

OLD SAYBROOK POLICE COMMISSION
Law Enforcement Personnel Selection Process Subcommittee
Special Meeting
October 8, 2015
MINUTES

A Special Meeting of the Old Saybrook Police Commission was held on Thursday, October 8, 2105 at the Old Saybrook Town Hall.

Present: Secretary Stuart and Commissioners Burnham and Dunlap. Chief Spera, Lieutenant Roche and Sergeant DePerry were present from the Department of Police Services.

I. **Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance**

Commissioner Burnham called the meeting to order at 4:03 PM and led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. **Comments from the Public**

There were no comments from the public.

III. **Minutes**

- a. October 1, 2015 Special Meeting

Commissioner Dunlap made a motion to approve the October 1, 2015 Special Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Burnham. The motion to approve the October 1, 2015 Special Meeting Minutes passed with a vote of 3 in favor and 0 against.

IV. **Review and Discuss Current Entry Level Requirements for Certified Law Enforcement Personnel**

Chief Spera passed out to each Commissioner a document the Police Department drafted up sourced thought PoliceApp.com and the POST Career Website. The handout listed the Connecticut towns currently looking for entry level applicants and the minimum qualifications required to apply for employment. It listed the starting and ending salaries for each town, the age, residency, driver's license, tobacco user, criminal history and education requirements and also other miscellaneous necessities required to qualify for employment.

Chief Spera stated that there are few requirements that the Commission can change but some of some of the ones he wanted to highlight were the following; Tobacco use, residency requirements, meaning the applicant must live 30 minutes or less from the Department, no domestic violence convictions and education requirements. The residency stipulation left some questions since the Chief was under the impression that it was against the law but the Commission could seek legal advice on that should they look at changing that requirement. The no tobacco use policy seems to be working itself out since less and less people smoke nowadays and should an applicant ever be changed with domestic violence they would be removed from the process due to the fact that they are not legally allowed to possess a firearm. Two requirements that the Chief would be interested in exploring would be the education and

the minimum age requirements. He asked the subcommittee to look at the starting salary and ending salary on the handout. Applicants who do not have a town preference will scan this list and apply to the top three highest starting salaries. Old Saybrook does not offer one of the top three highest salaries. Years ago the Old Saybrook Police Department condensed their step process which allows officers to make top step salary more attainable in a shorter period of time, but Old Saybrook's top step pay is still behind many other departments.

The subcommittee, Chief Spera, Lieutenant Roche and Sergeant DePerry began to discuss Old Saybrook's employment requirements vs. other Connecticut towns.

Commissioner Dunlap stated that he also went on PoliceApp.com and the POST career website and did not see anything listed for Old Saybrook.

Lieutenant Roche stated that the Old Saybrook process ended September 1st which is why Old Saybrook is no longer listed on the websites.

Commissioner Burnham asked how Middletown can require 20/20 vision as a requirement.

Lieutenant Roche stated that they require correctable 20/20 vision.

Chief Spera highlighted UConn's starting salary to the subcommittee. While they are the lowest on the handout many college's offer free tuition for employee children. Many officers around retirement age will leave and take a college job to get free tuition for their children. Yale, University of New Haven, Southern Connecticut State University and UConn offer that incentive. Free tuition is a big bonus for a certified officer taking a university police job.

Commission Burnham asked why Southington put "see attachment" instead of listing out their requirements.

Chief Spera stated it was probably the easier for them to attach a document with all of their requirements instead of listing out all the information.

Commission Dunlap asked the subcommittee members if anyone found anything else. He also went on the national website and it was very similar there too. He asked the subcommittee if there was anything that they have learned from prior processes that if the Commission had added a different requirement would it have improved the outcome for a previous hire.

Commissioner Burnham stated that the applicants must submit a writing prompt. She recalled the Commission adding that requirement after one hiring experience.

Chief Spera stated that yes the applicants still submit a writing prompt that the high school actually provides for the Department.

Chief Spera stated that his main concern is narrowing the already small pool of applicants down even more. Three of the officers sitting at the table with the subcommittee had no college degree when they applied and were hired. It's a loss for the Department to lose a good person just because they did not attend college.

Commissioner Dunlap understood and agreed with Chief Spera's comment but added that generationally more kids are going to college today.

Chief Spera stated that he would hate to see the Department lose someone just because they can't afford to attend college. The Chief explained that the more applicants the Department has, the more testing revenue is generated. He stated that the revenue is deposited into an off budget account which in turn funds other portions of the process negating the need for additional tax payer funding when a vacancy occurs.

Commissioner Dunlap stated that the time that personnel invests is at the cost of the town.

Chief Spera agreed, but stated very little "extra compensation" is provided to personnel working with the process.

Secretary Stuart stated that some applicants pay the fee and do not show up to take the written test.

Lieutenant Roche stated that 25% do not show up to take the written test.

Sergeant DePerry stated that the Department recently conducted 51 interviews in 3 days. 6 applicants were eliminated before they even walked into the interview though a pre interview questionnaire. The Department conducts the hiring process in the most efficient and thorough way possible.

The requirement that the Chief would like to change would be to permit persons who are 20 years old to take the exam as long as they are 21 by their appointment date. This change would generate more applicants.

The subcommittee agreed with Chief Spera's statement regarding lowering the testing age to 20 years old.

Secretary Stuart stated that Wilton, CT has a no visible tattoo policy listed on the handout.

Chief Spera stated that he has heard of that policy but he found that a lot of the younger officers have tattoos. The Connecticut State Police does not allow any visible tattoos.

Secretary Stuart stated that often men and women who serve in the military have tattoos. He could see if the applicant had a naked lady, gang signs or another offensive tattoo. His concern is how the Department could deem the tattoo offensive, legally.

Chief Spera stated that he is also concerned with that issue. He feels that until the law restricts Departments, tattoos would be categorized as cultural expression giving the Department the right to deem the tattoo offensive or not.

Secretary Stuart stated that tattoos are something that would be address internally within the Department and that the Police Commission does not have to add anything to the hiring process regarding that.

Commissioner Dunlap touched back on the college degree issue. He doesn't want to limit pool too much with requiring a college degree. The writing sample would give a good indication if the applicant can write or not.

Chief Spera stated that the written exam part of the applicant test is similar to the S.A.T test.

Lieutenant Roche stated that along with the grammar and writing sections there is a math section. One-third fail the test and most fail the math section.

Chief Spera added that the Police Department, in the current hiring process, is now pushing through oral board scores of 70 and above. Twelve to thirteen applicants have had their background checks already done. There is currently 2 eligible people right now that he would consider sending for additional testing and that is before the Chief's interview. Many of the applicants are being disqualified on prior polygraphs, which the Chief added is the most valuable part of the process along with the psychological exam.

Sergeant DePerry stated that many people take the test but they are not hireable. At some point most are falling out of the process.

Commissioner Dunlap asked the subcommittee if they should recommend that more money is put into recruitment and if there are more ways to encourage and showcase the professional nature of the Old Saybrook Police Department.

Chief Spera stated that the Police Department attends career fairs at the University of New Haven, Central Connecticut State University and more but the reality is that the Old Saybrook Police Department is not that attractive on paper when it comes down to salary and benefits. There are a couple of reasons why someone is hesitant to join the Old Saybrook Police Department. First reason is it is currently not a good time to join the law enforcement career field. Second reason is the younger generation is very savvy. The applicants now shop around. They want to find the best benefits. The Old Saybrook Police Department's current pension program and no healthcare upon retirement is hurting recruiting efforts. The current pension is based upon base salary. No Department overtime factors into the pension unlike many other Departments.

Commissioner Burnham agreed stating that the base salary pension not counting overtime hours is a huge deterrent.

Sergeant DePerry added that now applicants come in before they are even offered a job asking about the contracts, healthcare options, vacation and sick days etc.

Chief Spera stated that it's a battle between all departments to find the best applicants. The Chief commented on how two recent hires were "stolen" from other hiring process' in other communities.

Secretary Stuart asked if there are other towns in the process right now that are not on this list.

Chief Spera stated that yes more departments are in the process right now and that the handout is an overview.

Chief Spera stated that he loves to promote lower level employees to the law enforcement ranks. His goal is to recruit and retain starting at the early stages. The person becomes loyal to the department. Sergeant Hackett is a great example, he stated as a dispatcher and became a patrol man and is now a Sergeant.

Commissioner Dunlap asked Chief Spera how the Department can develop the process to explore that path.

Chief Spera stated that the explorer program is a great start for a youth looking to get into the law enforcement field.

Lieutenant Roche stated that explorers are encouraged to be per diem dispatchers and that the Department does offer an internship program.

Secretary Stuart asked if there is a stipend that can be offered to the explorers should they become per diem dispatchers to sweeten the pot.

Chief Spera stated that an explorer who is now in college can come back while on vacation or on the weekends to work as a per diem dispatcher. A per diem dispatcher makes roughly \$22 dollars an hour which is much more than what someone would be paid working at a traditional college job in retail.

Commissioner Burnham referenced Torrington's policy stating that once they make a conditional offer the applicant must withdraw from all other process and asked Chief Spera if that would help Old Saybrook.

