CITY OF NORWALK
PUBLIC SAFETY AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 22, 2024

Attendance: Jenn McMurrer, Chair; Jalin Sead; Josh Goldstein; James Frayer (arrived at 7:29PM) Douglas Sutton (arrived at 7:33PM)

Staff: Michele DeLuca, Deputy Director Emergency Management; Police Chief James Walsh; Fire Chief Gino Gatto; Tina Fogel, Personnel Director

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. McMurrer called the meeting to order at 7:00PM.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. McMurrer called the roll and all members that are listed were in attendance.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public comments this evening.

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES- JANUARY 25, 2024

****MR. SEAD MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH THREE (3) IN FAVOR AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION- MS. AYERS.**

V. NEW BUSINESS

Police Department

1. **AUTHORIZE MAYOR HARRY W. RILLING TO ENTER A LEASE AGREEMENT WITH THE OWNERS OF 132 WATER ST. LLC. FOR FIVE YEARS FOR $71,200 PER YEAR WITH 3.0% INCREASES IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS FOR THE NORWALK POLICE MARINE DIVISION BASE, ITS PUBLIC SAFETY VESSEL AND STORAGE SPACE. ACCOUNT# 013023-5297**

Chief Walsh said the Norwalk Police Marine Base has been a good point for well over 40 years but has reached a point where they need to relocate as noted in the backup material he provided to the committee. The building has many structural issues and has flooded three times in the past year, and last month's flooding had over 18" of water and cost $5,000 to clean it up, and the electrical service has been in disrepair and one of the boats almost incurred a fire and one of the officers sustained an electrical shock and had to relocate the boat to Veteran's Park temporarily while the repair was being made. He said they are proposing to move the Norwalk Police Marine base to 132 Water Street as it is a more suitable location and there will be a lease for five years and would provide sufficient dock space for all three police vessels as well as an office space that is suitable for four officers and is located on the ground floor so will have public access and has garage space for storage as there is a lot of equipment associated with the Marine base. He said after several discussions with the landowner they do believe this is a great move and will also provide them with a better response time because it is located further south in the harbor and out of the wake zone and is a more suitable location. He said they understand it is an increase from the current rent, but the current market value is reasonable of what they are asking and with a 3% increase per year but will be a significant improvement for the officers that serve at the Marine base as there conditions have been less then stellar and he thinks its time to provide them an area that they can professionally perform their service considering the Norwalk harbor is getting busier by the day and public safety vessels are continually needed especially with the Walk Bridge project.

Mr. Goldstein asked who the landowner is at 132 Water Street. Chief Walsh said 132 Water Street, LLC., and is owned by Gary Wetmore and Ted O'Neil. Mr. Goldstein asked if there was ever a discussion or exploration to purchase the property rather than engaging in a lease agreement. Chief Walsh said over the past three years he has researched areas in East and South Norwalk that could be feasible to relocate the Marine base and have settled on this location and the building is a multi-use building and would cost millions of dollars to purchase and the goal is to rent the building for five years and work with Recreation and Parks and Economic Development to work on obtaining a permanent marine base owed by the city.

Ms. McMurrer asked if the plans don't move forward as quickly as they would like them to have a marine unit building built on city property would they have the option to extend the lease. Chief Walsh said "yes" that has been discussed.

Mr. Sead said with the land the state purchased for the Walk Bridge project and once the project has been completed that may be a great opportunity. Chief Walsh said that has been looked at and discussed but part of the issue is that they need a location south of the Stoffolino bridge because they can't be inhibited by the bridge openings and most of the parcel will be used for the project for the next eight to nine years.

**** MR. GOLDSTEIN MOVED TO APPROVE TO AUTHORIZE MAYOR HARRY W. RILLING TO ENTER ALEASE AGREEMENT WITH THE OWNERS OF 132 WATER ST. LLC. FOR FIVE YEARS FOR $71,200 PER YEAR WITH 3.0% INCREASES IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS FOR THE NORWALK POLICE MARINE DIVISION BASE, ITS PUBLIC SAFETY VESSEL AND STORAGE SPACE. ACCOUNT# 013023-5297**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Goldstein recused himself from the next discussion item and left the meeting at 7:10PM.

2. **AUTHORIZE MAYOR HARRY W. RILLING TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS AND AGREEMENTS NECESSARY TO INCREASE THE RECORDS FEES ASSOCIATED WITH THE**

Deputy Chief Lepore said the Norwalk Police Department implemented the use of body cameras in 2015 to record all calls for service that the officers respond to and at that time any person who would present an FOI request or a records request there was a charge of $29 per disc which was based upon a fee that was in place in the records division. In December of 2020, a request was made to the Police Commissioner to reduce the cost of the body camera videos to $5.00 as they felt the $29 fee was too high, so it was reduced. Since 2018, the request for videos has more than doubled and now have more than 400 requests per year. In 2020, the department implemented dashboard video also associated with the Police Accountability Act, so the video account has also doubled. In 2023, a survey was conducted by her office for the fees that are charged from the surrounding cities and towns and her recommendation is charging a flat fee of $30 per hour of video.

Ms. Ayers said for clarification there would no longer be a fee of $5.00 per disc but will now be $30 per hour per disc. Deputy Chief Lepore said that is correct and the $30 per hour fee is what they can charge in accordance with records fees for FOI so that they can cover the cost of the disc and the hours that are put into researching and redacting and preparing it to be released to the public. Ms. Ayers asked how often a request is made by a citizen for a disc. Deputy Chief Lepore said over the past four days there have been 11 requests made.

****MR. SEAD MOVED TO APPROVE TO AUTHORIZE MAYOR HARRY W. RILLING TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS AND AGREEMENTS NECESSARY TO INCREASE THE RECORDS FEES ASSOCIATED WITH THE**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Goldstein rejoined the meeting at 7:20PM

Personnel Dept.

1. **AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR TO EXECUTE THREE (3) YEAR AGREEMENT WITH HARFORD HEALTHCARE MEDICAL GROUP FOR THE 426R- OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES.**

There was no discussion.

**** MR. GOLDSTEIN MOVED TO APPROVE TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR TO EXECUTE THREE (3) YEAR AGREEMENT WITH HARFORD HEALTHCARE MEDICAL GROUP FOR THE 426R- OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

2. **AUTHORIZE THE CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER AND /OR DESIGNEE TO ISSUE TWO (2) ONE (1) YEAR CONTRACT EXTENSIONS ON THE HARTFORD HEALTH CARE MEDICAL GROUP CONTRACT**

There was no discussion.

**** MR. GOLDSTEIN MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER AND /OR DESIGNEE TO ISSUE TWO (2) ONE (1) YEAR CONTRACT EXTENSIONS ON THE HARTFORD HEALTH CARE MEDICAL GROUP CONTRACT.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. **TECHNICAL CORRECTION TO THE NON-UNIT PERSONNEL BENEFITS AND COMPENSATION POLICY/ORDINANCE SALARY SCHEDULE THAT WAS BEFORE THIS SUBCOMMITTEE ON DECEMBER 28, 2023. THE INCORRECT VERSION OF THE POLICY WAS ATTACHED AT THAT TIME. WE ARE RESUBMITTING THIS POLICY TO MAKE A TECHNICAL CORRECTION.**

Ms. McMurrer said that she had forwarded Ms. Fogel a question that Mr. Wells had. Ms. Fogel said there was no change to the pay plan and there was an attachment to the pay plan which there were no changes to and the two positions in the Registrar's office are listed, and that section on the policy is not where the error was made and she can submit that to Mr. Wells and if he has any additional questions he can reach out to her.

** **MR. GOLDSTEIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE TECHNICAL CORRECTION TO THE NON-UNIT PERSONNEL BENEFITS AND COMPENSATION POLICY/ORDINANCE SALARY SCHEDULE THAT WAS BEFORE THIS SUBCOMMITTEE ON DECEMBER 28, 2023. THE INCORRECT VERSION OF THE POLICY WAS ATTACHED AT THAT TIME. WE ARE RESUBMITTING THIS POLICY TO MAKE A TECHNICAL CORRECTION.**
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VI. DISCUSSION

a. Budget development/priorities with Fire and Police Chiefs

Chief Walsh provided an overview of the budget and said the operating budget is at a 2.94% increase and 1.4% of that is salary based so there is an increase of 1.5% for operational costs but that does include two initiatives that are important which is the proposed marine division increase in rent and two Axon body camera programs which will increase accountability and ease management and efficiency.

Ms. McMurrer asked what was cut from the budget upon advisement. Chief Walsh said various operational accounts, but the Axon program is a priority, and he hopes that it is supported by this committee and the Common Council as it will increase efficiency and accountability.

Chief Gatto provided an overview of the budget and said they had requested four additional firefighters to be put on the rescue truck which is the only vehicle that responds with less than four people which came is at $335,000 which put a 4% increase for the operating budget, but the finance department said those positions will not be funded so they withdrew the request and are now at a 3% increase.

Ms. McMurrer asked Chief Gatto to provide an overview of the presentation that he had given at headquarters as they people that had attended were very in favor of increasing the staff since it is such a busy station and there is still some time to advocate for items in the budget and this is one that she would like to advocate for. Chief Gatto said the manpower for the rescue truck is part of their goal for the future and would include the renovation of the Westport Avenue station. He said they requested the renovation in last year's budget, but it was cut and were told it would be funded for this year, but the price increased because it was delayed and requested $3 million dollars in the capital budget, and it got cut again. He said eventually they would like to put that addition and increase the station from a 4-firefighter to an eight-firefighter station which would help with the response time. Ms. McMurrer asked how many calls station four receives. Chief Gatto said that is the second busiest station the city, but he does not have the exact number of calls but engine two out of headquarters does approximately 3,000 calls per year and the engine out of the Westport Avenue station is in the range of 2,500 calls per year.

Mr. Goldstein asked if the applicants that took the last exam correlated with the four new openings that were requested. Chief Gatto said "no" at that the Fire Commission did not want to hire anyone else from the previous list which was three-year-old and there are seven to eight vacancies but there was a request made by the Finance Department to not fill the vacancies, but the positions are funded, and it would cost more in overtime. Mr. Frayer asked if overtime is more expensive than full-time employees. Chief Gatto said "yes".

Mr. Frayer joined the meeting at 7:29PM.

Mr. Sutton joined the meeting at 7:33PM.

Chief Gatto said they had requested eight different projects on the capital budget totaling $6.466 and were decimated and only got approved for $876,000 due to the removal of the $3 million dollars for the Westport Avenue Station and wanted to put a placeholder in of $2.5 million dollars for a new ladder truck and would not take delivery for four years or longer and that was also not funded. Ms. McMurrer asked if the finance department was made aware of the supply chain issues. Chief Gatto said "yes", and he spoke to the purchasing agent and she said they will not put a placeholder in unless there is funding in place. Mr. Goldstein asked if by doing that it would lock the price in. Chief Gatto said "yes". Ms. McMurrer said it is concerning to her not to put the placeholder in because everything has increased so significantly in price and that the same ladder truck was significantly less a few years ago. Ms. McMurrer asked Chief Gatto if the committee was to advocate for one of these things, if he would prefer the ladder truck or the improvements to station four. Chief Gatto said the improvements to station four as it is a building from 1964 and the only thing that has been done as far is improvements was to replace the boiler and install a roof, but there are asbestos tiles and air issues etc. Ms. McMurrer asked although not ideal if the project could be done in stages. Chief Gatto said "no" he does not believe so. Mr. Frayer said he does not quite understand that the funds cannot be allocated for the firetruck that they won't take delivery on for four years as it is a five-year capital budget and because it is not being bonded for and can always leave it out of the budget when it comes time to bond for it and asked if there is deposit that is required. Chief Gatto said "no" just a purchase order would be required. Mr. Sead said this is a public safety issue and the city is growing and it would be foolish not to invest in the fire department for these capital projects especially with all of the apartments being built around the city which is putting a huge strain on the fire department, and if the city is not going to invest the development needs to slow down which doesn't seem like is going to happen so they will need to find a way to invest in this because of the public safety of our city. Mr. Frayer asked if the current ladder truck will last for five years. Chief Gatto said "yes" and that the 10-year-old ladder truck was just refurbished and are hoping to get five plus more years out of that but that is why they would like to order a new one now because the delivery takes so long.

Chief Gatto and Chief Walsh left the meeting at 7:45PM.

b. Optional Additional Early Voting Locations in Municipalities with a Population of 20,000 or more- Registrar of Voters.

Mr. Wells said there is a provision in the early voting law that states the committee decides whether additional voting locations are needed and if not need to explain why. He said the Registrar of Voters office or the Town Clerks office are recommending one and are adamantly opposed to adding one at this time as there is enough capacity at city hall to handle the expected voters for the primary election that is coming up and at that time will determine if another location will be needed for the Presidential election, as well as the increase in cost.

Mr. Goldstein said he thought there were various acts that were currently before the state legislature or had previously been at the state legislature in an effort to help subsidize these efforts. Mr. Wells said they may or may not be putting up some money and that the city received $10,500 and are requesting more money for the fall which they may or may not receive. Mr. Frayer asked what the increased cost would be. Mr. Wells said approximately $5,000 per day. Mr. Frayer asked if there is a deadline when the state would need a response. There was further discussion ensued and it was decided that Ms. McMurrer would reach out to the Corporation Counsel's office to get a clear understanding and bring the item to the full Common Council if a vote is needed.

VII. <u>ADJOURNMENT</u>

** **MS. AYERS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**
The meeting was adjourned at 8:12PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd