

**OLD SAYBROOK POLICE COMMISSION**  
**Special Meeting**  
**January 11, 2012**  
**MINUTES**

A special meeting of the Old Saybrook Police Commission was held on Wednesday, January 11, 2012, at the Old Saybrook Fire House.

**Present:** Chairman Burnham, Vice Chairman Metsack, Commissioners Dunlap, Sparaco, Winkler, Finch and Zemienieski. Chief Spera and Lieutenant Roche were also present from the Department of Police Services. Chairman LaMay and Board of Finance liaisons to the Police Department, Vice Chairman Westerson and Board Member O'Neil were also present.

**I. Call to Order**

Chairman Burnham called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Commissioner Zemienieski asked Commissioner Dunlap about private meetings he held with First Selectman Carl Fortuna and if he could elaborate as to the agenda for those meetings.

Commissioner Dunlap responded that he had met with First Selectman Fortuna one time in regards to an article he found in Police Chief Magazine about setting goals for a municipal police department and how to derive appropriate staffing levels based on those goals. Commissioner Dunlap expressed that he approached his meeting with the First Selectman as a citizen and not as a police commissioner and he wanted to know if the First Selectman had established goals for the Old Saybrook Police Department. Commissioner Dunlap also reported that the First Selectman had not yet set goals for the Police Department or for the Town of Old Saybrook. Commissioner Dunlap concluded that staffing levels should be met based on predetermined goals and target numbers.

Commissioner Zemienieski believes that all independent research should go through the Police Commission prior to making individual presentations to the First Selectman. He also stressed the importance of Police Commission presenting a unified front.

Commissioner Dunlap informed the Commission that he intended to continue meeting privately with the First Selectman but that he would preface all future meetings with the statement that he is only representing himself as a citizen and not speaking on behalf of the Police Commission.

Commissioner Zemienieski expressed concern and said that he felt these private meetings were inappropriate. He believes that it might be impossible to distinguish between the role of citizen and Police Commissioner, which creates a conflict of interest that should prohibit private meetings from occurring. He concluded in saying that the Police Commissioner bylaws are clear that the Commission does not operate as a fraction but rather as a whole.

Chairman Burnham concluded that it is the role of the Police Commission to set goals for the Police Department, not the role of the First Selectman.

## **II. Comments from the Public**

A citizen asked if there was a copy of the budget or last meeting's minutes available. Chairman Burnham responded that there were no spare copies of the proposed budget because the proposed budget was the topic of the evening's meeting, therefore it did not yet exist. She also added that meeting minutes could be found online at the town's website.

## **III. Presentation, Discussion and Action Pertaining to the Proposed 2012-2013 Capital and Operating Budget**

Chief Spera asked for a moment of silence for the passing of part time Patrolman Don Selby. Chairman Burnham acknowledged the request and called for a moment of silence.

Chief Spera took a moment to ensure that each Commissioner had received the revised budget spreadsheet and narrative packet.

Commissioner Dunlap asked Chief Spera if he could ask questions during the budget presentation and Chief Spera asked for all questions to be held until the end.

Chief Spera went through each change in the revised narrative packet.

Chief Spera noted that no Commissioner had contacted him within the last week with any changes to the proposed language in the budget book.

**Personnel:** Chief Spera began his presentation with the Personnel section of the budget. He began by reminding the Police Commission that this year's personnel budget reflects two years of raises, step raises and promotions as a result of the arbitration award and the police contract. He continued in saying that Dispatch is still involved in the negotiation process so they have only been receiving step raises for the last year and a half. In regards to the Clerical staff, Chief Spera informed the Police Commission that the records professionals are part time/per diem and task specific entities of the Department. In accordance with guidance from the Police Commission, Chief Spera told the Commission that he had removed all community events from the operating budget. However, the Chief also reminded the Commission that the events will continue to be held and policing them would be paid for out of Traffic Safety Fund. Chief Spera reported that the Traffic Safety Fund is at approximately \$38,000 and funding the community events would cost approximately, \$13,500 to \$14,000.

**Fixed Costs:** Chief Spera reported that the Executive Assistant to the First Selectman requested that a 5% increase be budgeted over the current actual Health Care costs.

**Expenses and Supplies:** Chief Spera reported that Expenses and Supplies was reduced by \$6,650. The Chief attributed this reduction to some line items being reduced and other areas being funded through private donations and grants. Chief Spera pointed specifically to the Police Explorer program, which had been taken out of the operating budget completely and will be funded through private donations that already exist in an off budget municipal

account. Chief Spera also mentioned a reduction in Community Policing as supplies purchased this year will be able to be used for next year's program. Expenses related to the Canine Unit will be primarily paid for through grants and donations that will be deposited in a new off budget municipal account.

**Contractual:** Chief Spera reported that the Contractual budget has been reduced by \$17,700. Chief Spera attributed this reduction to the conclusion of the Automated Fingerprint Identification System lease and to other contractual components such as the Digital Recorder and Wireless Provider for MDT's being transferred from the Police Operating Budget to the Emergency Management budget where all costs related to the town's Emergency Communication System are funded from. In addition, Chief Spera informed the Commission that the Legal line item has been kept flat at \$20,000 as recommended by the First Selectman.

Chief Spera concluded his presentation by reminding the Police Commission that of the four main components of the operating budget, there were only two areas that he had any control over. Personnel and Fixed Costs are comprised entirely of entities such as salary, health care costs, pension contributions, etc. that are not negotiated by the Chief or by the members of the Police Commission and are contractual in nature. The two areas where the Chief does control the budget, Expenses and Supplies and Contractual, saw drastic reductions in an effort to present a budget that is as close to a 0% increase as possible.

In regards to the proposed budget Chief Spera commented that the budget had been stripped down to the bare essentials. He expressed concern about relying on donations and grants to fund necessary areas of the police budget, but also realizes that during difficult economic times some sacrifices must be made. That being said, Chief Spera continued to urge the Police Commission to provide him with the resources necessary to continue delivering superior service to the citizens of Old Saybrook. He warned that a stripped down budget could be easily over extended by one or two major, unplanned events and additional financing would need to be sought from the Board of Finance. The Chief concluded by thanking his staff for their efforts and for their superior service.

Chairman Burnham commented that she understood why the Personnel budget went up \$140,000 because of raises given for two years. She asked Chief Spera for a breakdown of how the \$140,000 was split between the two years.

Chief Spera responded that the exact number was a little more complicated to calculate because of step raise adjustments and promotions. However, he pointed out that promotions were represented in their own line item under Supplemental Personnel and that the department is undergoing more step raises than in previous years as a movement towards a younger staff in the patrolman stage of their career. Chief Spera estimated that the current fiscal year is responsible for approximately \$80,000 of the \$140,000 increase because of the 3% raise awarded through arbitration.

Commissioner Finch asked Chief Spera if the Police Department saved any money through the resignation of Patrolman Robbins.

Chief Spera explained that because Patrolman Robbins had only recently graduated from the Police Academy, there was no significant savings in replacing him with a

new officer. Had Patrolman Robbins been at a higher pay step then replacing him with someone at the lowest pay step would have resulted in a more significant payroll difference. Chief Spera added that the only savings the Department will see is the result of the new officer taking longer to reach Patrolman Step Level 2.

Chairman Burnham asked Chief Spera for clarification about how the step raises were calculated for the budget proposal.

Chief Spera explained that during contract negotiations the initial proposal made was for all employees to receive their step increase uniformly on July 1st of each year. Despite all parties being in agreement, this proposal was never officially added to any of the formal documents and thus could not be used to calculate proposed salaries. After consulting Police Union President, David Perrotti, and senior members of his staff, Chief Spera decided to revert back to the currently accepted practice of giving step raises on an employee's hire date or promotion date. As such, there are no standardized salary numbers in next year's proposal because employees are paid a portion of the year at one step and the rest of the fiscal year at the next step up depending on each officer's respective hire/promotion date.

Commissioner Finch asked Chief Spera about the accuracy of the 5% increase for health care premiums and where the number itself came from.

Chief Spera responded that the 5% increase was a number given to him from the Executive Assistant to the First Selectman whose job was negotiate this rate on the Police Department's behalf. Chief Spera explained that the 5% increase is a predication and does not necessarily reflect what the real number will be. The Chief continued in saying that he has a similar problem with gasoline and heating oil as no one can predict what the price of gasoline will be by the beginning of the next fiscal year. As such, Chief Spera coordinated with other municipal departments that use fuel to keep funding flat for the proposed 2012-2013 budget.

Commissioner Dunlap inquired about the investment made in Patrolman Robbins' training prior to his departure.

Chief Spera explained that the state of Connecticut used to have a law that required a patrolman to give two years of service with the department responsible for his or her training prior to being able to depart. The law, however, has since been repealed. Chief Spera took this opportunity to inform the Police Commission that as Old Saybrook attempts to replace senior members of the Police Department with new officers, Old Saybrook could begin to see a problem in officer retention as the Town of Old Saybrook falls either at or below the average in officer salary and has poor retirement benefits. Current retirement benefits do not provide retiring officers with health care insurance, nor does any Department overtime count towards their pension. This, combined with no cost of living adjustment, becomes unattractive to employees and forces them to seek employment with other towns that have proper, more contemporary retirement plans. With no law keeping a new officer in one place for any given amount of time an officer could receive training in one area and then leave to another town with better benefit packages. Chief Spera also reminded the Commission that a new officer must complete 36 weeks of

training before they are a useable asset so waiting to hire a new police officer to replace a departed member of the staff is generally not a sensible idea because of the 36 week delay that must be incurred. The sooner you can begin the 36 weeks, the better.

Commissioner Finch asked if there was any language about an officer repaying training costs if they leave within a certain time period.

Chief Spera explained that no such language currently exists and that conversation would have to be held with the police union before any such language could be formally added. He added that the other issue with locking someone into a two year contract is the negative effect they can have on department morale if they are unhappy with their position.

Chairman Burnham concluded that the issue of retention would be dealt with in next year's negotiations and that perhaps a training wage for cadets would need to be used as a negotiating point.

Chief Spera finished by noting that a training wage had been previously discussed with the Police Union and they were willing to do a one-time, non-precedent setting training wage. In the end this proposal was abandoned at the urging of labor council for fear of violating established labor laws, specifically equal pay for equal work.

Commissioner Dunlap mentioned a proposal he had sent to the members of the Police Commission, asking for additional justification and evidence to defend current staffing levels. He asked Chief Spera if he felt the current proposal was defensible.

Chief Spera said that he felt the budget document speaks for itself. He also believes that the average citizen understands the vital role of the police and the services provided by the department. He continued in saying that each line item in the budget is defensible and additional education and exhibits could be provided to the First Selectman and the Board of Finance if necessary.

Commissioner Dunlap told the Chief that he believes the wording in the introduction is weak and too arbitrary to defend to the Board of Finance. Referring to figures from a UCR Data report, Commissioner Dunlap inquired as to why staffing levels have increased by about 20% even though the crime rate appears to be remaining steady.

Chief Spera informed Commissioner Dunlap that UCR Data reports only provide a snapshot view of certain crimes and does not fully reflect all the functions and services performed by the Police Department. As such, this report is an inadequate tool to make the conclusions that Commissioner Dunlap is attempting to make with the data. Chief Spera reminded the Commission that the introduction portion of the budget book was not meant to be an all-encompassing, detailed view of what the Police Department is responsible for, but rather a summary overview of trends in the Town of Old Saybrook and how the Police Department plans to function based on the proposed budget. Chief Spera continued that no other municipal agency presents a budget book and they provide nothing more than a spreadsheet to the Board of Finance.

Commissioner Zemienieski added that the UCR numbers were not the only facts that should be considered when the Police Commission makes its decisions. He said that the safety of the officers should be the number one priority and the Commission needs to do whatever is necessary to ensure their safety. **Commissioner Zemienieski made a motion to accept the Chief's Operating Budget as it was presented. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Metsack and opened for discussion by Chairman Burnham.**

Commissioner Dunlap asked if any other Commissioner had a problem with the language presented in the budget book. He stated that he did not have a problem with the numbers presented in the budget, only the wording of the narrative. He expressed that he does not believe that the current argument is strong enough to sell to the Board of Finance. Chief Spera responded, "I have faith in the Board of Finance. I believe good questions will be asked and good answers will be given. I believe that the proper business mindset will prevail because the average citizen understands the need for superior service."

Commissioner Zemienieski and Chairman Burnham both expressed that they believed the Chief could present any necessary justification to the Board of Finance. Chairman Burnham asked the Chief if it would be possible to provide some of the crime rate statistics for the budget document.

Chief Spera again reminded the Commission that the introduction is not meant to an all-encompassing, detailed view of the Police Department and that a chart with specific data figures will not reflect the appropriate sentiment. He continued by saying that the numbers being asked for are fluid numbers that change on a regular basis so providing a snapshot of the Old Saybrook crime rate would be ineffective and inaccurate.

Vice Chairman Metsack added that he was initially concerned with the budget proposal but reminded the Commission that their top responsibilities are the safety of the citizens of Old Saybrook and the safety of the law enforcement officers in the town. He added that if any Commissioner wanted to stiffen up the language in the document, they could write up proposals and get those proposals on the agenda for future meetings. He also urged the Commission to get the budget through the first step of passing through the Police Commission so it could be forwarded to the First Selectman.

Commissioner Dunlap asked Chief Spera if he had any measurable goals for the Police Department and if so, could they be provided in the budget document.

Chief Spera responded that internal goals existed as a result of a Strategic Planning Session held two years ago. The goals are reviewed annually by the leadership team and scored. Chief Spera added that the department is currently on track with the goals established during the Strategic Planning Session. Chief Spera added that if Commissioner Dunlap was concerned about the wording of the narrative, he could initiate a vote to take the introduction out and simply provide a spreadsheet like other municipal agencies.

Commissioner Finch made an objection to the proposed motion of voting to approve the Operating Budget as presented because the Commission had not yet discussed the Capital Budget.

Chief Spera informed Commissioner Finch that traditionally the Operating Budget and the Capital Budget were discussed and voted on separately.

Commissioner Finch inquired about the status of the Dispatchers' salary negotiations and how they affect the budget.

Chief Spera informed Commissioner Finch that negotiations are set to begin in late January and currently Dispatchers are only receiving their step raises at the recommendation of the First Selectman.

Commissioner Finch asked if there had been any indication from the First Selectman or the Board of Finance as to a target amount for the proposed budget.

Chief Spera and Chairman Burnham replied that they should come in as close to a 0% increase as possible.

Commissioner Zemienieski said that he did not wish to amend his motion and that he clarified it in saying that he wished to approve the Chief's introduction, line item justifications and figures as presented. Commissioner Zemienieski then called the question that was on the floor.

**The motion passed with a vote of 6-1 with Commissioner Dunlap dissenting.**

Capital Budget: Chief Spera referred the Police Commission to the Capital Budget spreadsheet provided to them in their budget books. Chief began by saying that vehicle purchases had made up the entire Capital Budget for the last several years and that this year would be no exception. He requested the Police Commission approve the 2012-2013 fiscal year Capital Budget proposal of replacing one SUV and two patrol sedans with new vehicles. He continued in saying that 6 vehicles currently have over 100,000 miles, one vehicle has over 150,000 miles and 1 vehicle has over 200,000 miles. He added that based on a formula provided by Ford, 1 idle engine hour is the equivalent of 33 miles that must be taken into account for service repairs. Based on that formula four vehicles have over 300,000 miles and 1 vehicle has over 200,000 miles. The Chief provided documents to the Commission that reflects the facts detailed in his presentation. The Chief also added that next year's Capital Budget would reflect a need to replace vehicles, soft body armor and the purchase of two new defibrillators.

Commissioner Dunlap asked Chief Spera if he could provide additional justification for the purchase of new vehicles, such as the anticipated costs for vehicle maintenance.

Chief Spera responded that although some costs such as oil changes and transmission flushes could be predicted, it is impossible to predict if a vehicle's transmission or engine will die in the middle of the fiscal year. In addition, the Chief expressed that he feels that the current mileage on some of the vehicles is rendering them unsafe.

**Commissioner Dunlap made a motion that the Police Commission should submit two budget proposals. The first proposal would include the cost of three new police vehicles in the Capital Budget and the other would reflect the need for additional money to be added to Vehicle Maintenance in the Operating Budget if no vehicles were purchased. There was no second to this motion.**

Chief Spera responded that he did not feel it would be appropriate to offer the Board of Finance a deal and that it is important to provide one budget that the Police Commission can get behind. The Chief again warned about the dangers of not replacing fleet vehicles and added a recent event of pursuing a suspect and not having sufficient back up because their vehicle died.

Commissioner Sparaco added that the Board of Finance doesn't like making deals and the best way to approach them is just to present all the facts.

Commissioner Zemienieski believes that the Police Commission should not sell itself short from the beginning by trying to undercut the importance of purchasing new vehicles. He continued that in addition to overused cars being a safety issue, it is also a morale issue. He stated, "We can't ask these guys to drive cars that we wouldn't drive ourselves."

Commissioner Finch asked Chief Spera for clarification about the Capital Budget numbers and why the numbers weren't more uniform from year to year.

Chief Spera explained that the new vehicles that will be delivered this fiscal year were split over two budget years and that the new vehicles must be outfitted with new police equipment because the old equipment is not compatible with the new fleet.

**Commissioner Zemienieski made a motion to approve the Capital Budget as presented in the proposed budget. Commissioner Sparaco seconded the motion. The motion passed with a vote of 6 in favor and 1 against with Commissioner Dunlap dissenting.**

#### **IV. Comments and/or Concerns from the Chief of Police**

Chief Spera concluded his presentation by expressing that his staff is performing well and are providing more services with fewer resources. He thanked everyone who was in attendance and thanked the Commissioners for their budget questions. He reminded the Police Commission that the budget book is a guide and that when questions come from the First Selectman or the Board of Finance all requested funds can be backed up. The Chief also stated that he refuses to do a "sound byte" budget presentation where only a portion of an answer or a fact is given. Chief Spera concluded that it is his mission to be as transparent as possible, which means providing all the details that are associated with a given question or concern.

#### **V. Comments and/or Concerns from Commissioners**



Commissioner Dunlap thanked the Chief for his dedication and his efforts to be transparent, but added that he felt the statistics from the UCR Data Reports should be included as additional justification for current staffing levels.

Chief Spera reminded Commissioner Dunlap that the UCR is an old system that has all but been abandoned because of the inaccuracy of its reports. He informed the Commission that the department had recently switched to the NIBRS system, which is a step in the right direction but still not the ultimate goal for crime rate statistics. Chief Spera expressed that he believes the new CAD system will give the department the capability of quickly generating accurate and up to date data concerning responses and man power usage.

Commissioner Finch asked who is responsible for making the presentation to the Board of Finance.

Chairman Burnham responded that the Chief and the Chairman are generally the members who make the formal presentation but all the Police Commission members are welcome to attend.

## **VI. Adjournment**

**Commissioner Finch made motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Winkler seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with a vote of 7 in favor and 0 against.**

*The next special Police Commission meeting is scheduled for January 23, 2012 at 7:00 p.m.  
in the Second Floor Conference Room, Old Saybrook Town Hall.*

*The meeting minutes for January 11, 2012 were prepared and respectfully submitted by:*



*Trent Gerbers  
Records Clerk for the Old Saybrook Police Commission*