

Norwalk Board of Police Commissioners

Mayor Harry W. Rilling
Commissioner Fran Collier-Clemmons
Commissioner Tony Lopez
Commissioner Nathan Sumpter
Commissioner Ron Paladino

CITY OF NORWALK BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS REGULAR MEETING November 18, 2024

ATTENDANCE: Mayor Harry Rilling; Commissioner Tony Lopez; Commissioner Ronald Paladino; Commissioner Nathan Sumpter

STAFF: Chief James Walsh; Deputy Chief Terry Blake; Deputy Chief Melissa Lepore; Deputy Chief Joseph Dinho

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Rilling called the meeting to order at 4:42 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OCTOBER 21, 2024

**** COMMISSIONER PALADINO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.
** THE MOTION PASSED WITH THREE (3) IN FAVOR AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION-
COMMISSIONER SUMPTER**

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments this evening.

OCTOBER- OFFICER OF THE MONTH-TAYLOR EQUI

Chief Walsh said I am honored to announce that Officer Taylor Equi has been selected as Officer of the Month for October 2024.

On October 13, 2024, Officer Equi provided CPR to a sixty-year-old male who was not breathing and eventually made a full recovery.

On October 13, 2024, Officer Equi responded to 57 Toilsome Avenue on a complaint of a sixty-year-old male with chest pain. As she arrived, she quickly determined that she was accidentally sent to #57 when the medical emergency occurred at #67 Toilsome Avenue. Upon entering the correct home, she located the subject down on the ground, who was blue and not breathing with no pulse. Based on her assessment, she immediately began CPR for several minutes until the arrival of Norwalk EMS and the Fire Department. The subject was transported to Norwalk Hospital, where he has fully recovered due to her life-saving actions. If not for her quick response and deduction that she was sent to the wrong address with the successful application of CPR for several minutes, it is unlikely that this subject would have recovered from this medical emergency. Due to her excellent performance and dedication, this individual is alive.

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Chief Walsh said this is the second time in 2024 that Officer Taylor Equi has been recognized by the commission for CPR lifesaving efforts.

(The commissioners congratulated Taylor Equi)

CHIEF'S EXECUTIVE REPORT- OCTOBER EXECUTIVE REPORT

Sworn Personnel Updates

Chief Walsh reported on the patrol staffing for October and said that there are 181 Sworn Personnel (2 open sworn positions), and one officer on Administration pending Internal Affairs Investigation.

Chief Walsh said that on October 3, 2024, Officer Amanda Lopez, and Officer Patricia Nelson.

Chief Walsh said that Officer Jamal Benn, Officer Karen Mozo, and Officer Jennifer Giron graduated from the POST Academy.

Chief Walsh said there are six officers on-field training, and that four background investigations are ongoing for January POST Academy

Civilian Personnel Updates

Chief Walsh provided an update and said that 22 telecommunicators / Supervisors are assigned to Combined Dispatch and are fully staffed. He said that 14 civilian employees are assigned to support staff positions and are fully staffed.

Departmental Initiatives

Chief Walsh said On October 30, 2024, the Connecticut State Police Crimes Analysis Unit published its Annual Report on the Uniform Crime Reporting program. Local and state law enforcement agencies submit crime statistics through the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). The NIBRS Data is used to create the state-based crime analysis. He said the analysis reports on three major fields of incidents which include crimes against persons, crimes against property, and crimes against society. The number of crimes against persons reported in the City of Norwalk decreased by 7%, while the incidents decreased by 3.8% statewide from 2022 data. The number of crimes against property in the City of Norwalk decreased by 11.8%, while the incidents increased by 11.0% statewide from 2022 data. The number of crimes against society in the City of Norwalk increased by 93%, while the number reported statewide decreased by 2.2% from the 2022 data and the increase could be alarming on face value but most of these are self-initiated criminal investigations. Much of the data that compromises Crimes Against

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Society is attributable to the Norwalk Police Department's self-initiated efforts to investigate illegal narcotics and weapon violations conducted by the Special Services Division. The increase in this category is primarily due to self-initiated arrests and investigations to deter illegal sales of marijuana and unlawful THC products from vape and smoke shops in the city. Overall, the City of Norwalk saw a decrease of 7.7% in crimes reported per 1000 residents from 41.4 in 2022 to 38.2 in 2023.

Chief Walsh said the 2025/2026 Fiscal Operating and Capital budgets are being prepared by Divisions and Administrative Divisions for submission to Finance.

Chief Walsh said they had participated in a multi-town motor vehicle enforcement initiative with Wilton, Darien, and the New Canaan Police Departments.

Chief Walsh said the school resource officer program has been expanded to (9) nine officers in October.

Finance and Current Fiscal Year Budgeting

Chief Walsh said that all budgets are monitored by Mr. Docimo of Administrative Services and provided an overview of the October 2024 budget status.

Commissioner Lopez asked for an explanation for the increase in overtime costs for the detective bureau. Chief Walsh said that is case driven and a vast amount of overtime was due to the Earl Sebastian missing person's case in which he was successfully located.

OPERATIONS REPORT

PATROL STAFFING (OCTOBER)

Deputy Chief Blake reported on the Detective Bureau activity and said that 41 cases were opened in October and noted that a suspect was arrested by warrant charging Sexual Assault 1st and Coercion, a suspect was arrested by warrant stemming from a burglary at World of Beverages and was charged with Burglary in the third 3rd, Conspiracy to Commit Burglary in the 3rd, Larceny in the 1st, and Conspiracy to Commit Larceny in the 1st, and a suspect was arrested for his role in a negligent firearm discharge and was charged with Reckless Endangerment 1st and Tampering with Evidence.

Deputy Chief Blake reported on the Special Services activity and said they opened 40 cases for October and noted that four gambling machines were seized from El Coqui grocery store, along with \$2500, and a search warrant was executed at 168 Main Street, smoke shop selling marijuana, and \$17,000 and five pounds of marijuana seized.

Deputy Chief Blake reported on the Special Victims activity and said they opened 33 cases for October and noted that a suspect was arrested by warrant for Harmful Communication

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with a Minor to Maintain an Inappropriate Relationship and Risk of Injury to a Minor, and a suspect was arrested by warrant charging Sexual Assault 4th and Risk of Injury to a Minor.

Deputy Chief Blake reported on the Marine Unit activity and said they had 18 cases for October and noted that there was a call to assist patrol with the search for stolen vehicle suspects, and an individual dumped 47 gallons of diesel into Norwalk Harbor, and the suspect was arrested.

Deputy Chief Blake said there were 7,357 calls for service and 152 total arrests in October, and that 840 total citations, summons, and written warnings were issued for the month, which is consistent with last year, and is up to 11,196 for the year which has well surpassed the totals for last year.

Commissioner Paladino said the sexual assaults seem to be high and asked how that is compared to last year. Deputy Chief Blake said the number reported are current investigations of sexual assaults that have occurred some of which have gone to an arrest or warrant, and some did not end in an arrest of an individual based upon a variety of circumstances.

Mayor Rilling asked how the case regarding the diesel fuel was handled. Deputy Chief Blake said the marine unit responded to the report as they received a report from an individual that this was occurring, and the Fire Department had responded as well as the CTDEEP and the Coastguard were notified. The CTDEEP hired a cleanup contractor.

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

TRAINING REPORT (OCTOBER)

Deputy Chief Dinho reported on the Community Police Services Division and said they handled a total of 709 calls for service. He said that 36 major events were attended, and he provided an overview of the major events attended/assisted during October.

Deputy Chief Dinho reported on the Traffic Unit and said they had conducted 356 motor vehicle stops and 15 enforcement citations for school bus violations, and 74 parking violations were issued. He said there were 83 selective enforcement locations and some of the locations were held on Highland Avenue, East Avenue, West Rocks Road, Winfield Street, Newtown Avenue, Chestnut Hill Road, Wilson Avenue, and Strawberry Hill Avenue.

Deputy Chief Dinho provided an overview of the Behavioral Health Unit and said they opened 4 cases in October, addressed 36 cases, closed out 32 cases, hospitalized 13 cases, partnered with the State's Attorney on two cases, referred 14 cases for services, and worked with the families on 15 cases.

Deputy Chief Dinho provided an overview of the training for October and said 13 total subject areas were taught and attended by 45 officers.

Commissioner Paladino reminded Deputy Chief Dinho to keep the commissioners updated on when the major events are scheduled as he would like to attend some of them.

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Mayor Rilling asked how many weapons were received in the buyback program. Deputy Chief Dinho said there was a total of 36 that were recovered. Commissioner Sumpter asked what happens to the weapons that are received through the buyback program. Deputy Chief Dinho said they are sent to the state for destruction.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT (OCTOBER)

Deputy Chief Lepore said that all the grants had ended in September and were reported on in September.

Deputy Chief Lepore reported on the grant applications that were submitted in October which included the 2025 DUI -patrol enforcement, Project Safe Neighborhood -Flock LPR system, the Drug Recognition Expert grant for teaching officers, the Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) -patrol enforcement, Click it or Ticket, American Rescue Plan Act 1A and 2A) for patrol enforcement and equipment.

She said that the grants that have been awarded to date include the 2025 DUI grant, the DRE -instructor grant, the CIOT -patrol grant, and the ARPA-1A and ARPA-2A grants. Deputy Chief Lepore said they are continually monitoring funding opportunities through state and federal grants.

Deputy Chief Lepore reported on the staff inspections and said there were no staff inspections scheduled for October and the next one will be in December.

Deputy Chief Lepore reported on the Crime Scene Unit and said that 126 persons were fingerprinted (39 were for pistol permits. She said 26 DVD's / or photos were created for case requests, 16 cases were processed for evidence, and 116 patrol cases required camera/photograph downloads of scenes, and backgrounds were conducted on 13 massage therapists that consisted of Massage Envy, Lily Spa, Westport Massage, New Canaan Massage, and Merritt Massage businesses. She said 17 solicitor permits were requested during the month for Power Home Remodeling, Comcast, and Renewal by Anderson and there were no pawnbroker/precious metal permits were requested for the month. She said the CSI unit was deployed for one case during October.

Deputy Chief Lepore reported on the accreditation and said the RFP for the promotional exam announcement was made with dates and a reading list was distributed to all sworn personnel. The written exam will be on February 1, 2025, and the assessment centers will be held during the week of February 10, 2025. She said to date 8 Officers/Detectives have signed up for the sergeant's exam and 2 sergeants have signed up for the Lieutenant's exam.

Deputy Chief Lepore said the directive updates were completed and distributed to all personnel.

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Deputy Chief Lepore reported on the body and dashboard cameras and said there was one issue with a body camera not charging, and one taser was returned to Axon for repair but is back in service.

Deputy Chief Lepore said that there were 53 new requests for case videos, 28 disks were burned with videos, and 27 electronic shares with Stamford Court.

Deputy Chief Lepore reported on the accreditation and said they are continually collecting proofs and reviewing CALEA standards for compliance and annual audits.

AUTHORIZED WRECKER POLICY AC AUTO BODY

Chief Walsh said per the Norwalk Police directive the Norwalk Police Commission governs the activities of the authorized duty wreckers.

On September 11, 2023, Officer Mark Voeltz received a complaint against AC Auto Body and its owner, Anthony Ceraso, of 182 Main St, New Canaan, CT. AC Auto Body, an authorized towing Wrecker for the Norwalk Police Department, had allegedly overcharged a customer while towing on behalf of the Norwalk Police Department towing rotation list. After a motor vehicle accident, AC Auto towed a vehicle, charging the customer \$2,482.69. Upon investigation, the only permitted charge permitted by the State of Connecticut for this tow was \$161.60 and \$161.00 for the storage. AC Auto Body overcharged the customer \$2,160.09. Officer Voeltz issued Anthony Ceraso an infraction of six counts of violation of Connecticut general statute 14-66a(3) Wreckers towing and transporting on October 23, 2023. Ceraso pleaded not guilty, and a magistrate in Stamford Superior Court heard this matter on November 8, 2024. Anthony Ceraso was found guilty on all six counts of violation of C.G.S 14-66(e), an act committed while working at the behest of the Norwalk Police Department.

