

Norwalk Board of Police Commissioners

**Mayor Harry W. Rilling
Commissioner Fran Collier-Clemmons
Commissioner Kelly Straniti**

CITY OF NORWALK BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS REGULAR MEETING JUNE 21, 2021

BY VIDEO CONFERENCE AND TELECONFERENCE

ATTENDANCE: Mayor Rilling; Commissioner Straniti; Commissioner Collier-Clemmons

STAFF: Chief Thomas Kulhawik; Deputy Chief Susan Zecca; Deputy Chief James Walsh

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Rilling called the meeting to order at 5:00PM. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MAY 17, 2021

On page 4, change “off” to “all”

**** COMMISSIONER COLLIER-CLEMMONS MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PUBLIC COMMENT

Max Cisneros- 1 North Avenue

Mr. Cisneros informed the commission of two incidences and said that one had to do with a young lady that had experienced a rape two years ago but she does not speak much English and was very fearful of reporting the rape, but after two years she had decided to report it to the

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police and was waiting in the police department for three hours and ended up having to leave to care for her children. The reason why she had waited so long was that she needed a Spanish speaking officer and he assumes that is why it took so long.

Mr. Cisneros said the second incident occurred in the SONO area where a car of someone that was moving was being loaded and was in the driveway and the neighbor starting yelling to move the car which escalated and one of the movers was struck and when the police arrived none of them spoke Spanish but accused the women of being crazy. These two incidences speak to the lack of language justice of the department, and 27% of the city is Hispanic so he would think the police department would want to make it easier for people to report instances. He requested that the department and the Mayor look into these instances and figure out how to make it easier for non-English speaking residents to report things.

Mayor Rilling said this will be discussed and there are methods where people can get assistance and he will be speaking with the Chief and Deputy chiefs on how to enhance their ability because there is a large Spanish population in the community and we want to make sure they are comfortable coming to the police department and are attended too quickly. He requested that Mr. Cisneros reach out to Deputy Chief Walsh regarding the woman who was unable to make her complaint so we can reach out to her and assist her with her situation.

Lauren Mallet

Ms. Mallet stated that she is a community organizer and she speaks with many people who feel it is very difficult to access the police and general lack of mistrust especially with our immigrant community. She also said she would like to hear from the Police Commission regarding the hiring of the last two police officers, and what hiring changes will be made to ensure we are not hiring officers that are not in the midst of any investigations to ensure we are building that trust with the community because hiring police officers with a clean background would be one of the ways to mitigate that.

Mayor Rilling said this is something that the police commission will be discussing and will be looking at all aspects of the entry level process to be sure we are only using the best practices.

Jaylyn Seed- 140 Main Street

Mr. Seed stated that the citizens are not really saying we are against the police but this is the criticism that we see especially with this problematic hiring of the officers from Bridgeport and we want to have the same feeling about the police department that others have and want to feel protected and safe. He said it would be good for the chief and officers to see the way they address the public when they have a concern about the police department because some of the comments that were posted in the media are troubling and we as the public want to make sure the police will help the community.

Farrah Marron- 63 Bayview Avenue

Ms. Marron thanked Mayor Rilling and the Chief Kulhawik for their prompt response on the recent hiring of the two officers from Bridgeport and highlighted the importance of these hires

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and what it has shed a light on for hiring practices within our department and this commission. She urged that the hiring process be reviewed because she does not know how officers can be sworn in despite being involved in a police shooting of a 14 year old child, and are involved in an ongoing investigation of an officer regarding police brutality. She encouraged the commission to lean into this moment and examine how the hiring practices are handled as well as revising the charter to be sure more folks are represented .

Megan McNeil- 26 First Street

Ms. McNeil stated that one thing that came out of the hiring taboggle is that the police commission will be expanded to a more diverse and inclusive and will include a civilian review board to participate in hiring and misconduct and is hoping that will be discussed this evening.

Dan Gurbandy-

Mr. Gurbandy echoed the previous statements and thanked the commission for responding quickly to the issues and rescinding the offers to these two officers but was disappointed to hear about the offer that was extended and noted that he has had friends that were highly qualified who have applied for positions with the City of Norwalk who never received even an interview, and then there are these two officers with documented abuse that slipped through the system without any due diligence. He said he is here to be sure the same standards are being held for all city employees particularly those who are charged with the safety of his family and neighbors.

Chief Kulhawik read an email that he received from Iliana Zulinga- 8 Running Brook Lane (email was received by Chief Kulhawik today at 11:00AM)

Dear Chief Kulhawik and Mayor Rilling and I am a resident of 8 Running Brook Lane and ask that the commission to please support the efforts of finding a way to help the people in our community that need police services and do not speak Spanish. This week alone two people have reached out to me in my group Latinos Unidos Norwalk, to let me know that they were victims of abuse and went the police station to report the incidents. In both cases, they were told upon arrival that they needed to wait for someone that spoke Spanish so she can be helped. In the first case the women was waiting for two hours until someone was finally able to assist. On the next day a women went for help and was asked the same thing that she had to wait for someone who spoke Spanish and after one hour she reached out to me and I proceeded to email Sergeant Joseph Dinho who was in the police department at the time and speaks Spanish so I asked him to help this person and he kindly and promptly did. I am concerned that there was a senior officer in the building who is bilingual and the officer at the front desk never thought to call Sergeant Dinho for help upon this women's arrival.

