

***Town Council Public Safety Committee
November 26, 2012
Town Council Chambers***

Present: Chairman Patrick O'Connor
Councilor Michael Smart
Councilor Brian McDonald
Councilor Michael Molisse
Councilor Robert Conlon

Also Present: Councilor Ed Harrington
Councilor Jane Hackett
Fire Chief Joseph Davis
Police Chief Richard Grimes
Captain Joseph Comperchio

Recording Secretary: Diane T. Hachey

Chairman O'Connor called the Public Safety Committee Meeting to order at 6:47 PM.
He took agenda item entitled "Sound barriers on Route 3 in town of Weymouth" out of order.

Chairman O'Connor stated that he has been working on this issue for more than a year, and noted a petition which has been filed amongst the residents of the Progress Street neighborhood related to excessive noise resulting in quality of life issues to the neighborhood.

Mr. Mark Doogue of 96 Progress Street and Mr. Joseph Fucile of Jacqueline Road, spoke on behalf of the residents. It was noted that decibel readings in the area are often in the mid 70's but a reading this evening registered at 83, and have been as high as 100 decibels, which is effecting the quality of life for the surrounding residents. Car parts from accidents on Route 3 and drunk drivers escaping from Police have occurred in neighbors backyards. These issues pose a serious public safety concern. An audio of the traffic noise was demonstrated for the committee, in addition to a visual indicating the town's property viewer of the effected nine residences. The constituents are requesting sound remediation (walls/trees) in order to remedy this situation.

Chairman O'Connor noted that a transportation bond bill was previously filed, but was rejected, and he would like to pursue this issue at the state level.

Councilor Smart motioned to forward a letter to Mass DOT (District 6), to perform decibel readings in the area, within 120 days; with copies to our local delegation, Mayor Kay and the Director of Public Health.

Motion seconded by Councilor McDonald and voted unanimously.

Police Department Staffing Levels

Chairman O'Connor recognized Councilor Harrington, as this issue was referred by him to the Public Safety Committee.

Councilor Harrington spoke as to the genesis of this issue and noted his concern with both Police Department and Fire Department staffing levels. He cited that in 1980 the town employed 115 Police Officers in comparison to 92 in 2012. Additionally, the Fire Department employed 137 firemen from 1977-1981 and today employs 95. He would like to pinpoint the causes of reductions over time, and is seriously concerned with the public's safety. He would like to know from each Chief, the ideal number of staff they feel is needed to protect the town of Weymouth.

Chief Grimes noted that an ideal number is difficult to determine as they avoid setting ideals due to the uniqueness of each community. His staffing levels are budget driven as they are the largest expense. He stated that it is challenging to run the department with less and is also concerned with the bottom line response times. Chief Grimes further noted that the town is segregated into 5 (five) quadrants with coverage of each, but due to population and geographical changes, it is difficult to determine an exact ideal number of officers necessary to cover all quadrants. Additional coverage is implemented on weekends, and shift overlaps aid in coverage.

Councilor McDonald questioned the Chief regarding implementation of regional dispatch to which the Chief noted that he is not a proponent due to the size of Weymouth. He went on to say that we would need to supplement smaller communities. Regional dispatching is more conducive to smaller communities.

Current police on the force total 94 as of roll call today, if the Chief had to state an "ideal" number it would be 100. He noted that the department is holding their own due to his staffs' diligence in handling on average 280-300 calls on weekends.

For comparison purposes, Chief Grimes noted similar size communities and their staffing levels as follows:

Framingham	119
Waltham	150
Peabody	126

Councilor Conlon asked if we have parameters for 911 calls which compare the time of the call to dispatch in relation to our response time-which would clearly indicate if we had sufficient staffing. The Chief concurred that he does have access to that information and would provide.

Councilor Molisse credits the Chief and the department for holding their own, and realizes the difficulty in pinpointing an exact "ideal staffing" number.

Chief Grimes stated that he is given a budget number and works as best as he can within the confines of such, but noted that in fiscal year 2013 he has contractual obligations to meet as well.

Councilor Smart asked if 2-3 officers are needed on a call if detectives are used to cover, and if street coverage ever dips below 5. The Chief confirmed that they do transfer detectives as needed and confirmed that coverage never goes below 5 officers on a shift.

Chairman O'Connor thanked the Chief for coming, and noted that he has been chairing this committee for 7 years and appreciates the Police Department accomplishing more with less and noted that the department is understaffed and wants to restore police and fire departments and encouraged all to "think outside of the box" in these trying financial times.

Councilor Conlon noted his dissatisfaction with the Police contracts for Southfield as the town currently can't handle the number of crimes (which are worsening in nature) for Weymouth proper, let alone Southfield.

Councilor Hackett asked about the mechanics of billing SSTTDC for police calls. Captain Comperchio confirmed that calls to Southfield are tracked and a quarterly report is issued to the Mayor's Office, who arrives at a figure to bill SSTTDC, this procedure was put into effect in January of 2011. Councilor Hackett suggested that we use this information as history to build a budget in order to increase revenue for the town.

Councilor Conlon announced that it costs 2 million dollars for the taxpayers of Weymouth for Police coverage in comparison to \$10,000 for the residents of Southfield. Answering of 911 calls cost the taxpayers of Weymouth 9 million dollars in comparison to \$50,000 for residents of Southfield.

Councilor Harrington wants to redirect this discussion--of which the purpose is current staffing, not Southfield staffing, which is merely a component of the issue.

Councilor Conlon noted the importance of the Southfield component as we have increased our geographical jurisdiction.

Fire Department Staffing Levels

Chief Davis reports that the department currently carries 88 staff, compared to 137 in the late 1970's. His ideal would be to run 4 engines and 2 ladders, as we are currently running 3/1. He cites lack of revenue as the reason he is unable to supplement staffing levels.

Chief Davis noted that he has applied for a federal grant for an engine at Southfield/staffed with 20 firefighters, and he is awaiting approval. Southfield has agreed to fund this effort once the grant expires in three years.

Councilor Harrington asked what the Chief's optimal staffing level would be, to which he responded one rescue squad, and a third man on each ladder. Additionally the Chief noted his

uneasiness with coverage in South Weymouth, citing the department does not have sufficient coverage for a 2nd alarm.

Councilor McDonald asked if the Chief has enlisted the support of our congressional delegation as related to securing the grant; and suggested the Council become involved.

Councilor McDonald motioned to communicate to our congressional delegation, in request of their endorsement, in securing the grant for the Fire Department, motion seconded by Councilor Smart and voted unanimously.

Councilor Harrington stated that the town of Weymouth has the lowest tax rate, in comparison to surrounding communities, and explained that we cannot exceed 2 ½ % and noted that the town is unable to produce sufficient funding to properly support all issues. He stated that he is neither for nor against a proposition 2 ½ override, and noted that the Town Council cannot initiate such, and this effort would need to come from the constituents of Weymouth or the Mayor.

With no further business to attend to, Councilor Smart motioned to adjourn at 8:48 PM-motion seconded by Councilor Molisse and voted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by:

Diane Hachey
Recording Secretary

Approved by:

Chairman Patrick O'Connor
Public Safety Committee