

**CITY OF NORWALK
PUBLIC SAFETY AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE OF THE COMMON
COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 22, 2023**

Attendance: Jenn McMurrer, Chair; Nicol Ayers; Heidi Alterman; Diane Revolus (arrived at 7:10PM); Bryan Meek; Josh Goldstein

Staff: Michele DeLuca, Deputy Director Emergency Management; Chief Gino Gatto; Chief James Walsh

I. WELCOME AND ROLL CALL

McMurrer called the meeting to order at 7:02PM.

II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES- JANUARY 26, 2023

On page 3, paragraph 2, change “Ayres” to “Ayers”

**** MR. GOLDSTEIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED ON ONE (1) ABSTENTION- MR. MEEK**

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public comments this evening.

POLICE DEPARTMENT- NO ACTION ITEMS

FIRE DEPARTMENT- NO ACTION ITEMS

V. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Chief Gatto said that Firefighter Craig Saris was hired December 10, 1997, and served the City of Norwalk for 25 years, and passed away on February 6, 2023, at the age of 52 after a four-year battle with cancer, and during those four years he came back to work on the second day after treatment until he no longer could. His passing is classified as an occupational line of duty death based on cancer illness as defined by the National Association of Firefighters and he is survived by his wife and two children. Craig received two firefighter commendations throughout his

career, and to describe Craig would be to say that he was an overall “good guy” and was very proud of his kids and was a “good fireman” and would do anything to help someone and he will be missed. Ms. McMurrer offered her sympathy to his family and for the department’s loss. There was a moment of silence held in his honor.

- **CONTINUATION OF JANUARY PRESENTATIONS RELATED TO 2022-2023 BUDGET PRIORITIES**

Chief Gatto provided an overview of the capital request and said that it consists of eight different projects and the number one priority is for \$454,000 to replace the self-contained breathing apparatus, facepiece and regulators. He said the second request was due to a OSHA mandated turnout gear replacement as they received a violations for having turnout gear that was over 10 years old. He said the request is for \$200,000 and each year moving forward would they will purchase 20-25 sets of gear to keep up with the rotation. He said the third request is for a renovation/addition at the Westport Avenue station as they are planning to relocate a truck company as that station currently only has one engine with four firefighters and is the third busiest station and the additional truck company would help with the response times in that area. He said the station was built in 1967 and has had no renovations except to replace the boiler. He said the drawings have been completed and the estimated cost is \$2.5 million dollars. He said the fourth request is for a rescue truck which is part of the front line apparatus replacement schedule and the current truck which is a 2008 would become the spare truck. He said the fifth request is for a shift commander car for \$150,000 and will be equipped with more monitoring. He said the sixth request is for a bathroom renovation at the Meadow Street fire station. He said the seventh request is replace two fire inspector vehicles in the amount of \$75,000. He said the final request is for a building repair in the amount of \$35,000 to cover the maintenance on the five fire stations as well as the apparatus maintenance garage. He said there was an electrical upgrade that OSHA required in the apparatus maintenance building but they will be partnering with SNEW and they will reduce the installation in half and they will pay for the balance over a one-year period of time because they are changing to LED lights with a savings of \$12,908 in the first year and the second year will be saving \$25,000.

Mr. Goldstein asked if there are future repairs that will need to happen at the other fire stations in the coming years. Chief Gatto said the apparatus floor at the East Norwalk Railroad Station will need to be replaced but the building is owned by the Third Taxing District, and they are aware that the repair is needed. He said that all of the windows at the Broad River station will need to be updated and a new floor will be needed.

Ms. Revolus joined the meeting at 7:10PM.

Chief Walsh provided an overview of the capital budget request and said the original capital request was \$965,000 and included 10 police cars, a new prisoner van and two electric vehicles and the replacement of two outboard engines. He said on February 1st with the CFO's recommendation it was cut to \$750,000, so the electric cars were cut out and the outboard engines will be requested in next year's fiscal budget, so they are still part of the plan.

Chief Walsh provided an overview of the operating budget is at a 3.5% increase and the overall increase is \$1.6 million dollars for a request of \$28.4 million dollars, and includes a request of \$386,000 to outsource the school crossing guards. He said it also includes a request of \$237,000 for the behavioral health unit and they are averaging 38-45 cases per month and the overall goal is to lessen police intervention when people are in crisis. He said it also includes a request for body cams, dash cams and tasers for \$460,000 and overtime for special events of \$120,000 for emergency services overtime and \$10.6 million for the salaries for patrol.

Mr. Goldstein asked what has been learned so far from the behavioral health unit. Chief Walsh said the program has been active since November and said the chronic calls are beginning to slow down as well as providing support and resources to the families.

Ms. Alterman asked if Norwalk has a policy regarding the body and dash cameras. Chief Walsh said there is a vast directive which mimics the state police and said that he could provide the directive to her but said there is also a link on the website.

- **DISCUSSION OF POLICE PRACTICES FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF TYRE NICHOLS IN MEMPHIS, TN.**

Chief Walsh said the tragedy forced law enforcement as a whole to once again look within themselves and in Norwalk they are very progressive in training and recruitment and that the retention of personnel is vital. He said they are currently at 181 sworn personnel and are at full authorized strength and the moral and the culture of the police department is improving and have adequate supervision and always run a minimum of three supervisors on the road at one time. He said there is also a clear directive that when an officer engages in a foot or vehicular pursuit there is a mandated supervisor intervention and is mandated to respond to the scene to manage the scenario. He said every officer that uses the use of force must submit a use of force report and is reviewed by four layers of supervision and is recorded on a spreadsheet and historically are seeing a reduction in use of force.

Mr. Goldstein asked if the Norwalk Police Department has a unit like the Scorpion unit and why units like this are not a good idea. Chief Walsh said in the history of law enforcement there have always been specialized units such as that and they can be effective depending on the culture of leadership and the management.

Ms. Ayers said there was a vigil held for Tyre Nichols on the city green and she was very disheartened to see only one uniformed police officer. She said it is important for the community to see the police in many different ways not only in enforcement and the way we become a stronger community and able to bridge gaps is for the police to show up in places and spaces like that. Chief Walsh said he only received a 90-minute notice that the vigil was being held and he does see the importance of community outreach.

Ms. Ayers said she respects the men in blue, but she also knows that there is a culture that comes with wearing that badge and asked Chief Walsh to speak to the culture of trying to make sure that all community members feel they can access the police as a resource and are not being policed. Chief Walsh said they work hand in hand with the community and a true test of citizen satisfaction within the City of Norwalk is the feedback they receive in regard to complaints and complimentary letters, and through their transparency and community outreach programs he believes the Norwalk Police Department has a long history and tradition of being transparent to all the community's needs. He said he agrees that the community outreach has suffered over the past few years but it will be increasing over the next year. Ms. Revolus said she is happy to hear that because community outreach is so important.

Mr. Meek said this is an important conversation and asked if there is something that can be done outside of the Norwalk Police Department resources to educate people not to resist arrest and follow the process. Chief Walsh said also of the issues are caused by generational mistrust and as the community sees more trust in law enforcement many issues can be resolved before they get worse.

Ms. Ayers asked if there are any plans to reinstate a program like the DARE program because she believes that would help to break generational mistrust. Ms. Revolus said that the bus stops are also a missed opportunity for officers to engage with the kids. Chief Walsh said there is still an active DARE program and one of the goals is to increase the SRO's. Ms. McMurrer said that coffee with a cop is also another program that is done and said that is another great opportunity to connect as well.

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 8:08PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd