.

The incident continued for approximately one hour. In that situation the dispatcher is required to stay in contact with the victim. The shift supervisor was directing the dispatchers to call in the SWAT team, Delaware State Police, negotiators, additional Milford units and his four staff officers.

Chief Brown emphasized that one dispatcher would not be able to make those calls or contacts, nor keep up with the radio traffic that was occurring.

Chief said that the complaint was actually a scam as the caller turned out to be an ex-boyfriend who had seen some males enter his ex-girlfriend's apartment. He was pretending that a crime had occurred to cause an inconvenience to his girlfriend hoping that the police would break into the apartment because of the alleged hostage situation.

The Chief stressed that one dispatcher could not have been able to handle that situation, and is the reason he asked for two. However, that was part of a strategic plan that began in 2017. It was submitted as a budget request, but because of financial limitations and other expenses, he was asked to withdraw that request and consider it later in the fiscal year.

He said this became an urgent situation when one of the police recruits, he sent to the Delaware State Police Training Academy, decided to quit half way through. She was formerly a dispatcher and had decided she wanted to be a police officer. She applied, was hired and was sent to the academy. She told Chief Brown that instead she wanted to go back dispatching and no longer wanted to be a police officer.

Chief Brown said he has discussed it with the City Manager because there were no positions available. Because he agreed that she could return to her old job, the City Manager recommended Chief Brown continue her employment and pay her with the money saved this past year due to the number of vacant police positions that had not been filled. That provided enough to pay her until the first of the year at which time Council would need to approve the additional position and funding.

As a result, he will have her fill one of the two new positions which is why this needs to be done now.

When asked about part-time dispatchers, Chief Brown said they have used two dispatchers during busy times for several years. That was to supplement the four full-time twelve-hour dispatchers. The two eight-hour dispatchers only work during peak times. However, that has started to create a lot of work when his staff officers need to schedule one of the two eight-hour dispatchers or one of the five part-time dispatchers.

He reported that the department is at the mercy of the part-time dispatchers because they all have full-time jobs and families. Because of that, they are not always willing to work when they are needed. Besides that, it is a real battle for the department to keep the part-time positions filled.

When asked if Chief Brown is asking to fund two new positions, he said that was always his strategic plan. Right now, it is critical he get the one position approved in order to keep dispatcher that quit the academy in a full-time position.

The Chief has no one to fill the other position at this time. His staff will need to start the hiring process and after someone is hired, they will need to be trained which takes several months. Because of the dispatcher's situation, it is not as important to add the second position right now. Instead, they can bring someone in under a part-time status, get them trained and if they work out, hire them full-time at some point in the future.

It was confirmed that the second dispatcher might be hired in FY20; Chief Brown said that could work.

Chairperson Wilson asked if the coverage can be worked out without the second position; Chief Brown said this will provide the adequate cover at this point.

The Chief said that approximately 50% of the people that apply for a dispatcher position are not suited or end up quitting so it is very difficult to find someone that will work out even after they have been trained.

Mayor Campbell said he talked to Finance Director Portmann who indicated there are funds available in the general fund reserves to take care of the additional dispatcher. If the Police Committee makes a recommendation to authorize, it will need a favorable vote of City Council.

Councilman Boyle is in agreement, particularly if there is funding available for the new dispatcher position noting that the second position will be considered during the FY20 budget. It sounds like there will not be a financial impact at this time.

City Manager Norenberg then reported that the cost for a full-time dispatcher is approximately \$63,000, which includes benefits. The full-time dispatchers make slightly more than the part-time dispatchers.

He said that with the additional full-time dispatcher position, fewer part-time dispatchers will be needed. That will result in an overall savings and the reason Mr. Portmann and he feel there are adequate funds available to pay for the new dispatcher position the remainder of the year.

Mt. Norenberg added that this dispatcher is a good employee otherwise the department would not have sent her to the police academy and is the reason they agreed to keep her working full-time over the past couple weeks, pending authorization.

Councilmember Peel confirmed that moving forward the cost will be \$63,800 for each additional dispatcher per year.

Chief Brown confirmed that the reason the request for the two additional dispatchers was withdrawn was to prevent a tax increase as was the wishes of City Council.

When Councilmember Peel asked where the money will come to pay for the additional dispatchers next year, Mr. Norenberg said they will have to look at everything as they begin the budget process. He met with City Accountant Suzannah Frederick last week to discuss revenues and expenses. They will be instructing department heads over the next few weeks to begin their budget process.

However, there remains two unanticipated items not included in the current fiscal year police budget. One is the two full-time dispatchers and the other will be the economic impact of the Teamsters agreement when approved.

Councilmember Peel feels that is potential recruiting tool for the academy. Dispatching gives them a great idea of the culture and hopefully future dispatchers who want to become police officers will be successful in the academy.

Chief Brown said that both he and Chief Hudson started as dispatchers.

Councilmember Peel also feels it is very important to talk about this in the context of a tax increase and prefers everyone be upfront about this very likely happening this next fiscal year.

Chairperson Wilson said that everyone is in agreement to fund the new position for Jennifer Darlin. When the budget is presented for FY20, the additional position will be considered.

Chief Brown then stated that he understands, but if they cannot hire two dispatchers, there is no need to only hire one because it will take two dispatchers to make this work schedule-wise.

Chairperson Wilson said she supports the two dispatchers, but noted that the funding is not available right now. Chief Brown said he prefers two dispatcher positions be approved but as long as Dispatcher Darlin can continue working in one of the new positions he can wait until July for approval of the second full-time position.

Chairperson Wilson confirmed that Chief Brown wants the committee to recommend adding two new full-time positions.

Councilperson Peel understands the need, but also wants it clear that adding two new positions will require a tax increase to pay for the positions.

Chairperson Wilson said that at this point, we do not know if that will be required.

Accountant Suzannah Frederick said that Mayor Campbell spoke with the Finance Director who confirmed there is money in the general fund reserves right now to fund the two additional full-time positions.

She recalled that when these new positions were being discussed last year, an additional \$83,000 added to the general fund budget is an approximate one-cent tax increase. If taxes are not increased, that amount will need to be cut in another area of the budget. Though there was no tax increase this past year, there were other items trimmed to prevent it.

Ms. Frederick confirmed that revenue forecasts have not yet been examined at this time.

Councilmember Peel agreed that it will increase the overall budget, so there will be a need to squeeze it from somewhere else.

City Manager Norenberg said that at this time, we do not know the full impact of a few revenue items such as the lodging tax. Building permits also continue to increase as well.

On the flip side, we do not know the impact of the Teamsters contract either.

The City Manager applauds the Chief's strategic plan though it is difficult to guarantee the funding of the second dispatcher in the next fiscal year, though everything will be done to make it possible. As Chief Brown indicated, there is turnover in the department that could result in an overall savings. The department has also agreed to back off the use of part-time dispatchers to the degree they were used before Dispatcher Darlin was hired back.

However, Council will need to make the funding decision. Mr. Norenberg suggests committing to attempting to fund the second dispatcher, though he agrees with Councilmember Peel that making a guarantee is risky, especially when you think about requests that have to be considered.

Councilmember Peel asked Chief Brown if he believes there is a way to fenagle money in the budget to fund the additional position; Chief Brown said he is unsure any additional money would be available in his budget.

Chairperson Wilson moved to authorize two positions, one to be filled now with funds that are available and the other to be deferred and considered during the FY 2020 budget reviews, revenue conditions permitting, seconded by Councilmember Boyle. Motion carried.

There being no further business, Chairperson Wilson adjourned the Police Committee meeting at 6:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Terri K. Hudson, MMC  
City Clerk/Recorder