

**CITY OF NORWALK
PUBLIC SAFETY AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE OF THE COMMON
COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 26, 2023**

Attendance: Jenn McMurrer, Chair; Edwin Camacho; Nicol Ayers; Heidi Alterman; Diane Revolus;
Josh Goldstein

Staff: Michele DeLuca, Deputy Director Emergency Management; Chief James Walsh; Deputy
Chief Terry Blake, Fire Chief Gino Gatto; Asst. Fire Chief Mark Conte

I. WELCOME AND ROLL CALL

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

**II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES-OCTOBER 27, 2022 (NOTE: NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER
MEETINGS WERE CANCELLED)**

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF OCTOBER 27, 2022, AS
SUBMITTED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH FOUR (4) IN FAVOR AND TWO (2) ABSTENTIONS- MR.
CAMACHO AND MR. GOLDSTEIN.**

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public comments this evening.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

**AUTHORIZE THE POLICE CHIEF TO CHANGE THE VERBIAGE IN THE 2021/2022
CAPITAL BUDGET ACCOUNT #09223010-5777-C0665 FROM THE PURCHASE OF 10 FORD
INTERCEPTOR EXPLORER HYBRIDS TO 10 MARKED POLICE PACKAGE VEHICLES.**

Chief Walsh said in fiscal year 2021/22 they had requested 10 Ford Explorer police package vehicles and placed the order, but received a notice from Ford last week that they still do not have a build date from Ford and that the pricing increased from \$39,000 to \$48,000 per vehicle so he is requesting the verbiage be changed from Ford police interceptors to marked police package vehicles to give the option to find other police packaged vehicles that would be suitable because they are down those 10 cars from two years ago, and are still unable to purchase the cars that were approved in last fiscal year's budget, and it is a nationwide supply issue. Mr. Goldstein said he thought there was an existing contract with Ford and that the purchasing of these vehicles was pursuant to an already existing and enforceable agreement. Chief Walsh said that an email was sent to the supplier last week and they said if the order is cancelled there will be no penalties. Mr. Goldstein said one of the reasons they had voted in support of this package was because they were hybrid vehicles. Ms. McMurrer said the cars that were ordered in 2021 was prior to the recent vote and this item is just for a technical correction because they are unable to get the Ford vehicles. Mr. Camacho asked if other manufacturers have been explored to see what may be available. Chief Walsh said "yes", and the only other available vehicles are the Dodge Durango or the Chevy Tahoe police package. Mr. Camacho asked if they had gotten pricing from the other two manufacturers. Chief Walsh said "yes" the Chevy Tahoe is \$42,000 and the Dodge Durango is comparable between \$40,000 and \$42,000 but they will not be requesting additional funds and will order less vehicles with the funds that have already been approved. Ms. Alterman asked if they will still be hybrid vehicles. Chief Walsh said they will not be hybrid vehicles. Ms. Alterman asked if that is due to the cost or the unavailability. Chief Walsh said they are not being produced.

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVE TO APPROVE THE ITEM.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

FIRE DEPARTMENT-EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

AUTHORIZE THE CITY OF NORWALK AND ITS COMMON COUNCIL TO ENTER INTO WITH AND DELIVER TO THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND HOMELAND SECURITY, ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS WHICH IT DEEMS TO BE NECESSARY OR APPROPRIATE.

AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO EXECUTE AND DELIVER ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS ON BEHALF OF THE CITY OF NORWALK, IT'S COMMON COUNCIL, AND TO DO AND PERFORM ALL ACTS AND THINGS WHICH HE DEEMS TO BE NECESSARY OR APPROPRIATE TO CARRY OUT THE TERMS OF SUCH DOCUMENTS, INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, EXECUTING AND DELIVERING ALL AGREEMENTS AND DOCUMENTS CONTEMPLATED BY SUCH DOCUMENTS.

Ms. DeLuca said the State of Connecticut works with all the municipalities on emergency management issues and typically all municipalities have a blanket resolution that allows the mayor to sign things such as a memorandum of understanding and some of the grant documentation etc. so by having a blanket resolution moves things through quicker. She said as long as the chief elected official doesn't change the blanket resolution remains in place so there is an active one that has been in place since 2013, but the

language followed an older template, so this is to refresh the resolution with the current template that other towns are using and to make it easier going forward.

Mr. Camacho said the language doesn't seem to provide any guidance and is equivalent to a blank check with unlimited potential and asked what other towns are using this. Ms. DeLuca said Fairfield did it what the new Selectwomen was elected. Mr. Camacho requested a copy of that because he can't imagine that was passed without amending it in some way and suggested that item be tabled. Ms. McMurrer asked if the item is time sensitive. Ms. DeLuca said "no". Mr. Goldstein requested information on which state department wrote the language and their rationale as to why this language is good and what other municipalities have passed it and if they have made any additions to the language.

**** MS. GOLDSTEIN MOVED TO TABLE THE ITEM.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Ms. McMurrer welcomed Mr. Camacho to the committee and is replacing Ms. Johnson and are happy to have him.

V. DISCUSSION

- FY 2023-24 Operating and Capital Budget requests and priorities for Fire and Police

Chief Gatto provided an overview of the operating budget request and said they are requesting approximately \$22 million dollars but 88% of that is salaries, overtime and stipends which are all contractual agreements. He noted that one of the big increases is for \$100,000 for an entry level firefighter exam as the Mayor and the Fire Commissioners want to develop a new test, and there is an increase in the fire hydrant rentals as well as a rent increase of 3% for the station on VanZant Street.

Ms. Ayres asked who owns the fire station on VanZant Street. Chief Gatto said the Third Taxing District and they rent it from them. Ms. Ayres asked about the fire hydrants. Chief Gatto said they are owned by the water departments.

Mr. Camacho asked if the testing will be done through the RFP process and what gives him the sense that it will be \$100,000. Chief Gatto said that three years ago they had paid \$85,000 so are hoping that \$100,000 will cover the cost.

Ms. McMurrer said that Mayor Rilling and Mr. Dachowitz had requested that the operating budget requests are under 3% and asked what percent increase the operating budget request is. Chief Gatto said he believes it is under the 3%.

Mr. Camacho asked how many vacancies there currently are and does the request count for the positions that are currently vacant. Chief Gatto said that five people retired on December 31, 2022, so there are currently 11 vacancies, but the salary accounts include the full complement of 132 positions, and the overtime budget will increase based on the vacancies but eight people will be hired at the end of May. Mr. Camacho asked is the money that is allocated to those vacancies will be used to offset the overtime costs. Chief Gatto said "yes". Ms. Revulus said in 2021 there

was a big push on recruiting and asked if there are still candidates on the list that may not have made it the first go around. Chief Gatto said there is a long waiting list, but the list is going on three years old and typically the entry level exams are done every two years.

Ms. McMurrer said for a city the size of Norwalk how many firefighters should there be on the force. Chief Gatto said that have 138 positions, but he is trying to get one more firefighters for the rescue truck which would benefit the operations of that company and would allow them to respond to different types of medical calls with having four people as opposed to three people. He said they have also not had an increase in firefighter positions since 2011, and noted that in 2021 they had responded to 7,678 calls, and in 2022 had responded to 8,591 calls which is an increase of 913 calls and the rescue truck responded to 1300 calls so the call volume is increasing, and the city is growing so it would be great the get the fourth person on the rescue truck. Asst. Chief Conte said there is a “two in two out” OSHA rule so one person cannot operate by themselves so each truck has four firefighters and are able to split them up in two and essentially get twice the work done especially during search and rescues, but they cannot split up the rescue company with three people so by adding an additional person it would double the workload.

Ms. Revolus noted that a lot of the new developments that are going up are high rises and that puts the need for an increase in staff for the fire department. Mr. Camacho asked if it fair to say that the new construction buildings such as the Waypointe are more fire resistant and safer as they are required to have sprinklers, fire rated doors etc. Chief Gatto said by code they are required to have sprinklers, fire alarms etc. but he would not say they are safer, but the early warning is important. Mr. Goldstein asked if the call data is split up by the type of residence. Asst. Chief Conte said they could provide that information and it will show that the multiple dwellings have the most potential for fires.

Chief Walsh reported on the capital budget request and said the first request is for two outboard engines to replace the existing engines on Marine two as they are old and has a lot of hours and last year had some mechanical issues and was out of service for a few weeks, and the cost of the engines is approximately \$95,000. He said the second request is to replace the prisoner van to a side entry van with row seats with three-point seat belts to prevent a tragedy like the one that occurred in New Haven, and the cost is approximately \$80,000. He said they last item is the purchase of two electric vehicles for administrative purposes and will also need to install charging stations for a cost between \$20,000 and \$30,000 based on the estimates they have received so far. He said they also included the normal request of 10 patrol vehicles at a cost of \$60,000 each which includes the upfit. Ms. McMurrer asked what the cost of the electric vehicles will be. Chief Walsh said between \$40,000 and \$50,000 per vehicle.

Ms. Ayers asked what percentage of increase there is for the operating budget request. Chief Walsh said he believes it is approximately 3.1% and includes the added costs of the behavioral health unit. Ms. McMurrer thanked Chief Walsh for being so diligent with the operating budget and have making room for the social worker and the behavioral department because that was a big priority of the committee this past year and hopefully in the future there will be grant money available. Chief Walsh said they have also added a part time social worker and she joined the team two weeks ago. Ms. McMurrer requested that data be shared at a future meeting on how the behavioral health unit is working out. Chief Walsh said the goal of the unit is to reduce the calls for service for the uniformed police and have the behavioral health unit be an

intervention for them before they call the police and provide people with other services that are available.

Mr. Goldstein said he is happy to see there are conversations surrounding electric vehicles and charging stations and although there are additional costs for charging stations and the vehicles there will be a cost saving over time especially on the fuel savings so he is hoping they will be able to make the case that this is a worthwhile investment. Ms. McMurrer added that she is in no means anti-electric but wanted to set the expectations correctly that the patrol cars run 24 hours a day and are “just not there yet” to go to a full fleet of hybrid or electric vehicles, but she does appreciate the fact that two vehicles have been requested.

Mr. Camacho said he knows the fire and police departments rely on overtime which keeps the budget low because there are no benefits being paid but he read that the overtime pay for last year was extraordinary and extensive among the police department and asked if he thought about arriving at a better balance between full time and part-time work. Chief Walsh said at full staff they are at 181 and are currently at 177 with the prospect of hiring three people in the next couple of weeks so the staffing levels will be the best it has been in two years. He went on to say that the overtime also included the extra work pay which is not paid by the City of Norwalk and in 2022 there was over \$4.6 million dollars of extra work pay which contributed to the income of the officers, and there were also hundreds of hours for officers that were mandated to work last year to meet minimum staffing as well as the huge presence requested at the schools and last year were at the lowest depth of staffing in the patrol division but should recover this spring. He said that he and Deputy Chief Blake conducted 10 interviews today preparing for the 2023 retirements and have hired 27 officers since January, 2022. Ms. McMurrer congratulated Chief Walsh on all of his recruitment efforts over the past year.

Ms. Revolus said that electric cars are a human rights issue due to the issues around the lithium batteries and when pushing the electric vehicles there is no talk about the dark side of going electric.

Ms. Revolus asked what emphasis is being put on retaining officers in the school system and the communities. Chief Walsh said there are five SRO officers that are assigned to the schools, and they understand their role is to provide resources and less enforcement and they have a great working relationship with the schools and would like to expand on that. Ms. Revolus asked if they are working towards having one SRO officer designated to each school. Chief Walsh said there are currently 19 schools and if that is a goal of the municipality, they may have to explore additional funding for manpower and staffing. Ms. McMurrer said that those conversations will continue to see what can be done to support that effort and last year there was a school safety meeting held and thinks it will be a good idea to have that again this year to better understand the data behind the benefits of the SRO officers in the schools and also invite the staff from the schools on how they are increasing security moving into this year after the horrific events of last year.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business discussed this evening.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ADJOURN.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:10PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd