



POLICE COMMISSION

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MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
BETHEL POLICE COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, SEP 19, 2007
BETHEL POLICE DEPARTMENT-CONFERENCE ROOM

ATTENDING: CHAIRMAN NICHOLAS ELLIS
COMMISSIONER ANDREW MATTURRO
COMMISSIONER HUGO GRECO
COMMISSIONER CHRIS McCOLLAM
COMMISSIONER EDWARD ROBINSON
CHIEF JEFFREY W. FINCH

Chairman Nicholas Ellis opened the meeting at 5:01 p.m.

1. General Public Comments:
Brian Walters of 32 Walnut Hill Rd stated that in his estimation Payne Rd and Walnut Hill Rd have become a automobile, motorcycle and truck "race track", some using stop signs only as a take-off point as they accelerate away spinning their tires. Besides the presence of officers, Walnut Hill also needs proper signage directing traffic to downtown Bethel and to Route 6. Confused drivers create a hazard by stopping in the middle of the road while analyzing maps and satellite direction devices. Chief Finch asked Mr. Walters to remain for the discussion of this issue to be added to the agenda under New Business.
2. Review of Past Minutes Aug 16, 2007:
Item 4a page 2 line 6 of the 8/16/07 minutes should change "Officer Burke" to "Officer Zavatsky". Motion by Comm Robinson to accept the minutes of 8/16/07 as amended; seconded by Comm McCollam – unanimous.
3. Budget Report:
The \$12,000 in overtime for a single week was due to \$8,000 for DWI enforcement of which 75% is reimbursable through a DWI grant and monies spent as part of the accreditation process. Motion by Comm Greco to accept the budget report; seconded by Comm Maturro – unanimous.

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4. Old Business:

a) Monthly reports

Motion by Comm Maturro to accept the monthly reports as presented; seconded by Comm McCollam – unanimous.

Motion by Chairman Ellis to add Walnut Hill Rd as New Business item C; seconded by Comm McCollam – unanimous.

5. New Business:

a) Traffic light at Whittlesey and Plumtrees

Chief Finch requested an accurate price in replacing the existing light with one displaying a green turn arrow. Lt Dickinson, in attendance, promised to obtain this before the next meeting. The lieutenant stated that it could cost thousands of dollars and also noted that the entire intersection is slated to be redone anyway as part of the bridge project next year. Motion by Comm Maturro to table this item until the next meeting and consider it under Old Business; seconded by Comm McCollam – unanimous.

b) Stop signs on Rockwell at Wine Sap

In response to a petition signed by residents requesting a four-way stop sign for speed control on Rockwell Rd at Rita Drive and Winesap Run, Lt Dickinson advised the Commission that State law specifically prohibits stop signs from being used for speed control. His research showed no reported accidents at this location for at least the past year and a half. He did find that the sight line pulling out of Rita Drive, of northbound Rockwell Road traffic, is dangerously insufficient for the approach speeds recorded there. The lieutenant displayed a video graphic showing the sight line problem as it relates to traffic and safety. Removing a large tree on town property at this intersection will increase the sight line, hopefully enough so that those pulling out can view approaching traffic far enough down the road to allow them to pull out safely without being forced to rely on every single driver to obey the speed limit which in reality does not occur. Just installing 4-way stop signs where you have no collisions and adequate gaps to pull out is likely to decrease safety and increase the probability of accidents, given that the most frequent collisions at controlled intersections is not right-of-way conflict but rear ending, and the mistaken reliance that others will always stop for the stop sign and grant the right-of-way. After the tree is removed the intersection dynamics need to be reexamined. A discussion on the use of speed bumps and humps followed with Comm McCollam asking if Lt Dickinson could consult with Danbury concerning their effectiveness. Chief Finch underscored the cost and effectiveness when properly installed with the agreement of residents at suitable locations, the most likely being small residential roads being used as a “high speed cut

through". Motion by Comm McCollam to have the Town Highway Department examine the location with the intent of removing the offending tree; seconded by Comm Greco – unanimous.

c) Walnut Hill Rd speeding

Chief Finch thanked Mr. Walters for personally appearing but took exception to the portion of his letter to the First Selectman, subsequently forwarded to the Commission in which he criticized the Department for not providing the same level of enforcement as Newtown and Redding. Bethel police have been doing considerable selective enforcement around town, including Walnut Hill according to Chief Finch. Violations do not traditionally occur while police are in an area. The time required for this type of enforcement is more than any Department can expend considering other required duties. Walnut Hill will be revisited. The distance between stop signs is not great enough to achieve the alleged 70 mph speeds. As to the issue of noise, Bethel is the only town in the area to patrol for loud mufflers. Lt Dickinson thanked Mr. Walters for his interest in the traffic issues and past suggestions for improvements. To address Mr. Walters concerns, much has been done in his immediate area to reduce collisions and improve traffic flow. Signs were placed directing Rt84 and RT6 bound traffic down Plumtrees to Old Hawleyville and Rt6 rather than his road which leads to Payne Road with its high accident rate. The lieutenant's redesign arising from an accident study at Taylor Road and Walnut Hill have reduced the accident rate from an average of five per year to one. "Danbury" and "Bethel" signs have been installed at Walnut and Old Shelter Rock to better direct traffic flow. State approval was applied for and received to install 25 mph speed limit signs there. "Stop Ahead" signs were replaced and repositioned. A "No Right Turn" sign was installed at the intersection of Walnut Hill and Shelter Rock after the one collision in a year and a half in the area when a truck trying to make a turn got stuck. The section of road near Mr. Walters' residence combines two roads, on one end Rt84 and Danbury traffic as well as that from upper Stony Hill down Walnut Hill from the area of the Big Y. The other end of Walnut Hill combines traffic from the center of Bethel, from the school complex and Rt58 as well as traffic coming from Redding. Problems with traffic here are according to the lieutenant "volume related". Even with a peak afternoon count of 1,000 cars per hour, changes as mentioned have kept the accident rate incredibly low. Chief Finch promised additional selective enforcement but stated that Mr. Walters' complaints are common in the town and the country.

6. Correspondence:
Mr Walters' letter as discussed. The petition as discussed.

Chief's Report:

a) Accreditation

Chief Finch reported that the Department "comfortably" passed the accreditation audit to the credit of Lt. Kennedy and Ofc. Burnes. The CALEA auditors were impressed by the handling of selective enforcement including the contacting of a complainant as part of the process as well as the follow-up. The Chief noted that he, Lt. Kennedy, and Ofc. Burnes would be going to the CALEA conference in mid November in Colorado. Lt. Kennedy explained that representatives from the department are expected to appear before a Commission sub-panel to answer any questions outlined in the auditors' final report to the Commission. A formal presentation of the award of accreditation may occur locally in December. At that time, the Department would be able to apply for State of CT Accreditation once eight (8) additional standards were met at the State level. Lt. Kennedy thanked Commission members for their support and their appearance at the public hearing during the on-site.

b) Resignation – N. Wright

In response to the announcement of N. Wright resigning to work in Bristol as a dispatcher for more money, the Commission discussed dispatcher training and the disparity in contract negotiated salaries between Bethel and other area departments. Currently there are two openings for dispatchers with one tentative offer to hire.

Academy slots will not be available until February or March 2008 requiring that recruiting be held October and November of this year with tests to be held in December. When the economy is good it is difficult to find qualified candidates. Frank O'Farrell is expected to be called up for active duty in Iraq but will be allowed to complete his Academy training. When he returns in a year's time, he will only have to do his field training.

Chief Finch reported new laws to be enacted which will consider anyone under 18 years of age to be a juvenile, effective 2010.

Two hearings are scheduled, one with the Dept of Transportation on 9/25/07, the other is a Labor Board hearing 11/5/07.

Conversion to the new program for CAD and Records is about a month behind schedule. A new modem/firewall is necessary to interact with State software.

8. Commissioner Comments:

Comm Matturro complimented Bethel officers on a recent DUI checkpoint. They kept traffic moving while doing a professional job.

Comm Robinson received two complaints from citizens concerning police officer "attitude". Chief Finch stated that people must be encouraged to report specific incidences when they occur rather than months later so they can be immediately investigated either with the duty sergeant, a lieutenant, the Captain or Chief's office.

Comm McCollam stated that all emergency services did a "great job" during the recent downtown fire. The police effectively blocked traffic at entrances to allow the access of emergency vehicles.

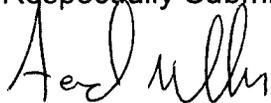
Chairman Ellis received several reports from firemen complimenting Maryann Broderick for her dispatching during the fire. She is calm, direct and unflustered. She has a good radio voice according to Chief Finch because it is clear what she says.

9. Executive Session:
At 6:15 pm motion by Comm McCollam to go into executive session to and invite Chief Finch to attend; seconded by Comm – Greco unanimous.

The Commission came out of executive session at 6:25 pm.

At 6:26 motion by Chairman Ellis to adjourn; seconded by Comm Maturro – unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted



Ferdinand Miller Jr.

Secretary