

# SPECIAL MEETING OF WESTFIELD POLICE COMMISSION

WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

May 15, 2023

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The Westfield Police Commission meeting was called to order at 59 Court Street, Westfield, MA, at 5:30 pm.

Roll Call: Richard Sypek – Present  
James Irwin - Present  
Peter Velis – Present

A. Approval and release of minutes dated March 13, 2023

Commissioner Irwin made a motion to approve the minutes dated March 13, 2023. Commissioner Velis seconded that motion.

Commissioner Sypek - Yes  
Commissioner Irwin – Yes  
Commissioner Velis - Yes

B. Open participation: None

C. Old Business:

1. Update on contract language as it pertains to shift swaps:

Commissioner Sypek noted that this item was on the agenda at the last meeting and it was agreed to continue this item so that the administration and the union could try to work out an agreement. Chief Valliere said that the administration and the union have come to an agreement regarding shift swaps. They have drawn up an MOU. The union could not be represented here tonight, however, President Blascak wanted Chief Valliere to notify the commission that the union is in agreement with this MOU.

Commissioner Irwin made a motion to accept the proposed MOU as written, subject to signature by all parties. Commissioner Velis seconded that motion.

Commissioner Sypek - Yes  
Commissioner Irwin – Yes  
Commissioner Velis - Yes

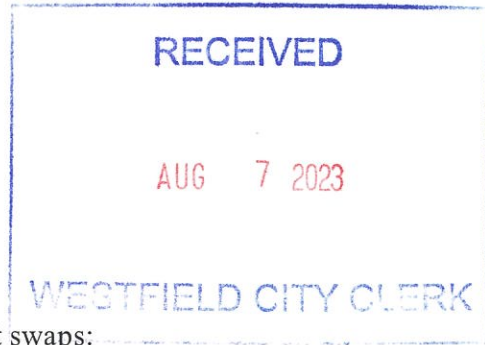
D. New Business:

1. Airport Manager Chris Willenborg would like to address the commission in regards to Det. Todd Edwards:

Airport Manager Chris Willenborg thanked the Westfield Police Department for all of the support they provided during the air show this past weekend. He said the police department put together and executed a traffic plan that worked great for the show.

He went on to say that the airport has had issues with people riding illegally on City owned property near the airport. He said the police department has provided support through their ATV unit in the past and asked if they could provide patrols in that area in the future.

Lastly, he said he wanted to recognize Detective Todd Edwards for the outstanding work he has been doing to support the airport with unauthorized drone activity. He said Detective Edwards has been working on this for the last year and a half. He said Detective Edwards is extremely responsive every time he has



called and is always willing to help. He said he would like to formally nominate Detective Edwards for an officer of the year award, if that is an award that is given.

2. Approve Contract Signature Authorization Form:

Chief Valliere said this form needs to be signed annually by the commission. He said this form gives himself and the 2 Captains permission to sign documents on behalf of the department.

3. Discuss listed concerns by School Committee regarding property located behind Westfield Middle School. The property is under consideration as a site for the new police station:

Commissioner Sypek said this item was listed on the agenda as item #5, however, the Mayor has requested this item be moved to Item #3 so that he may be present for the discussion.

Commissioner Sypek said that there had been discussion at the last School Committee meeting regarding the possibility of relocating the Police Department to a property owned by the School Department located behind Westfield Middle School. The School Committee put together a list of their concerns that they would like the Police Commission to respond to.

Item #1: To walk the area/see the area from ground level: Commissioner Sypek said it's up to everybody to do that. He said this area is a flat and open area and it is open to the public.

Item #2: Concern for the gym and the cars. Make sure our children are safe while using the fields. Commissioner Sypek said that he assumes the gym that this item refers to is the boys and girls club. Commissioner Irwin said he believes they are referring to the school gymnasium as well. Commissioner Sypek said that this is a 12 acre parcel. He said the proposed layout is about 4 to 5 acres which would leave a significant amount of land. He said this station would be highly secured with fencing, landscaping and that they will take all precautions necessary to protect the police officers, their vehicles and the general public. Captain Pitoniak said that the entrance and exit of this location is not ideal, but other than that this is a good location. He understands the public's concerns, but obviously the area would be fenced in. He said they would have pedestrian traffic going by the entrance, but that is the only option for an entrance. He said that this will take away the City's use of this area for the fireworks and larger concerts. He said they are looking at other locations for these events. Commissioner Velis asked Captain Pitoniak to talk about how the children will be safe while using the fields. Captain Pitoniak said he thinks they may be referring to traffic. He said the station will be fenced off and there will not be cars in the area of the fields. He said the only issue he sees is pedestrians who will be crossing the street at the entrance of the proposed department. Commissioner Velis said the answer to this is to watch where you are going. Captain Pitoniak said he understands the concerns. Commissioner Velis said he thinks they are asking what measures the department would take to make sure the children are safe. Captain Pitoniak said the area would be fenced, but you can never control pedestrians passing the entrance. He said you could put a crosswalk light at this location. Commissioner Sypek asked how much use those fields get. Captain Pitoniak said he and Captain Dickinson drove by those fields earlier today and there were at least 40 plus kids in the area the proposed entrance would be. This was around 10:30 am. Captain Pitoniak said if you designed the building going sideways you would still have plenty of areas to use. Commissioner Velis said it is common sense to use appropriate precautions.

Item #3: Concerns walkers might run into emergency vehicles as they walk to school on the walkway they use now. Chief Valliere said he believes this is the same issue. He said the fencing and landscaping will separate the building from the school and the Boys & Girls Club. He said there will not be vehicles in that area. He said this also takes care of issues #4 and #5. Commissioner Velis said he has looked at these items globally and it seems the School Committee is asking for prophylactic measures to be taken on all of these concerns. He said with all due respect, the only thing certain in life is uncertainty. He said there could be an incident and the commission cannot guarantee anything. He said he doesn't mean to be critical. He said he hopes the School Committee isn't looking for a perfect remedy.

Item #4: Concern that the area is quite congested from Abner Gibbs. The commission noted that Abner Gibbs School will no longer be in use as soon as the new school is built. Mayor McCabe said some of these issues came out during the first round of discussions that was held. He said the proposal that was shown at that time showed the parcel shifted east and the building more into the field than what they are now looking to do. He said the second and current proposal shows the building shifted to the West so that the entire parcel from Laflin St is completely wide open now.

Item #5: Mindful of the fire drills that use those fields for evacuation. Captain Pitoniak said once the fence is in place, it takes care of this issue.

Item #6: Access barn from the maintenance barn to South Maple St. That road becomes a one way road from the museum past Amelia Park. Traffic backs up in that area. Commissioner Irwin said there is a maintenance building near the skate park. That is the road that this item is referring to and it lets out across from Big Y. It is a one lane road. This is not near the proposed site. Mayor McCabe said that if they were to use the front entrance on South Maple Street for customer traffic, then they could have created a road on the South of the property and had an entrance and exit on South Ashley St. If the Police Department were to use that road for personal, then the issue became, would it effect the traffic loading and unloading deliveries. Captain Pitoniak said this road is only being considered as a secondary emergency entrance and exit in case they were unable to use the primary access point.

Item #7: Sex offenders register at the Police Department. That is a concern because the building would be so close to the schools. Commissioner Sypek asked how often sex offenders are at the building. Captain Dickinson said that if a sex offender registers as homeless that individual needs to come in once a month to register. If a sex offender is not homeless, they come in annually to register. The average is about 3 per week that come to register. They come in at different times between 8:00 am and midnight. Commissioner Velis said what greater deterrent to them then a police station. He said he has never felt safer then when he is near the police and the station. He said he is not saying this is an empty concern. He said he understands parents are concerned about the safety of their children. He said he would think they would welcome this with open arms. He said unless there was an absolute moron, they are going to high tail it out of there. He said there is a library next to the current police station. He asked how many sex offenses have been reported at the library. He said he doesn't believe anyone has knowledge of any. He said he believes those facts need to be made known. He said the police are there to protect the members of the City and especially the children. He said he thinks the parents will understand that this is a big plus for them. He said he doesn't want to sound cynical, but he feels it's much to do about nothing. He said there are sex offenders all over. They are near the YMCA, the Westfield River and numerous other places. He said he is looking at the facts. Commissioner Sypek said having a police department in your back yard is the biggest deterrent you could have. He asked if there is any way to limit when a sex offender can register to make it after school hours. Chief Valliere said he does not know what the language says. Captain Dickinson said the language does not say they have to register at a specific time, just by a certain day. He said the department tries to be accommodating and allows them to register during the 8-4 and 4-12 shifts. He said they could limit the hours. Commissioner Velis asked how impractical would it be for an officer to escort the offender out. Captain Dickinson said that can be done as well.

Item #8: Worried for residents in the area. Environmental concerns. Commissioner Irwin said that this is the same site as the proposed potential new middle school. Commissioner Sypek said they just rehabbed the current middle school. Commissioner Irwin said it is an old building. Commissioner Velis asked if there are any definitive plans. Commissioner Irwin said he is not aware of any. Commissioner Sypek said environmental issues are the same here as they are at the other proposed location for the police station. There needs to be testing done before any building can be done. Commissioner Irwin asked if there is enough for the commission to put together a reply. Commissioner Sypek said he will put a response together. He said he will copy it to the other commissions for their approval before it is sent to the School Committee.

City Councilor Adams said that the Mayor is the one who will have the final say where the new building is built. He said the committee's job is to investigate potential sites. He said every site they have looked at has issues. He said there are sites that have even come up since the last meeting. He said the Governor's

Center has closed and there is a church next door that also has a large parking lot. He said this could go on for a year. Commissioner Velis asked if City Councilor Adams could help the commission. City Councilor Adams said that there is a property even across the street from City Hall that could be looked at. He said the City hired a firm to look into these properties. He said the Chief needs to call this company with a list of the properties and they will research these properties and bring back results showing the best location so that the commission can vote on it. The City has already paid this company. They just need to be notified of the potential locations so that they can research them. City Councilor Adams said that the location on North Elm Street, which he feels is the best location, has been discussed for over 2 years now. He said the firm that the City hired will do the soil testing to let them know if that location is even an option. Commissioner Sypek said that he will still respond to the School Committee, but he would like to keep moving forward on the other properties as well. He said he would like an update for the next meeting.

4. Interview two candidates for Police Reserve Officer:

Zachary D Adam: Commissioner Irwin asked Zachary to tell the commission about himself and what he has done since he graduated high school. Zachary said after high school, he attended one year of college. He then began working security for Walmart. From here, he started a security position at Target and then at Kohl's. He currently works for a lumber company where he is in charge of the incoming and outgoing freight. Commissioner Velis asked Zachary what he personally expects to receive from a career in law enforcement. Zachary said his Uncle was a Police Officer and he has always wanted to follow in his footsteps. He believes a career in law enforcement is more than just catching bad guys. He said it's about self-worth, dignity and community. Commissioner Sypek asked Zachary how his friends would describe him. Zachary said his friends would describe him as someone with integrity, respect and a problem solver.

Commissioner Irwin made a motion to appoint Zachary Adam as a Reserve Police Officer for the Westfield Police Department. Commissioner Velis seconded that motion.

Commissioner Sypek - Yes  
Commissioner Irwin - Yes  
Commissioner Velis - Yes

Nicholas S Moynihan: Commissioner Irwin asked Nicholas to tell the commission about himself and what he has done since he graduated high school. Nicholas said he started working at an independent contracting job in Westfield. From there, he started his own business, which he currently still has. He has also worked at Amazon, U-Haul, Planet Fitness and Mestek. He currently works for Prince Telecom installing cable lines. Commissioner Velis asked Nicholas what he personally expects to receive from a career in law enforcement. Nicholas said he wants to be able to help people. Commissioner Sypek asked Nicholas how his friends would describe him. Nicholas said his friends would describe him as someone who is loyal and respectful.

Commissioner Irwin made a motion to appoint Nicholas Moynihan as a Reserve Police Officer for the Westfield Police Department. Commissioner Velis seconded that motion.

Commissioner Sypek - Yes  
Commissioner Irwin - Yes  
Commissioner Velis - Yes

5. Discuss having the police commission become the hearing authority, regarding complaints filed for a nuisance or dangerous dog. M.G.L. c. 140 s. 157:

Chief Valliere said that the Police Department does oversee the Animal Control Department. He said that by law these hearings need to be done by a hearing authority in a public forum. He said that Margaret Terkelsen who is the department head for the Animal Control Department is requesting the commission appoints a hearing authority. She would like to see the hearing authority to be more diverse than just the Police Commission. She would like to see someone how has more knowledge of


animals and their behavior. Chief Valliere said that there are not too many of these hearings, but when they have one it can be very in depth. Commissioner Irwin made a motion to continue this item to a later date so that the commission can review it further before taking any action and to have Margaret Terkelsen present for the next meeting. Commissioner Velis seconded that motion.

Commissioner Sypek - Yes  
Commissioner Irwin - Yes  
Commissioner Velis - Yes

E. Announcement of next meeting: Monday, June 12, 2023


F. Motion to adjourn: At 6:50 p.m. Commissioner Irwin made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Velis seconded that motion.

Commissioner Sypek - Yes  
Commissioner Irwin - Yes  
Commissioner Velis - Yes



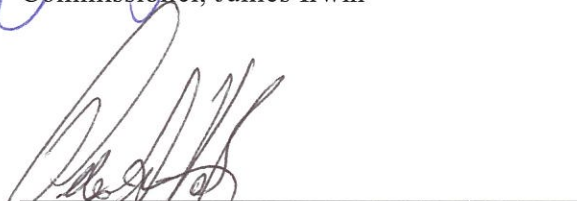
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Chairman, Richard Sypek



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Commissioner, James Irwin



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Commissioner, Peter Velis

APPROVED FOR RELEASE ON 8/15/2023