

MILFORD CITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
October 22, 2018

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, October 22, 2018.

PRESIDING: Committee Member Lisa Ingram Peel

IN ATTENDANCE: Committee Members:

Chairperson Katrina Wilson
Councilman Mike Boyle

Mayor Archie Campbell, City Manager Eric Norenberg, Police Chief Kenneth Brown and Deputy City Clerk Christine Crouch

Call to Order

In the temporary absence of the Chairperson and the scheduled Council Workshop, Committee Member Peel called the Committee Meeting to order at 5:38 p.m.

Recommendation/Funding Authorization/Police Department HVAC

Chief Brown deferred to City Manager Norenberg to provide the information.

As previously discussed, Mr. Norenberg reported there are a number of issues with the current police station including the HVAC system. An evaluation of the current system was recommended as a result.

Captain Gary Bailey had received a proposal from Gipe Associates, who is the same firm overseeing the Public Works HVAC Project. Included in the packet is a copy of the submitted proposal in the amount of \$6,900 for the Engineering Study/Feasibility Analysis.

Mr. Norenberg noted this is for informational purposes only. The project does not require competitive bidding due to the associated professional services and the dollar amount being below the required competitive bidding threshold. He recommends holding off the appropriation of funds until a final decision is made on the status of the new police station. Otherwise, Council can approve the authorization for funding and determine what is needed to repair/replace the current HVAC system.

Mr. Norenberg explained that it is on the agenda for the Council Meeting this evening, should the Committee decide to move forward.

Downtown Policing

City Manager Norenberg referenced the following letter sent to Mayor and City Council from various downtown business and property owners signed between August 25, 2018 and September 5, 2018:

DOWNTOWN POLICING INITIATIVE

The undersigned are Milford property and business owners who would like to see increased policing undertaken in the downtown area. We think that the downtown is vital to the future of Milford in terms of the City's public image and as the location of most of its cultural activities. We are working to enhance its economic viability and ability to serve the shopping and recreational needs of local residents and out-of-town visitors. We fear that the continued viability of the downtown is threatened by the drug dealing going on in the downtown area and the high number of homeless persons congregating there. We feel that it will be difficult to attract more people to use and enjoy our downtown unless corrective action is taken.

We feel that we have a responsibility to act given that is in our own interest as downtown property owners and merchants. We are asking the government of the City of Milford to guide and assist us in this effort. We are asking that the City of Milford provide increased non-vehicular patrols in the downtown area. We would like there to be a clearly visible police presence sufficient to deter drug-dealing and homeless loitering. We think this will require at least hourly foot and/or bike patrols on all major downtown streets from 9:00AM until 1:00AM daily.

We recognize that this will have a significant cost. And we are prepared to raise funds to help the City cover the costs by contributing funds ourselves, seeking grants from state and federal agencies and community fund-raising efforts.

We thus ask that the City provide us with a plan and time-line for implementing the police patrolling described above and an estimate of the amount of funding that the City would need for us to secure to implement the plan.

Chief Brown brought the matter to Mr. Norenberg and it was recommended the Police Committee should discuss the matter.

Chief Brown said he has provided as much foot patrol as possible and especially when events are occurring downtown. He has placed at least one officer at each event, though two officers have been used more frequently.

From the letter, it appears the downtown merchants want this to be a full time position and he is unable to provide that at this time.

Councilmember Peel referenced the letter which states 'an hourly foot and/or bike patrols on all major downtown streets from 9:00AM until 1:00AM daily is needed'. She asked if Chief Brown is saying this would involve an additional full-time person. Chief Brown said no and he may be referring to another letter though he and Mayor Campbell have talked with some businesses who wanted full-time police officers on foot in the downtown area.

He reported that the department received a \$36,000 grant to provide foot patrol in drug areas, but that also applies to other areas of the city.

When asked the plan for implementation, Chief Brown said because of the recent shootings in the Banneker/Brightway Commons area, he is putting four officers on foot in that area. Councilman Boyle asked where Chief Brown is getting them from, considering he is already down three officers.

Chief Brown explained the problem isn't the funding, it is the manpower. He feels that they may be asking too much from the patrol officers. The only way those duties are filled is when the officers are on off time. As a result, they do not get enough family time and are getting burned out. Once he hires the five additional officers, the department will be able to provide the foot patrol.