Mayor Rilling said that the city subscribes to language line and he believes the police department does have access to that. Chief Kulhawik said "yes" and that Deputy Chief Walsh did a quick check into the two instances and found that in the first instance a Spanish speaking officer had responded in 10 minutes to start the investigation but there was a delay because it required a detective in order to obtain written statements etc.

Mayor Rilling asked Deputy Chief Zecca to do a briefing and perhaps schedule a refresher training on the use of the language line.

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Sharon Baanante

Ms. Baanante- 64 Comstock Hill Avenue

Ms. Baanante stated like many she was deeply concerned with the recent hiring of the new officers but she does appreciate the response by Mayor Rilling and the Police Commissioners but what she finds disappointing is that this happened on the heels of the Black Lives Matter movement and during a time where our city is trying to make progress and to continue this process we need to create the trust, transparency and unity between our citizens, the Police Department and our local government leaders and she hopes that we can learn from our mistakes and listen to the ask today, take action and ensure this never happens again. She hopes the commission can be expanded and have more oversight as our country needs unity and unity begins with actions by each of you, it's going to help us to heal and we all have to do better.

Brian Merlin

Mr. Merlin stated that he was hoping after the issue with Fedor Auto Body and the targeting of immigrants that we can try and work to get a sanctuary city. The Mayor of New Haven said there are tons of benefits to it and he thinks it would be great to have because there are a lot of immigrants that are afraid to report crimes and we need to make sure the immigrant community feels safe when they are victims of crimes to report them to the authorities.

RECOGNITION

May Officers of the Month- Officer Raul Aldarondo & Officer Stephen Cowf
Chief Kulhawik said that on May 6, 2021, at 12:40PM. Officer Cowf was working an extra duty assignment on Water Street and he observed a vehicle that was operating recklessly and determined it was a stolen vehicle and notified headquarters. Officer Aldarondo who was responding to assist observed the vehicle parked on Meadow Street and a male walking away from the area and he detained the male and determined that was the driver of the vehicle and was taken into custody for possessing a stolen vehicle without incident.

(The commissioners offered the officers congratulations)

Patrol Staffing

Deputy Chief Walsh said the activity in the Deputy Chief Walsh reported and said for the month of May there were currently 175 sworn personnel with six patrolmen vacancies.. He said the sworn personnel used 175.25 sick days and 160.50 workers compensations days and that seven officers are on extended workers compensation, and three officers are on light duty.

Deputy Chief Walsh said that the Detective Bureau remained busy for the month of May and there were 11 burglaries into motor vehicles; two robberies; three larcenies; two shootings with victims; two shootings with no victims; three death investigations; ten overdose investigations (two were fatal); nine other investigations; two homicides; and four sexual assaults. He said the homicide investigations consisted of Timothy Cantey on Suncrest Road and the homicide/suicide on Chatham Drive.

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Deputy Chief Walsh said that Special Services open 34 cases for the month of May and made 12 felony arrests, executed 11 warrants and four search warrants. He said they conducted three liquor compliance checks on establishments on Washington Street and assisted Stamford police conduct search warrant at 10 Neptune Avenue and 4.5 ounces of cocaine recovered and arrested one individual on possession and sale charges and a search warrant was executed and a large amount of cocaine was recovered on Trinity Place.

Deputy Chief Walsh said the Special Victims Unit was also busy in May and 55 cases were opened and two search warrants were executed. There was an issue of late night parties at Rowayton Elementary School and extra observation posts were put in place on the weekends to deter further activity and a couple of parties were broken up and trespassing warnings were issued. There is a current death investigation of a 12 year old special needs student. There was an investigation with an arrest of a video provided of a fight between students that occurred at Kendall Elementary School.

Deputy Chief Walsh said the Traffic Unit made 399 stops in May and issued 65 citations, there were 6 misdemeanor arrests, 129 written warnings and 33 verbal warnings issued.

Deputy Chief Walsh said that Officers Nieves and Wargo were selected to attend the police motorcycle certification class and went through some training in May to prepare themselves. He said the unit also handled the Norwalk Police Memorial Ceremony that was held on May 13, 2021, as well as the logistics for the Rowayton and Norwalk Memorial Day Parades.

Deputy Chief Walsh said that there were 149 criminal arrests made in May and the patrol division responded to 4744 calls for service, and a total of 237 infractions were issued.

Mayor Rilling asked if there is any increase now that the Covid-19 restrictions are being lifted.

Deputy Chief Walsh said “yes” there has been a significant increase especially between 11:00PM and 3:00AM and compared to last June the call volume has almost doubled and will be addressing that with more manpower as well as on the 3:00PM- 11:00PM shift.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

May Training Report

Deputy Chief Zecca reported and said they are finishing up the credit review cycle in May for 1/3 of the department which included citizens with special needs and noted that personnel from Bridges by EPOCH conducted that training and was extremely well received and was very helpful. She said in addition to that annual training was also conducted and some of the officers had their NCIC recertification. She said on a monthly basis the crisis negotiation team and ESU Team did their monthly training and two supervisors from the ESU attend a NTOA training management and risk mitigation and had one detective attend a homicide investigation class. Chief Kulhawik said he had attended the Connecticut Police Chiefs executive training in May. Deputy Chief Zecca noted that there was a total of 149 classroom hours with 1248 total student hours of training for the month of May.

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PERSONNEL MATTERS

TUITION REIMBURSEMENT- SERGEANT RAFAEL FONSECA

**** COMMISSIONER COLLIER-CLEMMONS MOVED TO APPROVE THE TUITION REIMBURSEMENT FOR SERGEANT RAFAEL FONSECA IN THE AMOUNT OF \$1,468.13.**

Tuition Reimbursement- Sergeant Ryan Evarts

**** COMMISSIONER COLLIER-CLEMMONS MOVED TO APPROVE THE TUITION REIMBURSEMENT FOR SERGEANT RYAN EVARTS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$1,370.33.**

BACHELOR'S DEGREE ANNUAL STIPEND- OFFICER SAMANTHA BARDOS

**** COMMISSIONER STRANITI MOVED TO APPROVE THE BACHELOR'S DEGREE ANNUAL STIPEND FOR OFFICER SAMANTHA BARDOS.**

DISCUSSION OF APPROVAL ON REVISED POLICE MANUAL

Chief Kulhawik said if the commissioners had any input on the proposed revisions to the manual to send them to him and that he would like to have it on the July meeting agenda for the Police Commission for final approval.

DISCUSSION ON REVISIONS TO CANDIDATE'S BACKGROUND PROCEDURES AND ENTRY LEVEL TESTING.

Chief Kulhawik said the commission had requested that the candidate's background process be reviewed to see where things could be improved and had a working group that had met last week with the Supervisors that oversee the background investigators along with training. He said they reviewed the entire process and discovered while our process is standard as to what is done across the state there are things we thought we could do to improve that. He said they discussed the following changes:

- Review and update the entire checklist and institute using PACER which is an online system that checks for federal and civil suits.
- For lateral candidate have the investigators review to see if there are any previous IA investigations even if they have been cleared.
- Purchase a software program for an online tracking system which will allow the entire background process to be tracked online and in real time which will allow himself, the two deputy chiefs and the commissioner's full access to all of the information at any given time. He said a commissioner's interview will also be added as the last step of the process.
- A pre-questioner will be added that will be given to the candidates to ask them a variety of questions before giving a conditional offer of employment.

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- Send the background investigators to an updated refresher course on conducting background investigations
- For the entry level candidates The Connecticut Police Chief's Association is coordinating testing around the state on an ongoing basis so that we will have the ability to recruit year around instead of just by one particular test which will give the candidates a lot more opportunity and is overall a better system.

The commissioners agreed and said these are excellent conditions to put in place as well as updating some of the current procedures and having everyone involved be apprised of the changes.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Complimentary Letters

Chief Kulhawik said that a number of complimentary letters were received this month and a lot were received from residents in the Witch Lane area. He said they had received complaints regarding some traffic issues in the area and the traffic unit did a great job and six letters were received from residents that were happy to see that.

Chief Kulhawik said he received complimentary letter from Sergeant Dinho regarding Sergeant Gulino and what a fantastic job she did with the police memorial service and he echo's his comments.

Chief Kulhawik said he received a complimentary letter from the EMS Coordinator at the Norwalk Hospital congratulated the officers that were at the scene at one of the recent shootings and how they did a great job they did with administering medical aid to the victims and reporting their finding as the EMS crew arrived.

Chief Kulhawik said he received a complimentary letter from residents who were out to dinner and their ring notification alerted them that there was an officer at the door and were able to let them know that the 911 call was a mistake and were pleased with the response from the officer.

Chief Kulhawik said he received a voicemail regarding Sergeant Gulino stating that she had worked as a liaison for them with an individual who had some mental health issues and she was able to provide guidance to the family for services that are available.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

**** COMMISSIONER COLLIER-CLEMMONS MOVED TO ENTER INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Executive session began at 5:54PM

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Executive session ended at 6:34PM

During executive session there were no motions made and no votes were taken.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COMMISSIONER STRANITI MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:35PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd