

TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES
Public Safety Committee
May 11, 2023, 2023

Present: Fred Happel, Chair
Maureen Kiely, Vice Chair
Pascale Burga, Councilor
Gary MacDougall, Councilor
Greg Shanahan, Councilor

Recording Secretary: Mary Barker

Chair Happel called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

Review of Weymouth's Public Safety Plan

The measure was referred to the committee on March 20, 2023. Chair Happel presented the request- he read the memo from Mayor Hedlund. The members were asked to submit questions which were submitted to the administration for response. The chair read through the questions along with the responses. The committee addressed the responses as they were read:

Councilor Burga noted the determination not to contact Weymouth- she is unsure that was done and took exception to the comment that it was a "light" exposure. It could have been catastrophic. She is unsure if the Code Red conversation was held, or if Weymouth was included.

Councilor MacDougall questioned what precluded Dan McCormack, Keith Stark and John Mulveyhill from attending.

Councilor Shanahan asked how did Clean Harbors not know what chemicals are stored on site? There is no emergency plan because the towns don't require it. He hopes the other firms present in the Fore River Basin have disaster plans in place to protect the residents of the surrounding communities.

Councilor Kiely suggested that as good citizens, the companies should take responsibility and have a plan. The incident had potential to be much worse.

Councilor MacDougall asked if Clean Harbors was fined for the same thing in 2007? Councilor Shanahan responded yes, but he's unsure of the details.

Councilor Burga noted the incident took place on the 16th. The derailment in Palestine, OH took place on 2/3 – it doesn't make sense to say it was soot that travelled that distance. She is one councilor who did receive resident calls. She

reviewed the documentation that was provided by DEP and is unsure what they used to measure. Councilor Shanahan also reported receiving calls about odors, but he is unsure they also reported it to town officials. Councilor MacDougall did not get any calls, but suggested the response to Q3 indicates there much have been. Councilor Burga reported that she was first elected official to notice the purple monitors. Councilor Kiely reported she received a few calls, from residents in the Idlewell neighborhood.

Councilor Burga asked if they have an evacuation plan that could have been in effect for this, but because it was determined not to call, they could not have been able to execute this in time. The fire department was phenomenal in suppressing the fire. Councilor Kiely noted residents asked why was a reverse 911 call not made. Councilor MacDougall asked the distance between this facility and the compressor station. Councilor Burga noted it is not the only risk in the area. The compressor, in any event, is set up to shut down in an emergency. Councilor Kiely pointed out there needs to be better communication- people watched the news on the report of an explosion – after all, they do it for the noise notification.

Councilor Belmarsh was in the audience and indicated she had additional information. Chair Happel pointed out it was not a public hearing and the committee was not accepting input.

Councilor Burga pointed out that Calpine and Algonquin both provide training for fire. She believes the Fire Department needs additional gear, and Weymouth should not bear the cost. The companies should provide what is needed. Braintree should have had protective foam and didn't. The town should have the ability and equipment to be able to respond to any crisis at their facilities. Chair Happel added that the trailers on site should have been adequately marked. The first responders on scene did not know what they were dealing with. Councilor Burga responded that they were marked, but because the fire burned so hot it eradicated the markings, and they were not sure that what was listed was actually what was stored. Clean Harbors was on site within 15 minutes and DEP arrived shortly thereafter. Chair Happel was curious to know if the town has contacted the companies to see if they are amenable to help funding some of the things listed on the Mayor's response. Councilor Burga is only aware of a response from Algonquin. Chair Happel suggested a follow up on the 2020 letter to MEMA, especially with new administration at the state level, and also seek funding from any of the other entities. Councilor Burga responded that the issue is there are several firms and in three town. They relied on information provided by DEP which may not have been accurate and she is unsure how they resolve or address this. It should be a joint effort by the public safety committees of all three cities. They have a good relationship, but at the end of the day, it needs federal oversight, and at the very least, the fire departments must be adequately trained and furnished the tools they need. Whenever something eventful happens in the Fore River Basin, people must be notified. When is a good time to? The information that was provided was late and inconsistent. Councilor Kiely suggested brining in the firms, and the press, and have them respond to questions. They need to know what the safety protocols are and

everyone should be on the same page. They should provide funding to furnish the towns with the necessary gear. Councilor Burga suggested there has been discussion in each town, but collaborative would be more effective and save time. Councilor Shanahan reported that Braintree held a meeting, there was state delegation and town councilors- it was a multi-level response. It requires someone to take up the mantle, invite the town, involve the legislators, and government parties and invite the business entities. Make sure the press is there and get all answers at one meeting. It will never be only one town when it is the Fore River Basin. He asked they consider a letter to the Mayor; then go to Braintree and Quincy so everyone has a seat at the table. Councilor MacDougall agreed they need a multitown approach. They all have questions, such as: where did the water go... how did they decontaminate the equipment... are there long-term exposure effects? Is it all documented? Councilor Burga added there should be more oversight, not by the towns, and not just this incident – it should be on the state. One person should not be making the call of what determines the emergency response. There should be a notification process, such as what happens between Pilgrim Power plant and surrounding towns. Chair Happel recalled when the outfall tunnel work was being done, there was training for the unions who did the work, and there were monthly drills. The same should be done for the municipalities. The mayors should be on board to give direction. Unsure what control the councils have. He suggested they lobby the administration to put something forward. Councilor Burga added that the misinformation should also be addressed. Councilor Kiely suggested that incidents should have layers for the communication. They owe it to the public. Not being transparent has the potential for panic. Councilor Shanahan added that it requires planning and enforcement so that public health is not endangered. The committee discussed the lack of response from MEMA. The original letter was signed by chair of the school committee and Environmental Committee. Was it followed up? Councilor Burga pointed out that it's difficult to discuss what options to take when the administration is not present. What is the objective and how to accomplish it? First and foremost, sufficiently protect first responders. Second how to get a response from DEP when they downplay what happened? Should they include a referral to Environmental Committee?

Councilor Shanahan motioned to have the chair draft a letter to the administration re: the lack of a response to the 2020 letter requesting an evacuation plan and was seconded by Councilor Burga. Unanimously voted. Councilor Burga suggested there is an urgent need for this, for the future. A plan is necessary, and should vary by incident and type.

Councilor Shanahan motioned to draft an additional letter to the administration to determine if there is a tri-town emergency plan, obtain a fire update to find out what was the process, and what happened in Braintree and was seconded by Councilor MacDougall. Unanimously voted. Once the committee has a response, it will determine the next steps re: meeting with the other towns.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:08 PM, there being no further business, Councilor motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Councilor.

Attachments- RH memo dated 5/9/23
Q&A dated 5/10/23

Respectfully Submitted by Mary Barker as Recording Secretary.

Approved by as Fred Happel, as Public Safety Committee Chairman
Voted unanimously on 5 June 2023