

WOODBIDGE BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS

SPECIAL MEETING

MINUTES

March 13, 2017

A Special Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Police Commissioners was held on Monday, March 13, 2017 at 6:00 p.m., in the Main Meeting Room at Woodbridge Town Hall.

The purpose of this Special Meeting was to discuss Personnel Matters regarding the reassignment of personnel on Special Assignment, proposed Police Department Budget cuts and take action, as appropriate.

PRESENT: Commissioner Robert Berke, Commissioner Matthew Gilbride, Commissioner Stephen Falcigno, Commissioner Deborah Desir, Commissioner Deborah Fried, Board of Finance Liaison - Andrew Esposito, Jr.

OTHERS: Chief Frank P. Cappiello, Deputy Chief Raymond S. Stuart, Lt. Jeffery Leiby, Administrative Assistant Janice Innocenzi

- Chairman Robert Berke called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m.
- Chairman Berke began by explaining that this meeting was called to address staffing concerns that were brought to the Board's attention last week by members of the Police Department, with concern for officers' safety, to redeploy people to fill some essential vacancies. Some of those vacancies were three officers on special assignment (including the 2 SROs and 1 assigned to the Statewide Narcotics Task Force).
- Chairman Berke noted that although the agenda does not have a section on Public Comment, it was the Board's intention to have Public Comment.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Among those speaking in support of keeping the School Resource Officers included:

- Bob Gilbert, Superintendent, Beecher Road School
- Margaret Hamilton, Chair, Board of Education
- Beth Heller, Deputy First Selectman
- Michelle Wachsmann, parent (provided a copy of a petition currently in circulation)
- Bob McSherry, parent
- Sean Rowland, Chief – Woodbridge Volunteer Fire Department
- Lauren & Dan Esposito, parents
- Marge, parent
- Paul Testa, parent
- Ed Martocchio, parent
- Nancy Luciano, parent
- David Lober
- Woodbridge Police Officer Rich Monaco said that the Police Commission did what the officers' asked of them last week; they tried to help patrol with staffing. He also said that Officer Vincent Lynch and Officer Scott Prentice are the first line at the schools; it is vital to keep those officers in the schools. We have to find a way to find the money to keep them in the schools.

EXECUTIVE SESSION AND ACTION, AS APPROPRIATE:

The Board voted unanimously (Falcigno/Desir) to move into Executive Session at 6:35 p.m. to address safety issues related to the SROs. (Board members, Mr. Esposito and Chief Cappiello adjourned to another room for the Executive Session.)

- Commissioner Fried joined the Executive Session at 6:51 p.m.
- The Board moved out of Executive Session at 7:00 p.m.

ACTION TAKEN ON MATTERS DISCUSSED DURING EXECUTIVE SESSION:

- There were no motions made, no votes taken.
- Chairman Berke reminded everyone that the reason we considered using a public forum for public comment is because there were a number of officers that raised some serious safety concerns and they were fearful of the position that they were being placed in being short several officers to fill all the patrol slots. The Board was very concerned about that and at the time that we had this meeting, we weren't exactly sure what the budget cuts would be, so we had to figure out ways to work within the constraints that we have. We were looking at avenues to support those open positions and reaching that conclusion, there were a number of areas that we had assigned that were potential areas to look at for redeployment to fill those immediate needs.

Obviously, there is enormous support for having an SRO at Beecher; after discussing this with the other Board members, the SRO at both schools should remain at the schools until the end of this fiscal year which is June 30th and there won't be any interruption with the services that are currently present.

Commissioner Berke said we need to fill those spots in patrol urgently and he asked the Chief to reassign the officer in the Statewide Narcotics Task Force back to patrol. There are two new recruits that were hired that will not be able to be utilized in patrol until 2018 and at that point, when they come on board, we can reassess whether to reassign someone to the Statewide Narcotics Task Force.

Commissioner Gilbride said that he has had children at Beecher and knows, through his children, that experience and the DARE Program and what Officer Lynch has done. No one here was taking any actions as a result of inappropriate or unsatisfactory feelings towards the officers with respect to the schools, it was primarily motivated for the safety of the officers and that is one of our main concerns. We took some action, but we wanted to hear from the public and Chairman Berke did an excellent job suggesting that we continue it to today to get the feedback from the public and the turnout has been reflective of what some of us expected to get, but it is still in the reality of what we have to deal with, so I think the action that we are asking the Chief to take is appropriate and I hope you share our feeling. We wanted to make sure you were a part of this and it is a process going forward; we are not going to do things unilaterally; we do have to make decisions at times, but I am glad you were all here and we were able to hear what you had to say.

Chairman Berke stated on behalf of the Board, he'd like to thank Officer Lynch; I think we are very lucky as a community to have this incredible person filling that slot and I had a chance to look at the petition and at the time I looked at it the numbers were growing, I think there were about 296 people that signed the petition and about 100 people that commented and I think he should be proud of the job he is doing. As it relates to those patrol openings, one will be filled by the officer assigned to the Statewide Narcotics Task Force. Chairman Berke asked the Chief to begin the task of searching for candidates to fill another patrol position from the pool of people for certified, as soon as possible.

Commissioner Gilbride also noted that the School Resource Officers are also accessible by the Chief for emergency situations if something were to arise, so if there are officers responding that need backup, the officers at the schools can and should be called to protect their brother and sister officers, so we are making sure the Chief is aware that he has the discretion to reassign on an emergency basis.

Chairman Berke added that there were some other issues that came up unrelated to filling these immediate vacancies, were issues regarding next fiscal year and our budget. He said he understands that Amity has placed the Amity SRO within their budget, we are asking Beecher to place the SRO in their budget; I think it is appropriate to have the SRO out of the Police Department budget. As it stands right now, that SRO payment comes out of the group of men and women that we can use in patrol and we obviously have a significant shortage and there seems to be enormous community support, but I would expect that would be a positive result.

Chief Cappiello said that we have had concerns over the past weeks, especially after members of the Department expressed their concerns last week, but we all realize the concerns of our officers, our community and our students. We are all in this together; we are all looking to work together with the Board of Finance, the Police Commissioners, the Boards of Education, the First Selectman and the Board of Selectmen. They are trying to work with us to balance all issues involved in this current environment. To have everyone working together and being open-minded and listening to each other, as you saw tonight, we took a step in the right direction and we will continue to progress that way. Thank you all for your support.

Commissioner Falcigno said he wanted to reiterate what Chairman Berke said, but said he wanted to be explicitly clear that these events and the decisions we're making, as Officer Monaco mentioned, were really a result of our Commission Meeting on Tuesday night. I have been on this Commission for a few years and I have never had as many police officers attend our meeting as we did the other night. Every one of them voiced their displeasure in the situations that we were putting them in and I felt that the overall safety of the community was possibly at risk. That was the impression I got after listening to our uniformed officers voice their opinions on their staffing, staffing levels and the shortages that we have. That's why this became such an important decision to make for us because we were listening to the officers, we were complying with what they felt was in their best interest and the town's best interest. It certainly was not meant in any way, shape or form, to demean or diminish anything that the SRO Officers were doing, but as a Commission, the next morning we found out that our budget had been reduced, so one kind of fed off of the other. But, again, this is not meant in any way to diminish what anybody is doing at either school.

ADJOURNMENT:

The Board voted unanimously (Falcigno/Gilbride) to adjourn the Special Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Police Commissioners at 7:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Janice Innocenzi

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Administrative Assistant

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MOTIONS

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