When asked of the hiring status, Chief Brown explained that three recruits started the academy in September so it will probably be April before they graduate.

When Councilmember Peel said it was her understanding a response was sent, Mayor Campbell referenced the following letter dated September 28, 2018:

*Ms. Milly Pederson
Josephine Keir Ltd.
27 S Walnut Street
Milford, DE 19963*

Dear Ms. Pederson:

City Council, the City Manager, Chief Brown and I are in receipt of the letter and signatures of area business owners you brought to City Hall regarding Downtown Policing Initiatives.

We appreciate your position and commitment to the Milford community and support your endeavor.

You have requested a plan, a time line for implementation, and a cost estimate based on adding hourly foot patrol seven days per week from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 a.m.

The exact location(s) of the foot patrol is needed, first and foremost, in order to determine how many officers are required. Once the number of additional officers is determined, the police department will calculate the cost of hourly foot patrols for sixteen hours per day for 365 days. With this information, we can then determine the annual costs associated with this initiative. As part of the overall plan, ongoing funding sources will need to be identified so as to ensure funding for the initiative beyond one year.

Once funding is secured, we anticipate being able to hire the determined number of officers. Officers typically require 22 weeks of police academy training and upon graduation will be ready to begin their assignment.

Again, thank you for your commitment and we look forward to working with you to accomplish this initiative. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions.

Mayor Campbell stated that he was under the impression that one of the property owners was collecting money to support this initiative.

Councilwoman Peel said she has a concern about the appearance of providing better police assistance to people who contribute or pay more. For example, if she wants a police officer to ride by her house more often, can that be accomplished if she had an option of paying more money for that purpose.

She said if the downtown merchants have a demand, and the community finds out they paid money to get more patrol, and receive more police patrol, what happens to other areas where people cannot afford to do this. Mayor Campbell explained that it was agreed not to do this. There was a recent meeting about the homeless that became a crime problem discussion involving forty to fifty people. Those people wanted more police presence in the park areas because people that used to walk the parks are now afraid to use the riverwalk. Some have been called names and others have been threatened. One was even involved in an attack situation. Another incident involved a dead pigeon and a threatening note.

One of the residents committed to providing more evidence about these situations through the use of pictures, videos, etc. It was explained it was illegal to tell people they were unable to hang out in the parks or downtown unless they are involved in some kind of criminal or questionable activity. Regardless, the police continue to chase a lot of people away.

After a lot of discussion, it was agreed that an officer doing foot patrol in the park and downtown areas would be a possible deterrent to those simply hanging out.

She recalled a recent police operation that was geared toward illegal activity that had occurred in the parks. Councilmember Peel asked Chief Brown if that helped. He stated that short term it helped though they will continue with similar operations in those areas. Unfortunately it cannot be done all the time even though they expect the police to be present all the time, which is impossible.

Councilmember Peel asked what type of strategy Chief Brown has and whether he has considered a change in scheduling or how he may redistribute the officers and use them for foot patrol based on the current numbers. Also, at what point would the three new officers be available which would provide additional manpower and allow these needs to be addressed.

Chief Brown reiterated that currently it is very hard. He also has one officer out on FMLA. Another just got back from FMLA and in both cases, they lost two officers for a three-month period. He also has some in the military and their training takes them away. Last year, he lost an officer to military training for three and a half months.

He said those are some examples of the situations that create a shortage of officers. He struggles to maintain the numbers for regular patrol which is the reason he needs another five officers. Once they are up and running, he expects them to help a lot and he will be able to address these other issues.

Councilwoman Peel asked if Chief or someone in his department is able to provide information of the total number of officers,

what they are doing and where they are. For example, how many are in each division, what their rotation is and how many are scheduled on each shift, how many are off and how it might look with the implementation of this grant.

She feels that if the residents and merchants know additional officers are on their way and that the police department is willing to hit all the key spots in a strategic way, they may understand the problem a little better.

Chief Brown said he does not want to give a false impression that all we need is five officers to automatically be downtown on a full-time basis. Those five officers will only allow the shifts to be full again.

Councilman Boyle said it appears he is not there yet because as he indicated previously, he is losing two and one was just terminated. Therefore, they have lost three and the three in school will only compensate for the three he is down now.