On November 22, 2023, Officer Mark Voeltz received a second complaint of overcharging from another customer whose vehicle was towed by AC Auto Body after it was involved in an accident on November 15, 2023. In this case, AC Auto Body charged the customer \$1,761.42 to release the vehicle. In this case, the State of Connecticut authorized rates should have been Towing \$149.20 and Storage \$208.00, totaling \$357.90, an overcharge of \$1,420.52. On December 13, 2023, Officer Voeltz issued an infraction to Anthony Ceraso, charging (8) eight counts of violation of Connecticut general statute 14-66(a) (3) Violation of Wrecker statute. Ceraso also pleaded not guilty to these charges but was found guilty by a magistrate on November 8, 2024, after a hearing.

Chapter 4.0 Appendix A of the Norwalk Police Directive (Authorized Wrecker Policy) governs the rules and regulations of all authorized wreckers that have performed services on the behest of the Norwalk Police Department. The Board of Police Commissioners is responsible for all matters and activities.

Anthony Ceraso, owner of AC Auto Body, has been found in violation of Connecticut General statute 14-66(a) (3) and the Norwalk Police Department rules and regulations. These

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violations and infractions have adversely reflected upon the Norwalk Police Department, and these violations are subject to sanctions by the Board of Police Commissioners.

He said he recommends that AC Auto Body be removed from the Norwalk Police Department's Authorized Towing Wrecker list.

Commissioner Lopez said he recalls this matter was brought before the commission in the past, but no action was taken pending a court case and asked for confirmation. Chief Walsh said it was noted in a previous police commission meeting, but he withdrew the matter because he wanted Mr. Cesaro to have his due process, and he now has and has been found guilty. Commissioner Sumpter asked if they would still be allowed to tow for other municipalities. Chief Walsh said they are most likely obligated to report this to the State of Connecticut Dept. of Motor Vehicles for their review. Commissioner Paladino said this behavior cannot be tolerated and they certainly should come off the towing list for good.

**** COMMISSIONER PALADINO MOVED TO APPROVE REMOVING AC AUTO REPAIR FOR THE NORWALK POLICE DEPARTMENT AUTHORIZED TOWING LIST IMMEDIATELY.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PERSONNEL MATTERS

TUITION REIMBURSEMENT- SERGEANT NATHANIEL PAULINO

**** COMMISSIONER PALADINO MOVED TO APPROVE THE TUITION REIMBURSEMENT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$2,280.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

TUITION REIMBURSEMENT- OFFICER ESLAM ELLISY

**** COMMISSIONER SUMPTER MOVED TO APPROVE THE TUITION REIMBURSEMENT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$5,757.50 SUBJECT TO CHIEF WALSH GETTING THE PROPER INFORMATION AND SUBMITTING THE PROPER PAPERWORK AND SUBMITTING IT TO THE COMMISSION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COMMISSIONER LOPEZ MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO ADD THE CONSIDERATION OF THE DROP PLAN FOR SERGEANT SALVATORE CALISE.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Chief Walsh said Sergeant Salvatore Calise had officially applied for the deferred retirement plan. He started with the department on August 1, 1996, and has requested to begin the DROP plan on February 1, 2025, and fully retire on January 31, 2030.

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**** COMMISSIONER PALADINO MOVED TO APPROVE THE DROP PLAN FOR SERGEANT SALVATORE CALISE BEGINNING ON FEBRUARY 1, 2025, AND ENDING ON JANUARY 31, 2030.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

COMPLIMENTARY LETTERS

Chief Walsh said he received a complimentary letter from Dean Peckham of Nathan Hale Middle School on behalf of Officer Stephanie Howard. Officer Howard has been the School Resource Officer at Nathan Hale since the beginning of the school year. He said she had stated that they have enjoyed having her, and the students and families have come to see her as part of the school community.

Chief Walsh said he received a letter stating that his law enforcement family supports him and thanked him for his service and requested they he give thanks to Sergeant Tejada and Sergeant Geismar for their lifesaving rescue of the kayakers.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COMMISSIONER SUMPTER MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd