

OLD SAYBROOK POLICE COMMISSION
Regular Meeting
September 24, 2012
MINUTES

A regular meeting of the Old Saybrook Police Commission was held on Monday, September 24, 2012, at the Old Saybrook Town Hall.

Present: Chairman Burnham, Vice Chairman Metsack, Commissioners Sparaco, Finch and Stuart were also present. Commissioner Dunlap participated via teleconference. Chief Spera and Lieutenant Roche were also present from the Department of Police Services.

I. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Burnham called the meeting to order at 7:00PM and led the Police Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Comments from the Public

There were no comments from the Public.

III. Workshop - Youth Services

Chief Spera acknowledged and commended Master Sergeant van der Horst on his completion of twenty-eight years in law enforcement.

Chief Spera introduced the workshop series as an assignment to the subject matter experts throughout the Department. He explained to the Commission that these workshops were not meant to impress or to garner sympathy for the Department but were merely a presentation of the facts. Chief Spera continued that the goal of these workshops was to show the Commission in detail what the Department is doing, what issues the Department is having and what the next steps are for each area. With that Chief Spera introduced Detective Barnes, Patrolman Walsh and Patrolman Kiako as presenters for the Youth Services programs.

The following is a list of questions asked during the workshop:

Commissioner Finch asked if someone under the age of 18 can be tried as an adult in the state of Connecticut.

Detective Barnes responded that the initial arrest is still processed as a juvenile but the court could determine to try a minor as an adult.

Commissioner Finch asked what happens to juveniles whose parents cannot be located within the given 6 hour time frame.

Detective Barnes replied that DCF must be contacted.

Chief Spera asked what approximate percentage of juvenile arrests are reactive, as opposed to an officer on patrol who comes across a youth doing something wrong.

Detective Barnes responded that very few, if any arrests are made without a complaint.

Commissioner Stuart asked why it looked like Juvenile Diversion Board referrals have gone down over the last year.

Detective Barnes responded that there could be a variety of reasons such as juveniles being arrested for more serious offenses, juveniles being arrested as second time offenders or juveniles from other towns who are arrested and don't have a Juvenile Diversion Board available to them in their home town.

Commissioner Finch asked what percentage of people from other towns are arrested in Old Saybrook.

Chief Spera responded that adult arrests are 2 to 1.

Detective Barnes added that about 50% to 60% of juvenile arrests are from other towns.

Chief Spera asked what a typical Juvenile Diversion Board punishment might be.

Detective Barnes responded that punishments vary from case to case. He added that one of the benefits of the Board is an opportunity to get to know the family involved and what punishment might carry the greatest impact for those involved.

Chief Spera added that he feels the Juvenile Diversion Board is an exceptional program because it gives those who qualify an opportunity to stay out of the criminal justice system and correct their actions before the need for legal intervention.

Commissioner Stuart asked Detective Barnes how many forensic interviews he has done.

Detective Barnes responded that he has done 4 so far this year.

Chief Spera asked Detective Barnes what his on call schedule is.

Detective Barnes responded that he is on call 24 hours a day, 7 seven days a week.

Chief Spera added that the reason Detective Barnes is always on call is because he must be consulted on every juvenile case that the Department handles. Chief Spera also noted that Detective Barnes receives no additional compensation for being on call around the clock.

Chairman Burnham asked how long the average juvenile case takes to see to completion.

Detective Barnes responded that there is no way to answer that question but that each case is convoluted and time consuming because of all the different rules surrounding juvenile arrests.

Chairman Burnham asked if a sworn officer has to be with a juvenile at all times.

Chief Spera responded that the answer for right now is yes but it could be possible to train a civilian to take some of this responsibility.

Commissioner Stuart commented that it appears that as officers have spent less time in schools, they have actually branched out to more locations and reached more children.

Chief Spera responded that it's true that the School Resource Officers are in more locations but the limited time they get to spend in each place cuts down on the opportunity to have a positive and meaningful interaction with the kids.

Commissioner Stuart asked for clarification about how the presentation was set up. The Commissioner specifically asked why a list of programs was presented followed by a shortened list of what the School Resource Officers are actually doing.

Chief Spera responded that he wanted to show the Commission all of the programs that the Department once provided in the schools and then show all the different programs that have been lost over the years because of a lack of time in the schools and funding for the programs.

Commissioner Stuart asked if he could see a breakdown of when specific programs were cut so he could analyze what one School Resource Officer was doing as opposed to two or several School Resource Officers.

Chief Spera responded that he might be able to provide that information but the overall picture is that the program started to deteriorate in 2005 and rather than spend the time tracking down very specific details on each when each program was ceased, he'd rather use that time in the schools performing those programs.

Commissioner Dunlap asked what drove the decision to reprioritize time out of the School Resource Officer program.

Chief Spera responded that there was a greater demand on traditional law enforcement services and rather than add additional personnel, officers were asked to spend more time on traditional patrol and investigative functions.

Chief Spera briefly spoke to each of the Old Saybrook school principals in attendance and he asked each principal about their thoughts on the School Resource Officer Program.

Each principal talked about how invaluable the School Resource Officers are to the community. They added that having a consistent and reliable presence in the schools not only humanized the police force but gave the children an outlet that they could trust as a resource. The principals concluded that the School Resource Officers are not in their schools enough and that the community either needs to fully support the program or cut it from the budget all together. But each principal asked the Commission for the program to continue and more time be allotted for the officers who are assigned to their schools.

IV. Workshop – Criminal Investigations

This topic has been tabled until the special meeting scheduled for October 8, 2012.

V. Comments from the Public

Old Saybrook Principal Michael Rafferty thanked the Police Commission for giving him and the other Old Saybrook principals the opportunity to speak about the benefits of the School Resource Officer program. He stated that this was the first time in his career that he has been formally asked to come to a Police Commission meeting. He asked that the Commission truly value the comments and requests made by each of the public school district's principals.

Grant Westerson thanked the Department for an informative presentation.

VI. Comments from the Chief of Police

Chief Spera praised his personnel for a phenomenal presentation. He reminded the Commission that these presentations take time to put together and that the Department continues to be busy. Chief Spera also added that the hiring process is still underway as the Department continues to look for quality candidates and establish a viable hiring list that can be utilized for the next 6 to 12 months. In the meantime, the Department continues to operate short staffed and operating at well below optimum levels.

Commissioner Finch asked if there were some tasks that civilians could be hired to perform.

Chief Spera responded that while this is possible, having a civilian to perform some of the community oriented services that have been traditionally performed by a police officer takes away an opportunity for an officer to have a positive interaction with a member of the public.

VII. Comments and/or Concerns from Commissioners

Commissioner Stuart asked if meeting minutes from the previous meeting were available.

Chief Spera responded that they would be available by the next meeting.

Commissioner Stuart asked about the status of the congratulatory letter for former Chief Mosca.

Chairman Burnham responded that the letter had already gone out.

Commissioner Stuart asked if it would be possible for the Chief to provide the personnel list that he asked for prior to the start of the workshop series.

Chief Spera responded that he would hand out that list as part of his presentation on personnel allocation.

Commissioner Finch asked about how the mass phone calls to people's homes are generated for missing persons.

Chief Spera responded that we use two different systems to generate missing person phone calls to but neither of them allow for callbacks to allow townspeople to know what has happened. He stated that he is posting updates on the Department's Facebook and Twitter pages.

Commissioner Finch asked for a brief update on the new vehicles.

Chief Spera responded that none of the new patrol cars were on the road yet but they were in the final phases of outfitting and should be ready in the near future. Chief Spera added that the Board of Finance has established a subcommittee to discuss the Department's request to receive a new police car early and ask for one fewer car in the upcoming budget proposal.

Vice Chairman Metsack commended Detective Barnes, Patrolman Walsh and Patrolman Kiako on an excellent presentation.

VIII. Adjournment

Commissioner Finch made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sparaco . The motion to adjourn the meeting passed with a vote of 6 in favor and 0 against.

The next regular Police Commission meeting is scheduled for October 22, 2012 at 7:00 p.m. in the First Floor Conference Room, Old Saybrook Town Hall.

The meeting minutes for September 24, 2012 were prepared and respectfully submitted by:

Trent Gerbers
Records Clerk for the Old Saybrook Police Commission