Chief Spera responded that at that point the applicant would have to withdraw from all processes with any other departments. The Old Saybrook Department of Police Services requires that withdrawal once the person is hired. He doesn't feel that doing it any earlier helps. There are not a lot of applicants who would do that unless their heart is set on working for that one town. It's putting all your eggs in one basket. What is becoming popular around the country are signing bonuses or bonuses to the Officer who recruited the applicant. National trade magazines show that signing bonuses are becoming more and more popular.

Commissioner Burnham asked if the national trade magazines say anything about the hiring issues Departments are facing.

Chief Spera stated that one of the top issues facing law enforcement nationwide is hiring and retention. Other than expanding it the age range to a 20 year old who turns 21 by academy date he has no other suggestions.

Secretary Stuart stated that he likes the expanding of the age issue.

Sergeant DePerry stated the only downfall is that 20 years old is young. It is easy to know what applicant is participating in their first interview as they are very inexperienced.

Chief Spera stated that by allowing a 20 year old who will be 21 by academy date it will produce more revenue. He currently has 4 Police Officers who can put in their 2 weeks' notice at any point and retire.

Secretary Stuart stated that it doesn't burden the department by allowing a younger candidate to apply.

Commissioner Dunlap stated that the subcommittee has a valid result of this effort. The subcommittee has found that what are the Old Saybrook Department of Police Services and the Police Commission is doing makes sense. The subcommittee will consider the 20-21 age factor.

The subcommittee agreed that it was insightful to review the handout that Chief Spera provided them to see where Old Saybrook is at compared to the other departments.

V. **Discussion and Possible Action concerting the scheduling of the next meeting and its agenda items.**

Chief Spera stated that at the next meeting he would like to put the three Commissioners through a mock process. They would each be walked through the test, oral interview, background information questions etc.

The subcommittee agreed that at the next meeting on October 20 at 4:00 PM they would be walked through the mock process.

Secretary Stuart asked after the mock process should the subcommittee discuss and review the Police Commission interview questions.

Commissioner Burnham asked the subcommittee where they should involve the labor attorney regarding reviewing any new questions.

Secretary Stuart suggested to involve legal advice after the questions are drafted.

Chief Spera asked the subcommittee if they wanted to see if Atty. McHale or one of his associates was available for a phone call conference to advise the Commission on question guidelines.

Commissioner Dunlap asked if the subcommittee could look online to view the legal requirements.

Commissioner Burnham stated she is leery regarding anything found on the internet.

Secretary Stuart agreed but stated that he hates to pay for 20 mins of legal advice and then pay again to rewrite the questions.

Chief Spera stated that the telephone conference call prior to actually writing the questions would be helpful.

Lieutenant Roche stated that perhaps Atty. McHale would have something already prepared for something like this.

Commissioner Dunlap stated that the current demographic inside the Police Department is loaded towards seniority. There is a big gap of 10 year people. There has been no discussion on how to recruit the certified tenured officers.

Chief Spera stated that the Old Saybrook Department of Police Services has many senior and lower level Officers. There is not a lot of in between. Even a certified officer looking to change departments would

have to go through the hiring process. The Old Saybrook Department of Police Services doesn't offer a great pension plan or retirement health care. Old Saybrook is one of the least attractive towns for certified officers to head to. Most of the certified officers are looking for mid and end of career benefits specifically healthcare, pension and retirement packages. Also finding a certified officer who is looking for the correct reasons is very hard.

Sergeant DePerry stated that Police Department cultures are different. It's very hard for someone to leave one department and come into another.

Commissioner Burnham stated that the First Selectman needs to know these issues regarding pension, healthcare, overtime etc. when dealing with the police officer contracts

Chief Spera stated that the Board of Selectman is well aware of the issues. The Chief reported that the Town is exploring switching to a 401K style pension plan with the employee and the town each contributing a percentage.

Secretary Stuart asked if the Police Commission could ask the pension board to come to a meeting.

Commissioner Dunlap stated that a political body should negotiate contracts. As elected members the Commission has a voice in town. If the subcommittee identifies the problem maybe a solution can be found.

Commissioner Burnham stated that years ago the Police Commission was in charge of union negotiations but that has since changed and it lies entirely with the First Selectman.

The subcommittee agreed that at the next meeting would take place on October 20th at 4:00 PM.

VI. **Comments from the Public**

There were no comments from the public.

VII. **Adjournment**

Commissioner Dunlap made the motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Burnham. The motion to adjourn the meeting passed with a vote of 3 in favor and 0 against.

The meeting was officially adjourned at 4:46 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:

Jennifer Damato
Records Clerk for the Old Saybrook Police Commission