

Old Saybrook Police Commission
Regular Meeting
October 26, 2020
MINUTES

A regular meeting of the Old Saybrook Police Commission was held on Monday, October 26, 2020 via ZOOM. The meeting was recorded and can be viewed in its entirety at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htUHkdQKHw4&t=131s>

Present: Chairman Keeney, Vice Chairman Reid, Secretary Maselli, Commissioners Von Dassel, Quish, Shippee and Wilcox. Chief Spera and Captain DePerry was present from the Department of Police Services.

I. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Keeney called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. He then led those in attendance with the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Discussion, and Possible Action Concerning Meeting Minutes

a. Regular Meeting – September 28, 2020

Commissioner Quish made a motion to accept the September 28, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes. Vice Chairman Reid seconded the motion.

Commissioner Shippee stated that on page 3 she asked if Grossman and Harbor Motors will service the vehicles and she stated that it would be a goodwill gesture if we purchase locally.

Commissioner Shippee also stated that right before adjournment Commissioner Wilcox explained that Secretary Maselli told people could not make complaints during public comment. That was after Commissioner Von Dassel suggested they do that.

Chairman Keeney stated Secretary Maselli is correct.

Commissioner Wilcox stated he doesn't agree with Secretary Maselli and if someone had an emergency they would call 911.

The motion to accept the September 28, 2020 with the above additions passed with a vote of 7 in favor, 0 against and 0 abstaining.

III. Discussion and Possible Action Concerning a Matter of Public Concern.

Commissioner Shippee made a motion to switch agenda items #3 & #4. Commissioner Wilcox seconded the motion.

The Commission discussed moving Comments from the Public up to agenda item #3 and putting Discussion and Possible Action Concerning a Matter of Public Concern to agenda #4.

The motion to switch agenda items #3 & #4 did not pass with a vote of 4 against, 3 in favor and 0 abstaining with Chairman Keeney, Secretary Maselli, Commissioner Quish and Commissioner Von Dassel opposing.

Chairman Keeney read a letter to the Commission and to the members of the public. The letter stated the following:

The Old Saybrook Police Commission understands and acknowledges that we are currently in a challenging environment. Events in other parts of the country have led to a growing mistrust of police officers. This is amplified by social media posts from those not directly involved in a matter that typically do not portray the entire collection of facts regarding any event. Emotional responses from often well-intended citizens make the acceptance of actual facts even more challenging.

A recent call for police services in Old Saybrook resulted in some negative social media postings. In this case, the involved family did also follow the correct procedures and contacted the police department directly expressing their concerns.

They then accepted an invitation to meet with the several members of the police department as well as our First Selectman, Mr. Carl Fortuna. The result of this meeting was satisfactory to everyone including the family and provided growth opportunities for law enforcement professionals. Additionally the state organization that had originally expressed some concerns, also posted a statement supporting the outcome of these actions after consulting with the family.

Even though it was not required, Chief Spera requested that the Chief Law Enforcement Officer for Middlesex County, State's Attorney Michael Gailor, review the audio and video footage of the investigation. The State's Attorney found no wrong doing by any of the officers. This was first communicated independently to me as Chairman of the Police Commission and to the First Selectman, but until tonight, not communicated publicly. The Commission thanks States Attorney Gailor for his time on this matter and respects and accepts his unbiased assessment.

There are times like this that we wish we could share details of events from the beginning to help ward off emotional responses tied to incomplete or inaccurate information. We understand that our police officers are human and interacting with the police sometimes leads to hurt feelings. It is my hope, that we all continue to move forward, using all lessons learned, to create a better tomorrow.

The volunteer members of this Commission wish to reassure the community that we will continue to prioritize the proper training and supervision of our employees so they in turn can properly and professionally serve.

The Commission discussed the matter.

Commissioner Wilcox stated that he asked this item be put on agenda and he expected to be able to review body cam and dispatch records to see if anything had gone wrong. He said Chief Spera refused stating that he deemed it an uncorroborated allegation. He thinks Chief is wrong on the law. Would like Chief to address how a report of stolen street sign become an event with 4 officers responding. He would also like addressed why the officers didn't know about the witness stating it was a vehicle with RI plates.

Commissioner Shippee stated she was disappointed in the Police Commission as a whole for not responding to this sooner. She asked why they were not the body of people to suggest it be investigated.

Secretary Maselli stated an investigation was done by the states attorney.

Commissioner Shippee asked why the Police Commission was not the body suggesting it be investigated.

Commissioner Shippee stated she feels this should have been a Special Meeting.

Chairman Keeney stated Commission has two options. They can vote as commission to view body cam tapes and open an investigation. Or they can honor the privacy request from family involved and accept the statement from the family that they are satisfied with the outcome of the complaint and accept the detailed account from Chief Spera and analysis from Michael Gailor.

Commission Wilcox stated he doesn't understand why Commissioners cannot investigate on their own. He stated that the dispatch records are missing from Chairman Keeney's record and should be listened to. He also stated that Michael Gailor didn't review the dispatch records and when he spoke with Michael Gailor he stated he didn't assess if it was an appropriate use of officers.

Secretary Maselli questioned Commission Wilcox asking if he just stated that he spoke to the States Attorney about Police business.

Commission Wilcox stated yes he did.

Secretary Maselli stated that it is inappropriate to do that. He stated that is not just his opinion but it's the rules. He asked Attorney McHale for his guidance.

Attorney McHale stated Police Commission takes action by a vote of the body. Individual commissioner cannot conduct individual investigations unless it was under the direction of a subcommittee. He stated Secretary Maselli's concerns are legitimate.

Commissioner Shippee asked if Attorney Cronin agrees with this.

Attorney McHale stated that he and Attorney Cronin have worked together regarding handling the correspondence and in the draft by-law it states that individual Commissioner shall not investigate personnel matters.

The Commission discussed the fact that the number of officers who show up to a call is an operational matter.

There was no motion. The Commission moved on to item #4.

IV. Comments from the Public

Chairman Keeney read the rules of public comments which are in the Police Commission by-laws.

Public Comment was given by Frank Glowski.

Public Comment was given by Chloe Carlson.

Public Comment was given by Mark Hand.

Public Comment was given by Laura Gray.

Public Comment was given by Keith Margotta.

Public Comment was given by Keith Smith.

V. Executive Reports

a. Financial

i. FY 21 Status

Chief Spera stated that all financials were included in the Commission packet that they all received. He stated that the legal line item is in the red and will continue to be used but that the entire budget will end in the black again. He asked if the Commission had any questions.

The Commission had no questions regarding FY21 financials.

b. Administrative

i. Police Operations Briefing

1. Fleet Replacement Program

Updates, Discussion and Possible Actions

10 vehicles have been purchased from state contract. The state shops around for the best price and they then offer the ability to all dealerships to match or beat that price. Two dealerships were willing to match and or beat that price. The maintenance will be done locally.

2. Executive Report

a. Employee Status Report

Sergeant that was out is currently back.

Dispatcher Paradis has reached tenure and will be leaving in December. The Department wishes him well.

b. Labor Matters – Update

A off the record settlement has been submitted.

Will be working with the dispatch union on how records work will be done until the full time dispatch slot is filled.

3. Correspondence

Chairman Keeney discussed the letter he received from the Board of Finance that was included in the correspondence packet.

He stated that he will respectfully be declining their invitation to attend the November Board of Finance meeting regarding funding the police study as no request from the Police Commission has been made.

VI. Discussion and Possible Action concerning a new Commission By-Law Concerning Police Commission Correspondence.

Attorney McHale presented the new proposed bylaw regarding Commission correspondence. The Commission discussed the proposed bylaw.

The Commission discussed making a few minor edits to the proposal for ratification next month.

Secretary Maselli made a motion to accept the proposed policy change for ratification next month. Commissioner Quish seconded the motion. The motion to accept the proposed policy change for ratification next month passed with a vote of 5 in favor, 2 against and 0 abstaining with Commissioner Wilcox and Commissioner Shipping opposing.

VII. Comments from The Chief of Police

Increased COVID concerns in town, numbers are going up.

Shorts4Saybrook raised \$28,365.61 for the Cares Committee.

Not cancelling Halloween but things will be different this year.

Will still be doing some sort of give the cops the bird just not sure how that will look.

No holiday open house, but will still be collecting toys for families in need.

Meeting with the registrar regarding voting safety.

VIII. Comments from Commissioners

Commissioner Shippee was disappointed in the Commission for not reacting quicker and in the future she would like to see a special meeting be held.

Secretary Maselli thought it was great so many people attended but frustrated and wants to remind citizens to respect family's request for privacy.

Commissioner Von Dassel concerned with Facebook post, two sides to every story hoping Commission would get to bottom. In future Commissioner should request Special Meeting.

Vice Chairman Reid asked if Department members are getting COVID tested.

Chief Spera said only one or two have had to be tested.

Commissioner Quish stated it's a tough job being a police officer, she knows first-hand as her father was the Chief of Police in Hartford and she has seen the positive difference in the community here. Old Saybrook Police took immediate accountability in regards to this complaint.

Chairman Keeney spoke about working towards accreditation for the Department. Stated he should have called Special Meeting. Agreed with Commissioner Quish stating Chief responded appropriately.

IX. Adjournment

Secretary Maselli made a motion to adjourn. Vice Chairman Reid seconded the motion. The motion to adjourn passed with a vote of 7 in favor and 0 opposed, 0 abstaining.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:

Jennifer D'Amato
Records Clerk for the Old Saybrook Police Commission