



POLICE COMMISSION

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MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
BETHEL POLICE COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, OCT 20, 2010
BETHEL POLICE DEPARTMENT-CONFERENCE ROOM

ATTENDING: CHAIRMAN NICHOLAS ELLIS
V. CHARIMAN CHRIS McCOLLAM
COMMISSIONER HUGO GRECO
COMMISSIONER BILL OCHS
COMMISSIONER DAN GROSSO
CHIEF JEFFREY W FINCH

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Chairman Nicholas Ellis opened the meeting at 6:05 p.m.

1. General Public Comments:

Robert and Messert and daughter Dawn of 45 Taylor Rd submitted a 685 name petition signed by students and other residents, in support of retaining the DARE (Drug Awareness, Resistance and Education) program which was closed by Chief Finch.

Det George Bryce stated the Police Union's support of Det Deluca and the DARE program noting its benefit relating to police work. It is a self funded program which costs the Town nothing. From his School Resource Officer experience Det Bryce noted that relationships established with students in a classroom setting is much different from casual hallway interaction. Those students are more likely to approach a police officer later on than they would otherwise. It is the only "live community police program we have".

Barbara Wilson spoke on behalf of the Department's dispatchers. Many calls have been received from residents expressing sadness over the elimination of the program. Many people have stopped by the Department as well voicing loss and concern.

Lynn Morris as a resident and police officer offered support for Ralph Deluca and the DARE program.

William Cadella of 6 Cindy La read from a prepared statement expressing his belief that through the DARE program's "Just Say No" message, students avoided drugs, the involvement with which would have precluded them from pursuing community service jobs. The public should have a say in how their tax dollars are spent and this is expressed at this time by asking an elected body, the Police Commission, to reinstate DARE.

Lauren of 35 Taylor Rd noted that members of the public are willing to donate money to keep the program operational. Chairman Ellis pointed out that this is not a budget issue but rather the reallocation of existing resources.

Det Ralph Deluca of 4 Crestview Rd as the former DARE officer officered to field any questions relating to the DARE program.

Mike Connors of 33 Appollo Rd asked if DARE can be put on the agenda following public input.

2. Review of Past Minutes Aug 18, 2010

Comm McCollam stated two corrections to the minutes of 8/18/10. He was incorrectly noted as "Chairman McCollam" in Section 2, Review of Past Minutes. "Vice Chairman" should be substituted. Also section 5a should read "---his union is currently discussing a similar matter with the Town" deleting the word "grieving". Motion by Comm McCollam to accept the amended minutes of 8/18/10 meeting with correction; seconded by Comm Greco – unanimous.

3. Budget Report:

The Commission considered the reports. Chairman Ellis questioned the nearly double overtime expenses from the previous reporting period. Capt Cedergren, in attendance, noted higher overtime expenses were due to the PT Barnum event and parade. Motion by Comm Ochs to accept the current budget report as presented; seconded by Comm McCollam – unanimous.

4. Old Business:

a) Monthly Reports

Comm McCollam noted certain report format changes. Chief Finch stated this is still being worked on. The Chief also pointed out a new report listing all criminal charges for the specified time period. Shift Sergeants are being given the activity reports. Motion by Comm Ochs to accept the Monthly Reports as presented; seconded by Comm Grosso – unanimous.

Motion by Chairman Ellis to add DARE Program to New Business as item 5a making Dispatcher Resignation item 5b and Court Awarded Vehicle item 5c; seconded by Comm McCollam – unanimous.

5. New Business:

a) DARE Program:

Chairman Ellis stated that the issue was previously addressed in executive session with support from the Commission to end the DARE program. Chairman Ellis also said that it should be noted that the Chief has the right to change assignments on his own but chose instead to involve the Police Commission, the First Selectman and the Superintendent of Schools, Dr Chesley.

Chief Finch gave a verbal report to the Commission from a prepared statement on the state of the DARE issue and what has unfolded over the past several weeks.

Excerpts from his report are as follows:

The decision to end DARE was undertaken so as to be able to reallocate the use of the YOs (youth officer) time to staffing issues within the DB (Detective Bureau). For a long time the Det Bureau has felt shorthanded and transferring an officer to the DB from street patrol left uniform street Patrol shorthanded. Additionally I wanted to start new programs within the YB as well as the middle school. Never did I suggest pulling the YO out of the schools entirely.

It is not about money it is about the best use of our staffing. DARE is a program that many believe has not lived up to its intent and that is why so many towns no

longer have a DARE program. It is my responsibility as Chief to manage the department and ensure the best use of the resources I have. DARE, today, is not the best use of police resources.

Many police administrators and police supervisors know this, as do the educators in our schools. To quote one of our educators, "DARE has shown no statistical significance in changing the at risk behaviors of youth". This is not to say that DARE is of no value, I have never said that, but rather we must weight its value against the value of other needs. I believe that the true value of DARE was not the DARE program, but rather it was the officer and I do intend to keep our YO Ralph DeLuca involved with the schools.

You know, I did not make this decision alone. I discussed this Captain Cedergren who agreed, as well as others within the department. I discussed this with the Police Commission and you approved. I discussed this with the First Selectman and with the Superintendent Dr Cheslely and Dr Chesley discussed this with the principal of Johnson School.

Ralph, in addition to being part of the DB and assisting them in their investigative work will spend more time fulfilling traditional YO responsibilities, some which are presently lacking.

One would be the tracking of all youths arrested, following their case, and making contact with the parents and mentoring the youth, to try and help the youth and family through current difficulties as well as trying to help keep him or her out of trouble in the future.

A new responsibility will be a new focus on the middle school, and upon hearing this plan supportive recommendations came quickly to me from three sources:

- Police officers, several in this department stated they have long said that we should be focusing more on the middle school age group as that is where they start to get in trouble.
- Dr Chesley and
- Dr Smith from the middle school.

I believe the position of YO needs to return his focus to the troubled youth of this Town. The truth is that the YO cannot be a valued asset to the Department, to the public, the DB or fully serve the YO function if he is not available half the year, or more, because of a commitment to teach DARE. If we are not being successful at changing the risky behavior of youth, which 100 yrs of history seems to confirm that we haven't, (more then just DARE) then let's try something new. Let's return to some traditional values of being a YO. Rather then simply lecturing about bad behavior and bad choices lets have a YO who gets involved when bad things happen, gets directly involved with parents as well. I feel confident that our time invested in this manner will find more success in preventing future problems and or problems that might otherwise continue to deteriorate into more serious violations of law.

Comm McCollam stated that Ralph Deluca's input has been overlooked and asked that he could be heard at this time. Also to consider how the program runs such as length of the program and possible changes such as the time of year it is run. Ralph Deluca was asked to address the Commission. Det Deluca stated that he is already doing many of the functions mentioned by the Chief. As Youth Officer he

is at the Middle School every day, works with families as well as doing case work. Cpl Deluca passed out to Commission members several pages documenting this position. DARE runs from February to June. Even during this period while teaching DARE his case work volume was on "par with other detectives". DARE runs over 10 to 11 weeks with a total of 60 hours of instruction. DARE consists of working with troubled students as well as lecturing. These students are best identified by working with them in the classroom environment. This involvement extends to families. The Chief's input does not include all the information. Memoranda from Dr Gumbus of Johnson School and Dr Smith of Middle School was passed out to Commission members. Even during the 60 hour commitment, Det Deluca stated he is always available for other detective functions. DARE, according to Det Deluca "is not an exclusive function where I do not do anything else".

In response to Chairman Ellis' request to speak briefly about the program Det Deluca went on to say that DARE is not just lecturing but a vehicle for "interaction", an "emersion" where the Youth Officer becomes "part of the school fabric".

Community contact is "immeasurable" for the business of law enforcement.

In response to a question by Chairman Ellis, Chief Finch reported that the First Selectman's awareness of the studies available to educators which show that DARE has "long since been known not to significantly affect the risky behavior of youth". Even worse, according to the Chief, is informing youth about drugs which are available and seized cars displaying the DARE logo which deliver the wrong message about what drug dealers can afford to drive.

Chairman Ellis expressed support for the Chief's decision. He voiced his view that there should be excitement over new possibilities which open as a result.

Comm Ochs stated that more time is needed to consider the memoranda Cpl Deluca handed out. Comm Grosso read out loud those portions of the memoranda which supported the Chief's position. Motion by Comm Ochs that the DARE decision be tabled to the next meeting; seconded by Comm McCollam – the motion did not carry. With a vote of 2 to 2, Chairman Ellis broke the tie by voting not to table the DARE decision.

b) Dispatcher Resignation

Chief Finch reported on the resignation of dispatcher Michael Connors. The Department has begun the replacement process.

c) Court Awarded Vehicle

Chief Finch requested that the Commission allow the Department to keep rather than sell the court awarded 2003 Tahoe SUV for use as an auxiliary vehicle.

Motion by Chairman Ellis to give the court awarded 2003 Tahoe to the Police Department for police work; seconded by Comm Grosso – unanimous.

6. Correspondence:

Ms Volpati – Judd Rd

In her letter Ms Volpati mentioned signage consisting of an electronic message board for Judd Rd. Lt Dickinson told the Commission that Ms Volpati has to go through Planning and Zoning for this. Her letter was merely a "heads up" of her intent.

7. Chief's Report

a) Training Report

Lt Kennedy's training reports were in the hands of the Commission.

b) New GPS pilot law

Chief Finch made Commissioners aware of a pilot program utilizing a court ordered GPS monitoring device placed on individuals to monitor them on a map. The same device can be voluntarily worn by potential victims so they can access their proximity to the potential perpetrator.

c) ACO regionalization

Still waiting to be finalized according to the Chief. Currently it is in the hands of the First Selectman and Town Attorney.

d) Drug Take-Back

A one-day State wide program, handled locally by Off Lynn Morris and Det Deluca resulted in 3 boxes (46 pounds) of pills being turned in by the public. The idea is to not have people flush them down the toilet and pollute the environment. There was not much time to advertise the program this first year. The intent is to run the program every year.

e) New Hire

Chief Finch announced the hire of a new police officer, Courtney Whaley who will attend the Academy shortly

f) Injuries

Two officers are out with injuries.

Chief Finch mentioned that the Exchange Club is currently locating and honoring recent veterans. Off O'Farrell and Off Holland have been invited.

8. Commissioner Comments:

Chairman Ellis thanked those who showed up at the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting where the issue of a temporary ball field using land designated for the new police department was discussed. The application was eventually withdrawn. Chairman Ellis also expressed support for the Chief in regards to the DARE program stating that only with change can improvements be made.

At 7:25 motion by Chairman Ellis to adjourn; seconded by Comm Ochs – unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted

Ferdinand Miller Jr.



Secretary