

MILFORD CITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
January 24, 2013

A Meeting of the Police Committee of Milford City Council was held in the Joseph Ronnie Rogers Council Chambers of Milford City Hall, 201 South Walnut Street, Milford, Delaware on Thursday, January 24, 2013.

PRESIDING: Chairman Douglas Morrow, Sr.

IN ATTENDANCE: Police Committee Member S. Allen Pikus and Finance Committee Member Garrett Grier III
City Manager Richard Carmean, Police Chief Keith Hudson and City Clerk/Recorder Terri Hudson

ALSO: Milford School Superintendent Dr. Phyllis Kohel, School Board President Patrick Emory and Milford Police/School Resource Officer Joseph Melvin

Chairman Morrow called the Police Committee Meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. He noted that Finance Committee Member Garrett Grier was also asked to attend (Police Committee Member Pikus, in attendance, is also Chair of the Finance Committee).

He announced the purpose of the meeting is to discuss Milford School District's request for three additional school resource officers. Mr. Morrow reported that the city manager, police chief and he met with Dr. Kohel and Mr. Emory at which time it was decided to bring the issue before the police committee.

Dr. Kohel thanked the committee for taking the time to listen to their proposal. She emphasized they are not asking the city to put additional resource officers in their schools at the city's expense. She said they really appreciate everything the city has done for the school district over many, many years and long before many of those present today were on city council. She feels the partnership between the city, police department and the school district has always been a very positive partnership. They have always worked together to resolve any issues, which she feels have always had phenomenal results, especially when compared to other communities that do not have that type relationship.

The superintendent explained the opportunity to have a school resource officer (SRO) has been available to the school for a number of years. Mr. Carmean and Dr. Kohel talked about it though they could not determine when it started.

The superintendent stressed that they are not here begging for more money or expecting the city to fund three more resource officers. However, they do want to talk about their needs to have a resource officer in each of their schools and they are willing to pay for the new officers that will need to be hired.

She said they are willing to fight tooth and nail to keep SRO Melvin in place because he does so much more than be a presence in the school. He teaches classes and makes contacts with students who are very comfortable talking to him. Thus these students have become comfortable being able to go to a police officer to resolve or discuss their problems. They also give tips about what is going on in the school as well as the community.

Dr. Kohel said he has been so proactive for the school that the thought of not having him in their school is very scary especially nowadays. To have this type person in each of these schools would not only meet the schools' needs, but would also help quell the fears and frustrations this community is currently facing because of the school incidents that have most recently occurred across this nation.

School Board President Emory then stated that he also echoes what the superintendent stated and thanked the city for providing a school resource officer over the years.

He referenced the incidences that have occurred around the country recently with the most recent a couple of days ago in Houston, Texas. Mr. Emory said that since the Connecticut incident, there have been continuous shootings. Over the last few years, Mr. Emory has been approached several times about the need for more of an enforcement presence or a resource

officer presence in the school district. He recalled discussing the matter with former Superintendents Bob Smith and Sharon Kanter and suggested another officer be considered. Unfortunately, it was one of the matters that was always put on the back burner. However, they now feel this should be a front burner issue.

Mr. Emory has been contacted by many people in the Milford community in addition to fellow board members. He began to think about it and was hatching out some ideas. He talked to Dr. Kohel about how they could maximize the coverage with a minimum amount of officers. They came to the conclusion that the best layout was to have four officers including Officer Melvin. They would then place one at the Morris School in Lincoln, one at the Mispillion Lulu Ross Complex, one at Benjamin Banneker and keep Officer Melvin at the High School/Academy complex.

Mr. Emory reported that the middle school will be closing as a result of the state informing the district they will no longer share the expenses of maintaining and repairing it. He said Milford Middle currently houses sixth and seventh grades, the Central Academy eighth and ninth grades and the high school tenth through twelfth grades. Beginning next year the sixth, seventh and eighth-grade students will attend classes at Central Academy and grades nine through twelve will attend Milford High School.

A committee of Milford residents, business leaders and school employees considered options for the middle school building but concluded the costs of renovation for even one more year was simply too high to justify.

Mr. Emory stated they are trying to figure out how to get the coverage and initially thought it may work with two or three officers. However, the reality is if one school is not covered and the other schools are covered, parents would ask why their child is different than the children at a school that had a SRO.

As a result, they believe coverage is needed across the board. They are not asking the city to provide the officers free; instead, the school is willing to pay for the new SRO's. They will need to determine the price and find out if this is workable for the city. That is the reason they previously met with Chief Hudson, Councilman Morrow and City Manager Carmean.

He said that some people recommended hiring a private security group. Mr. Pat said he has an enforcement background himself and personally feels that type security would be inadequate. He prefers people who are COPT (Delaware Council on Police Training) certified. That provides the training and know how to handle situations. If a private security firm is hired, the school shoulders the associated liability and the responsibility of ensuring the certifications are done properly.

Mr. Emory said the school has had a great relationship with the city in the past and he appreciates it. In this manner, the school will simply write the check and the city will take care of the other end.

He said the other positive for the city is the school will only need these officers nine months of the year. He has not talked about paying twelve months of the year but in this case, the police department could use them in whatever manner they feel is appropriate. He feels that perhaps they can work out something on that end. A contract between the school and the city would be developed.

Mr. Emory noted they have not yet discussed this with the school board. However, he is adamant the time has come that these officers are needed. He does not believe it can be avoided any longer.

He said the only concern in this plan is the Morris School in Lincoln. Though the school is outside city limits, he knows that if something happened, Milford Police would respond along with other police agencies. However, there is a longer time frame associated with response to that school. In addition to that concern, some upgrades are needed to its entryway. Considering the personnel and the young age of the students at that school, Mr. Emory feels it is paramount that a Milford officer be placed there.

Mr. Emory said there were also questions about whether Milford Police would have the jurisdictional authority at this school. He discussed this with Representative Kenton who informed Mr. Emory that if this cannot be worked out, he is willing, along with his colleagues to put together some kind of legislation to address the jurisdictional problem. In the

meantime, Officer Melvin reported that he has talked to the Attorney General Biden's office who indicated there would not be a problem with it.

He further stated that another issue he has with private security is that any time they encountered a problem, they would be calling Milford Police to respond. To him, it makes better sense to have certified officers in the schools because they could handle things more accurately and simply do a better overall job for the school district.

Mr. Pikus asked if Officer Melvin is able to respond to Morris Elementary School right now if there is a problem; Officer Melvin said he goes down there now in the capacity that Morris is in the Milford School District. However, if any actual enforcement or arrest is needed, he contacts the state police. He said that after speaking with the attorney general's office, they are willing to allow Milford SRO's be sworn in and granted jurisdiction over that property. Therefore, it is not issue.

Mr. Pikus said this is a positive thing adding he wants the officers protected too.

It was noted that an officer can be sworn in by the attorney general to be granted arrest powers outside of their normal jurisdictions. For example, Milford's undercover drug officer is sworn in, as well as officers working statewide DUI patrol which allows them to cross jurisdictional boundaries to operate checkpoints. Officer Melvin added it is not an uncommon practice and only takes a few minutes.

Mr. Emory said there were some concerns and some people suggested only using Milford's officers for schools within the city limits and hiring a state trooper for Morris School. To him, that is mixing apples and oranges. He agrees they have a good rapport with the state police, but have a better rapport with Milford. He is confident that Chief Hudson will handle any situation where an officer would call out and another officer was needed to fill in.

He said the other factor is they do not have to be at those assigned schools every day. If Officer Melvin is overseeing this program and determines another officer is needed at another location, that could be done at his discretion.

Mr. Emory has also been asked if the school can afford this; his answer is they cannot afford to ignore this. They have adequate funding which they feel will take care of this. Mr. Emory sees no higher priority than the protection of our children.

Chairman Morrow feels that if the city is not challenged financially, they would only have to work out the logistics in relation to the complement of officers, their current station, which officers would be selected and the hiring process.

Chief Hudson added that this will also need to be approved by full council.

Mr. Morrow said that if the school agrees to pay for these officers, he does not see it as a financial challenge though it will be a logistical challenge initially. He is confident city council will be committed to making this work.

Mr. Pikus asked about the longevity and whether the school will want someone in perpetuity. Mr. Emory said they will have to work this out in the contract. Realistically, if the school needs three additional officers, Milford will need to hire three to replace them. They do not want to put Milford Police in a situation where the school says they will do this and then backout a year from now. If that was the case, the three officers being added would then have to be laid off. Therefore, a contract will need to be in place to cover the next four to five years and go from there.

Mr. Emory does not believe things will get better and sees a need for the SRO officers from here out. He wants Milford to get ahead of the curb.

It was confirmed there is no contract with the school now because the city is paying for that officer. Mr. Emory added there is only a verbal agreement that has been ongoing for years.

Mr. Morrow pointed out there are a number of positives. Besides the extra presence in the schools, the department would have an increased number of officers which could be used during the summer to meet any needs we may have.

Mr. Carmean said he spoke with Chief Hudson about this and was asked to sit in on the meeting last week with the chief, Officer Melvin, Dr. Kohel and Mr. Emory.

Mr. Carmean said he never thought about the benefit of these students providing information to the officer about issues in the community. Especially, the fact the information they are getting is not confined to those occurring at school. These officers are privy to information that is happening all over our community which is a big benefit to the department. Once the students begin to trust the officers, it can make a huge impact especially if they get information that someone is bringing a gun to school.

Chief Hudson said Officer Melvin said that has already occurred; Dr. Kohel agreed.

Chief Hudson pointed out that in addition to what he does in school, Officer Melvin participates in other activities. He coaches baseball, was involved in little league and teaches hunter education. He said these are all ways he is able to interact with students, students that have graduated and other members of the community.

Officer Melvin said that one of the first things he learned in training was to be prepared for everyone to know him. He said that he is unable to step out the door and regardless of if he is in uniform or not, people come up to him to talk. This includes students, parents and teachers. To bring three more police officers into an environment where people are comfortable approaching these officers will be a huge benefit to the department.

He said it is unfortunate they cannot gather statistics on crimes they prevent.

Mr. Emory advised the next step is to this before the school board on January 28th. They requested the meeting tonight to determine if the city was in favor of moving forward with the plan.

Mr. Pikus stated that as was previously discussed, there would be a contract in place that would address the funding, number of years, etc. At the end of that period of time, through retirement and attrition, the school resource officers could then be worked back into the department. Therefore, it could be very positive for the city.

Mr. Morrow said that realistically, once the program is started it is highly unlikely to end. Mr. Emory agreed emphasizing he does not see an end in sight; Superintendent Kohel agreed. Mr. Emory feels that once this is established, the school community would demand it.

Dr. Kohel said their hope was that the state would consider picking up the costs of at least one SRO for each school district. That was the focus of a conversation they had as a group of superintendents with the Secretary of Education who was supposed to take that message to the governor prior to his State of State Address.

She had a meeting in the governor's office about security and the hope was that he would announce his thoughts about what the state was going to do to address securities in the schools. Instead they discussed with Homeland Security the Statewide Crisis Plan that Officer Melvin was instrumental in putting together. It was again asked if there was any consideration about Delaware possibly receiving federal funding for security or would they be allowed to have some input about their plans for individual districts but there was no solid answer.

Therefore, there is little hope that the state will fund one of these positions.

Mr. Pikus asked if the district would have funded the other two if that occurred; Dr. Kohel stated yes. She explained that with the closing of the middle school, there will be approximately \$400,000 saved. The plan is to use that money to fund the school resource officers.

Mr. Pikus explained that even though this is a police committee meeting, the finance committee is also represented with Finance Committee Member Grier in attendance. He said that though Police Committee Member Katrina Wilson is absent, he is very confident she will favor the plan.

Mr. Morrow said that Chief Hudson has provided the school with some preliminary figures of what it would cost per officer. He has since obtained more concrete numbers.

Dr. Kohel agreed and stated that though they are unable to finance four officers, Officer Melvin suggested that three be hired and one that could float between Ross, Mispillion and Banneker. One would be assigned to Morris and the second assigned to the high school campus which will house sixth through twelfth grades and more than 2,000 students.

Mr. Morrow said from the comments, the police committee favors the plan noting there will be future meetings with the school, Chief Hudson and City Manager Carmean. In the meantime, Chief Hudson will provide his figures to Dr. Kohel which will be presented to the school board. The city will then await the school board's decision.

Mr. Emory said that they had hoped this would be in place by the start of the next school year.

Chief Hudson advised the hiring process takes two to three months. He would love to be able to hire certified officers, but that is unlikely. As a result, the person will be sent to the police academy which is twenty-six weeks long. After graduation, they are required to enter Milford's Field Training Program which is an additional twelve to fourteen weeks.

It would be his recommendation to put seasoned officers into these positions. The new officers would replace the new SRO's in the patrol division.

Chief Hudson explained that unfortunately, he would not be able to put the three officers into the school until the new officers are released from training. Typically, that takes up to a year. Mr. Emory agreed noting the problem is the lack of academy sessions. In some cases, they only have one academy a year.

Mr. Morrow advised that council will need a definite answer from the school board as soon as possible. In the meantime, the superintendent and Mr. Emory can work with Chief Hudson and Officer Melvin on a more concrete plan. Dr. Kohel said she is available to meet with Chief Hudson and Officer Melvin anytime during the week. However, she and Mr. Emory will discuss this with the school board Monday night.

Mr. Carmean said he has some problems with providing the school these numbers. He said if three new officers are hired, they would start at the same pay scale and benefits. There will also be a fluctuating number with the city's 457 match. Also, one officer may have the family health plan and another may have the single plan. Chief Hudson will need that information before exact numbers can be provided. He said that each employee costs the city a different amount when it comes to benefits.

Mr. Emory and Dr. Kohel said they both understand that. Dr. Kohel said they are willing to rate these officers at the highest level which would cover any of these costs. Mr. Emory projected it would cost approximately \$100,000 per year per officer. Chief Hudson agreed that is very close.

Mr. Morrow said that Chief Hudson can work out the logistics with the school such as vehicle costs. Mr. Emory said he was unsure how that would work but hoped that would be included in the \$100,000 a year.

Mr. Morrow recommended that Dr. Kohel, Mr. Emory meet with Chief Hudson to consider a more concrete plan including the numbers they can present to the school board.

Mr. Grier feels this is a great opportunity for both parties. Mr. Morrow agreed adding that we need to act on this as quickly as possible.

Officer Melvin said that the school wants three officers though right way that will be difficult. If we can add one and possibly phase the others in that could work.

Mr. Pikus asked that a meeting be set up right away noting time is of the essence. He said he is definitely in favor of this and pointed out that they are also on the finance committee and agree we need to get this in place.

It was agreed that the initial plan should be no longer than five years due to an increase in costs over the year.

Dr. Kohel will discuss this further after the school board meeting on Monday night. City Manager Carmean recommends providing the board with a \$300,000 cost per year.

Mr. Emory said that though this appears this will work well, when they present this to the school board, he is certain someone will have some concerns. Mr. Carmean emphasized it will not be a problem with city council. Mr. Pikus said he is confident it will receive at least five votes noting there are three council members present this evening.

Mr. Grier said this will receive unanimous support from city council noting the importance of keeping our schools safe.

With no further business, Mr. Grier moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Pikus. Meeting adjourned at 6:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terri K. Hudson". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Terri K. Hudson, MMC
City Clerk/Recorder