

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS MEETING
MONDAY, JUNE 13, 2022 7:00 P.M.
ZOOM CONFERENCE MEETING**

Chrmn. Smith called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. ROLL CALL

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Sam Bergami, Bill Bevan, Alberta Jagoe, John Mager, Sharon Marrone, David Rubenstein, Richard Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Police Chief Mello; Deputy Chief Rojee; Capt. DelMonte, Officer Hemperly; Ald. Pacelli, Aldermanic Liaison; D. Candido, Secty.

A quorum was present to conduct the business of the meeting.

2. CONSIDERATION OF APPOINTMENTS - none

3. CITIZEN COMMENTS – available via social media

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

It was moved by Vice Chrmn. Bergami and seconded by Comm. Bevan to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 9, 2022 as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Consideration of Chief on Matters of Administration

Chief Mello shared with those present that at this time close of the fiscal year is 3 weeks away and the Department ran out of overtime funds in January. He added with the exception of the Covid year, he did not recall a \$50,000 deficit as is the case at the close of this budget. He added this is indicative of the fact that officers are not taking overtime shifts that are posted and he also explained the Department will be returning \$800,000 in regular wages based on the number of staff openings.

As well he referred to the 2021 Oyster Festival and the fact that a \$12,000 reimbursement for officers was realized from the committee but in fact the actual cost to the city was \$20,000.

With regard to the parking recommendations for Walnut Beach and as a result of the recent incidents, twice in a short period of time which is extreme, the plan needs to be revisited. He explained these incidents are the result of bad behavior on the part of people who came to our beach and did not listen to officers' requests. He explained several arrests arising from those incidents have been made and two of the body cams that were taken have been recovered.

Further, it was noted a meeting is scheduled with the Downtown Business Association to address parking modifications in Milford center as well as requests for additional enforcement in the center.

Chief Mello reported the current academy is going well and it is scheduled to end in December.

Chief Mello stated he has been invited to appear at the next Board of Aldermen meeting to discuss what has been happening at our beaches and the current crime trends in the city.

Chrmn. Smith asked if the overtime issue could correlate to the less than ideal police coverage.

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Chief Mello stated we know that the overtime budget is severely underfunded in some cases. He explained it is possible to project money needed for contractual days off, as well we have to post 60% of vacation and time off and in the summer months it is necessary to go beyond that. He stated we know when the budget is approved there will not be sufficient monies for unforeseen crimes. He explained now that we are looking at 3 weeks remaining in the fiscal year, it is obvious that officers are not signing on for overtime and we are having minimal officers sign on. He added officers have worked a 12 or 16 hour shift but not more than that, especially during the summer. Such long shifts puts the Department at a reduced level of officers and at times it is necessary to take officers from their regular shift which leaves coverage very light for the rest of the city and the Post Road area. He added it is also the impact of not having enough officers. Chief Mello stated between now and mid-August the Department will see 4-6 additional openings and we also know we have officers who will be fulfilling their military obligations during the summer months.

Chief Mello stated Milford center has become a destination in the evenings and as good as that is, it also speaks to the challenges this Department faces.

Chrmn. Smith noted that on behalf of this Commission, he is not alone in having heard exhaustive concerns about Walnut Beach and he asked the Chief to provide a response as to what to tell people when they make comments about this situation.

Chief Mello noted this post-Covid behavior was also seen last summer and this year we are using available officers we have and we must look at having enough resources to address the specific need. He referred to the "Blue Plan" which provides for calling in other departments for assistance if necessary.

He explained that Walnut Beach has easy access from 3 different areas and it is necessary to go back to having everyone enter thru the same entrance. He noted the beach goers carry in coolers or bags and our officers do not know what they are carrying in. As well he stated we see many people come to that beach and it is a difficult beach to close and a plan for a permanent fence will assist in closing off the beach. Chief Mello noted the officers also have to address the marijuana use issue on the beach as well as any alcohol violations which is a city violation.

Chief Mello explained there are times you see large crowds become belligerent and that is not the time to have officers go in and use force. He explained there is a city ordinance in place regarding such violation and it is in contrast to our Use of Force Plan. Further he stated he did not want our officers to use force that is disproportionate to the crime. He explained in the most recent incident, we started to be more aggressive with the alcohol and substance violations and we put officers on the beach so people would see them. As well the Department continues to monitor parking and we know that many people are parking in the restricted zones. He noted parking attendants will be hired to help with those parking issues. It was noted as officers started addressing parking violations and also began to get reports of fights, it was obvious the crowds became more aggressive.

He added he is hoping by addressing the fencing around the parking lot which will only be for residents, stickers required, will be helpful and the parking plan to be put in place will create additional restrictions such as non-residents will have to pay to park which will avoid having the majority of the people on our beaches be from out of town. It was also noted that there has been

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significant resources at Walnut Beach because of incidents that occurred last year and those additional officers will come from additional patrol.

Chrmn. Smith stated he is proud to tell people that we have a plan for fencing, parking, restrictions and perhaps Park, Beach & Rec can assist with looking in those coolers and bags that are carried on the beaches since we cannot.

Chief Mello also raised the issue of telling those individuals who are using marijuana or drinking beer to leave the beach and it is smart policing to get them away from the crowd and then address the offense/matter. He emphasized the importance of addressing de-escalation and walk away from using force.

Chrmn. Smith stated he is proud of the work of our officers adding their response is thoughtful, measured and takes a lot of time.

Chief Mello stated there is a staff meeting scheduled in the coming week and he will share the comments from the chairman made on behalf of the Commission.

Comm. Bevan noted another access point is the boardwalk coming from Silver Sands and Chief Mello explained that has to be a Park & Rec matter and it was decided it would be prudent to have Park & Rec staff be placed at the entrances to the park via the lot or the boardwalk. He added if a Park & Rec staff tells someone at the beach for a specific reason and they do not, then the PD can be called.

Chief Mello added the issues seem to start to die down after schools and colleges close their academic year and he noted if last year was any indication, we did not see this behavior continue into the summer.

6. Report on Planning and Zoning Requests

- a. Splash Car Wash – 1553 Boston Post Rd – It was moved by Comm. Rubenstein and seconded by Comm. Bevan to accept Traffic Division recommendation regarding Splash Car Wash – 1553 Boston Post Rd as presented. Motion carried unanimously.
- b. Special Permit Mixed Use Building – 852 Boston Post Rd – It was moved by Comm. Mager and seconded by Comm. Bevan to accept Traffic Division recommendation regarding Special Permit Mixed Use Building – 852 Boston Post Rd.as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

7. ACCEPTANCE OF REPORTS

It was moved by Vice Chrmn. Bergami and seconded by Comm. Marrone to approve the following reports:

- a. Special Investigations Unit Report
- b. Detective Bureau Report
- c. Crime Prevention Unit Report
- d. Traffic Division and Licensing Unit Report

Comm. Mager noted the numbers in the Detective Bureau investigations continually show an uptick and Chief Mello explained there is an uptick in the summer and they have been doing good work in

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light of the need for additional staff. Based on that there has been some restructuring for the summer and for example place one of the officers that was in the Task Force in the Detective Bureau. Motion carried unanimously.

8. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a. Unclaimed/Found Money from Evidence (various cases) \$587.37 - Chief Mello noted this matter was tabled at the May meeting in order to research the statute regarding unclaimed/found money.

It was moved by Comm. Rubinstein and seconded by Comm. Mager to remove from the table Unclaimed/Found Money from Evidence (various cases) \$587.37 tabled at the May 9, 2022 meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

Comm. Mager thanked Chief Mello for providing the pertinent information.

It was moved by Comm. Rubenstein and seconded by Comm. Mager to approve Unclaimed/Found Money from Evidence (various cases) \$587.37 and place funds in the Officer Wellness Donation Account as recommended by Chief Mello. Motion carried unanimously.

9. NEW BUSINESS

a. Review of Parking Restrictions – Walnut Beach Neighborhood – Chief Mello stated Officer Hemperly had completed this review based on a request from City Hall and will be sharing the recommendations.

Officer Hemperly noted the recommendations are similar to what was put in place during Covid. He explained the streets which branch out from Walnut Beach will be resident only parking and would require resident parking stickers (effective 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.) during the beach season. The Walnut Beach parking lot will be for residents only and require sticker and will have a towing enforced violation associated. As well E. Broadway to Naugatuck Avenue south to Monroe will provide for non-resident parking to allow for local business parking. Park & Rec are making “Beach Closed” signs to be posted in the area should capacity issues arise. He stated hopefully it will keep pedestrian and cyclist safe and provide information as well as alleviate high volume that was noted in the residential area.

Chief Mello added the only towing area will be at the metered stops. He explained it is necessary to make sure the vehicle is not just 10-15 minutes late as the time it takes to wait for the wrecker to arrive, hook up the vehicle and leave can be about 45 minutes to an hour and it is not practical to keep an officer tied up with that wait time.

Chrmn. Smith felt the residents will embrace this and hoped this information will be communicated to the neighbors.

Chief Mello stated this is the 2nd year we have had a chaotic start and people know we have to take such extreme measures to create control. It was also noted it may not be possible to tow every car in parking violation if we do not have the manpower to do that.

Comm. Mager complimented Officer Hemperly for a comprehensive report noting he liked the provision for residents to obtain permit in the event they have out of town guests. He asked if any consideration had been given to reaching out to companies on the tow list to see if they would be agreeable to take “stand by towing”.

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Chief Mello there had been communication from a towing company who would agree and others who expressed concern about it. He added it would be necessary to change the regulations for that to happen and he would assume there would be opposition based on the call he had recently received.

Chrmn. Smith asked how would residents know they can apply for special permits for parking and Chief Mello noted that information will be available through social media, Department website or the minutes of this meeting. He added it is important to note these accommodations are for Walnut Beach only and there will be requests from other areas as well and those requests will be considered on a case by case basis. He added residents can email the Traffic Division to request parking waivers for a specific date.

Officer Hemperly noted the restrictions are in place through September 30th.

Chief Mello also noted this should not be used by people who want to have their friends use a special permit to park for the beach.

Comm. Rubenstein echoed Comm. Mager's comments regarding the comprehensive report. He noted in light of out of town traffic coming into the city, would it be possible to log into the DOT signs on 8\I-95 posting beach parking lot full and Chief Mello stated we typically do not see the lot full often and he did not feel there will be a capacity issue unless the bad behavior issue surfaces again.

Chrmn. Smith asked if the Mayor is in agreement with the recommendation and Chief Mello stated he had been provided with a copy of the report and he had not made any objections.

Motion was made by Vice Chrmn. Bergami and seconded by Comm. Rubenstein to accept the Review of Parking Restrictions – Walnut Beach Neighborhood as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

b. Bike lanes – Meadowside Rd/Pumpkin Delight to Seaside Ave. – Motion was made by Comm. Mager and seconded by Comm. Bevan to accept Traffic Division recommendation regarding Bike lanes – Meadowside Rd/Pumpkin Delight to Seaside Ave. Motion carried unanimously.

c. 94 Brewster Road – No Parking Signs – Motion was made by Comm. Rubenstein and seconded by Comm. Mager to accept Traffic Division recommendation regarding 94 Brewster Road – No Parking Signs.

d. Radar Speed Signs – East Broadway between Silver Sands/Surf Ave – Addendum – Motion was made by Comm. Mager and seconded by Comm. Bevan to approve Radar Speed Signs – East Broadway between Silver Sands/Surf Ave – Addendum.

Chief Mello explained this request was denied last month based on the cost of the signs associated with it. He noted the Department did a study of the traffic pattern on East Broadway and looked at the accident history and speed. As well, it was not realized that the signs were purchased by a resident and donated to the city and were the same signs that Public Works had previously purchased for another location. Chief Mello noted the signs are solar and there would be no cost for electric power associated with them. He explained a favorable recommendation is needed on this in order to submit this to DOT for their approval. Further he stated this can only improve the situation on that street.

Comm. Mager thanked the individual who purchased and donated the signs.

Motion carried unanimously.

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10. COMMENDATIONS – none to report

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION –

Chief Mello explained that upon the guidance of our City Attorney, conversation regarding this particular issue should be in public session but questioning of any witness should be in executive session. As well, performance issues will be discussed in public session.

Deputy Chief Rojee explained one incident dates back to late April when Officer Emily Mills was given a written reprimand for failure to follow instructions; noting she had been on duty and made arrangements to work on a different case which overlapped into the time she was to work on a special assignment and she did not indicate a replacement for the case.

Consideration of Report of Chief of Police on matters concerning the Appointment, Employment, Performance, Evaluation, Health or Dismissal of Department Employees

- a. Consideration of the performance of one employee.

Motion was made by Vice Chrmn. Bergami and seconded by Comm. Marrone to adjourn to Executive Session at 7:56 p.m. for above noted matter. Motion carried unanimously

(Commissioners present, Chief Mello and Deputy Chief Rojee remained for Executive Session).

Motion was made by Vice Chrmn. Bergami and seconded by Comm. Jagoe to reconvene in public session at 8:10 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion was made by Comm. Mager and seconded by Comm. Rubenstein to uphold the proposed discipline as discussed in Executive Session. Motion carried unanimously.

Before adjourning Chief Mello shared the following for informational purposes only noting that one officer will be leaving the Department and moving out of state shortly and two officers will be retiring.

Being no further business to discuss, it was moved by Vice Chrmn. Bergami and seconded by Comm. Jagoe to adjourn at 8:12 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Recorded by Diane Candido

Submitted to City Clerk: June 15, 2022