Councilmember Peel asked if two more positions were funded that are ready to be filled and Chief Brown stated yes. His plan is to send two to three recruits to the New Castle County Academy that begins in December.

When asked how the applicant testing went this past weekend, Chief Brown explained that fifty-six letters were mailed. Of the thirty applicants that showed up, fifteen passed the written test and physical agility. He plans to fill those positions in the December Academy from this batch of applicants.

Chairperson Wilson arrived at this time, along with Solicitor Rutt.

Councilman Brooks also arrived.

Chief Brown said that for many months, they have been expecting one of his officers to be hired by the New Castle County Police Department because he lives there. That will create another vacancy.

Councilman Culotta arrived at this time.

Providing a synopsis of the discussion, Councilwoman Peel feels it may be a good idea to pull the downtown merchants that submitted the letter and let them know the circumstances or at least respond to them in writing and explain the situation with the total number of officers, and the various aspects of policing with regard to staffing needs, etc. She also recommends including a plan of how the Chief plans to continue building the force.

After apologizing for being late due to training in Wilmington and related traffic, Chairperson Wilson agreed and recommends providing that information as well.

Mr. Norenberg pointed out that a lot of the merchants that signed the letter participated in the master planning and visioning sessions held in 2015. One of the recommendations at that time was to create a Business Improvement District or a Downtown Improvement District. When the letter states they are willing to donate and chip into the costs of paying for policing, unfortunately that is not a sustainable source of funding. However, many Business Improvement Districts help generate funding for things such as litter pickup, regular snow removal, etc. so it is consistent with the idea.

Another idea considered is the option to supplement security with non-sworn officers who could provide a deterrent presence and possibly randomly intersperse with the sworn officers. For example, if you look down the riverwalk and see someone in a uniform, that may deter something regardless of whether it is a Milford Police Officer or someone from the Senior Patrol or a non-sworn officer. However, that person may have a radio or cell phone that keeps them in contact with the dispatcher if there is a problem.

Councilmember Peel feels it is important that these merchants understand these limitations. She agrees it is stressful for the patrol officers who are having to work a lot of overtime. At the same time, Chief can present a plan moving forward showing the benefit of the additional officers. Her only concern is that our policing is equally distributed and not just for those that can pay more.

Chairperson Wilson emphasized that she totally agrees with that thought.

Councilmember Boyle recommends thanking the merchants for their concerns and their offer to help though the City is unable to handle the police shortage in this manner. Councilmember Peel feels we still need to talk about the fact we are in the process of expanding and are trying to build a bigger police force.

Chairperson Wilson stated that it has always been important for people to understand that this is a Council made up of different ward representatives, but overall, everyone is representing the City of Milford. Many times, council members are being asked to focus on one particular area. In her opinion, it needs to be clear that the entire city must be protected. In most cases, certain individuals may not be aware of activities in other parts of the city. She always emphasizes that when talking to citizens who are unaware of most problems in the city, though those issues and concerns are just as important to City Council and need to be treated in an equal manner.

Status Update/New Station Architect and Engineer Screening

Mr. Norenberg reported that six proposals were received this summer of which two finalists were selected. Those two firms were interviewed on October 11th by Police Committee Chair Wilson, Planning Director Rob Pierce, ICMA Fellow Evan Miller, Chief Brown and the City Manager. All agreed that one firm would best meet the needs for the department.

The next step is to discuss the two-step contract. The first will be to develop site plans and options for the site which would need to be presented to City Council for further action. That information would then be prepared for the potential referendum at which time voters would decide on proceeding with the new police department.

Mr. Norenberg emphasized there is a need to keep the public involved with ongoing communication to make sure we are providing the correct information.

The City Manager suggested skipping the Executive Session in order to proceed with the Council Workshop at which time the site acquisition of the second property will be discussed.

Chairperson Wilson asked if Councilmembers Boyle and Peel received a copy of the presentations from the architect and engineering firms. City Manager Norenberg said he will make sure a copy is provided to each.

Adjourn

There being no further business, Councilman Boyle moved to adjourn the Police Committee meeting, seconded by Councilmember Wilson. Motion carried and Committee Meeting was adjourned at 6:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Terri K. Hudson, MMC
City Clerk/Transcriber