

SPECIAL MEETING OF WESTFIELD POLICE COMMISSION

WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

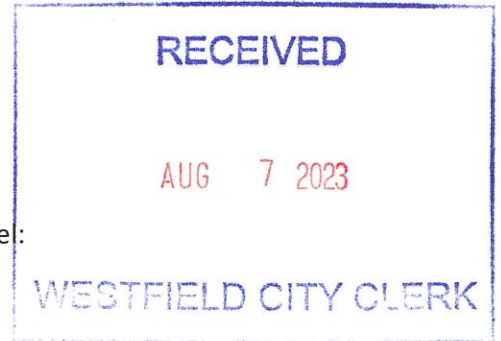
July 17, 2023

The Westfield Police Commission meeting was called to order at City Hall, 59 Court Street, Westfield, MA, in Room 201 at 5:30 pm.

Commissioner Richard Sypek asked for anyone recording the meeting to identify themselves, there were none.

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

- A. Approval and release of minutes dated May 15, 2023
The minutes were not present at the meeting and will be approved and released at the next meeting on August 7, 2023.
- B. Open participation: None
- C. Old business: None
- D. New Business:
 - 1. Appoint the following five individuals as Traffic Control Personnel:
 - Richard Barone
 - Michael C. Chechile
 - Jeffrey Gawron
 - Paul Gay
 - Michael LaCroix



Commissioner Sypek asked for Chief Valliere to give some background on each. Chief Valliere responded that all are retired officers, but not all from Westfield. Richard Barone currently works for Conservation and was a sheriff in another state but has the credentials for Massachusetts law enforcement. Michael Chechile just retired on July 13th as a sergeant in Westfield. Jeff Gawron is personally known by the chief and just retired as a deputy chief. Paul Gay went to the academy with the chief and just retired as a detective in Chicopee. Michael LaCroix should have been appointed as of January 11, 2023 but Chief Valliere said he neglected to get him on that list so his name was not called at that meeting but he has worked jobs since and will not get paid without the Commission voting for him as of January 11th.

Commissioner Irwin made a motion to appoint the five individuals listed by Chairman Sypek and retroactively to January 11, 2023 for Michael LaCroix. Commissioner Velis seconded the motion.

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

SPECIAL MEETING OF WESTFIELD POLICE COMMISSION

WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

July 17, 2023

2. Educational Benefit Program:

Commissioner Sypek said the Committee for the Educational Benefit Program has recommended that psychology and emergency management degrees be added to the educational benefit package included in the Westfield Patrol Officers Coalition collective bargaining agreement. Commissioner Sypek said he has a letter he received in May that he distributed to the Commissioners and offers it for the record for the minutes. Commissioner Sypek asked if Chief Valliere wanted to comment to which Chief Valliere responded that he agrees with the recommendations of the Committee and that both degrees seem more than applicable to the police profession. Commissioner Sypek said these two degrees stood out to him as most relevant to police work.

Commissioner Irwin made a motion to approve the psychology and emergency management degrees already added to the contract to be accepted by the Commission. Commissioner Velis seconded the motion.

Commissioner Sypek - Yes

Commissioner Irwin - Yes

Commissioner Velis – Yes

3. Interview one candidate for a full-time patrolman's position:

Zachary Adam: Commissioner Sypek asked Zachary since his interview in May if there was anything more that they should be aware of relative to his interview. Zachary responded no. Commissioner Velis confirmed that there was nothing of any merit or concern, and that Zachary still wanted to be an officer. Zachary replied in the affirmative. Commissioner Sypek said he had a good interview and they are looking forward to having him as a full-time patrolman.

Commissioner Irwin made a motion to accept Zachary Adam as a full-time patrolman as of October 16th. Commissioner Velis seconded the motion.

Commissioner Sypek - Yes

Commissioner Irwin - Yes

Commissioner Velis – Yes

4. Interview and appoint one full-time sergeant from the following candidates:

Matthew Schultze: Commissioner Sypek said they interviewed him eight months ago and asked if there was anything he would like to offer to the Commission that they should be aware of relative to his temporary position. Officer Schultze said he has been in the position for eight months and he believes everything has been going well. He gets along good with the dog watch crew and Lieutenant Kane. In the time that he has been there they had a couple of high stress incidents where he was the boots on the ground in the field for all of them and he thinks everything was handled well. Commissioner Irwin asked if Captain Pitoniak or Captain Dickinson had anything to add about Sergeant Schultze. Captain Pitoniak said he has been doing an excellent job since he has been in the Sergeant position. The feedback he received from his guys patrolling and supervisors that work with him have

SPECIAL MEETING OF WESTFIELD POLICE COMMISSION

WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

July 17, 2023

all been positive. Commissioner Velis said that he has not met Sergeant Schultze but has inquired about him. He said everything just heard matches everything said about him.

Jason Perron: Commissioner Sypek said they interviewed Officer Perron about eight months ago for the same position and asked if there was anything Officer Perron would like to offer to the Commission. Officer Perron said last time Commissioner Velis was not there when he froze solid and he now can answer those questions. He said he is a well-respected and talented officer and his ability to communicate with anyone and solving problems are cream of the crop. With 27 years as an officer, six years in the military, and different life experiences, especially as a selectboard member, it has helped turn him into somebody that 11 years ago wasn't ready to be a leader, and that is what the department needs. He can offer support, guidance, and knowledge from his experience and is not afraid to speak up when he thinks something is wrong. He always puts the guys in the department ahead of himself and he appreciates the opportunity to be in front of the Commission again

Officer Perron inquired about the Commission filling the upcoming positions and Commission Sypek responded that they will start their search for the new chief tonight by hopefully promoting from within so every level will be open again. He said it their intention to fill every position as soon as possible. Officer Perron added that he fully supports the Commission's decisions to appoint Sergeant Schultze and Lieutenant Kane.

Sean Smith: Commissioner Sypek said they interviewed Officer Smith about eight months ago for the same position and asked if there was anything Officer Smith would like to offer to the Commission. Officer Smith said he is well suited for and would like to have the position, however, he personally sees no reason to remove Sergeant Schultze as he has done a fine job. Commissioner Sypek asked if he would be applying when the next round of positions open. Officer Smith responded that he has been studying already. Commissioner Velis added that his comments about a fellow officer should be commended.

Commissioner Sypek told the candidates that they are all outstanding candidates and he appreciates the comments made about Sergeant Schultze.

Commissioner Irwin made a motion to appoint Matthew Schultze as a full-time sergeant. Commissioner Velis seconded the motion.

Commissioner Sypek - Yes

Commissioner Irwin - Yes

Commissioner Velis – Yes

5. Interview and appoint one full-time lieutenant from the following candidates:

Douglas LaValley: Commissioner Sypek asked Officer LaValley if there was anything he would like to offer the Commission since the last interview. Officer LaValley said he has been working on his deficiencies as a supervisor and out of respect for the job Lieutenant Kane has done and for the Commission's time, he would like to politely decline the interview at this time. Commissioner Sypek said the whole process will be starting all over and he anticipates that Officer LaValley will be applying again. Commissioner Irwin asked if there was another exam he needed to take. Officer LaValley said there is

SPECIAL MEETING OF WESTFIELD POLICE COMMISSION

WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

July 17, 2023

one in September and that he is signed up for it. Commissioner Velis said his remarks were commendable.

Michael Kane: Commissioner Sypek asked Lieutenant Kane if there was anything he would like to offer the Commission since the last interview and appointment. Lieutenant Kane had nothing to add. Commissioner Sypek asked how the job is going so far. Lieutenant Kane said good although the shift is a little tough. Captain Pitoniak said he was doing a great job and he understands there is an adjustment to working the night shift. Captain Dickinson agreed and added that he has seen it himself and everyone he has spoken to had nothing but great things to say about him. Chief Valliere said that it is not just what he does to improve relations around the community but internally as well. Commissioner Velis said he is one individual that he has heard such praise in his ability to command, but is impressed the most with what he hears about his character. He asked if Lieutenant Kane could give some indication what his future may hold. Lieutenant Kane answered that it is day by day.

Robert Saunders: Commissioner Sypek asked Officer Saunders if there was anything he would like to offer the Commission since the last interview. Officer Saunders replied that he continues to work on moving the department in the right direction. Commissioner Sypek said they will be starting the search for a new chief and as a consequence of that there will be openings all down the line, and asked Officer Saunders if he plans on reapplying for this position to which Officer Saunders replied yes. Commissioner Irwin asked the captains if they had anything to add. Captain Pitoniak said he is doing a great job and recently moved to an admin position doing some of his and the chief's office work. Captain Dickinson said he is very helpful and a good asset, especially for the chief when dealing with firearms. Commissioner Velis asked if he concurs with Captain Pitoniak about his administrative abilities, Captain Dickinson replied yes. Chief Valliere said he has technical skills that they are lucky to use in regards to computers, radios, and technical issues with some of the cars. He said it is an invaluable asset because otherwise they would have to wait for repairs. Commissioner Velis said he observed Officer Saunders at the station always hard at work. Chief Valliere added that he doesn't require any oversight.

Commissioner Sypek told the candidates that they will be doing the same process again in the next year and thanked the candidates for coming and for the jobs they are doing.

Commissioner Irwin made a motion to appoint Michael Kane as a full-time lieutenant. Commissioner Velis seconded the motion.

Commissioner Sypek - Yes

Commissioner Irwin - Yes

Commissioner Velis – Yes

6. Address any new updates regarding the construction of a new police station:

Commissioner Sypek said all he has to report is that there is a meeting on Wednesday with the building committee in the mayor's office at 11 am which he will attend and report on. He also attended the last school committee meeting with the chief and the captains. They haven't made any decisions yet as they want to see a preliminary site plan and had questions for the hired expert. The meeting was continued to July 31st and he plans on attending. Since it is not the Police Commission's role to

SPECIAL MEETING OF WESTFIELD POLICE COMMISSION

WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

July 17, 2023

find a site it does not violate the open meeting law for any of the commissioners to attend a School Committee meeting. They cannot discuss among themselves but they can ask questions of the School Committee and participate, of which he did.

Commissioner Irwin said he found old information from Tecton regarding the church property they investigated and compared the current size of $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre versus 3.62 acres as a possibility at the church station. He said it was noted by Tecton that this committee chose that school site, but they did not. Commissioner Sypek said they can't choose anything. Commissioner Velis stated that it is not their jurisdiction to make a decision from the recommendations, only to respond to inquiries. He then asked if the Ashley Street school site, that Commissioner Irwin had previously mentioned to him, had ever been considered. Chief Valliere said he brought it up one time but they didn't want to listen to it for long although it's not a bad spot. Commissioner Sypek agreed but said it could become a difficult, litigious situation. Commissioner Velis questioned the school committee's authority regarding prohibiting building on the site and also challenged how vital any particular location actually is. Commissioner Irwin suggested calling the project a law enforcement center and Commissioner Velis asked if that would be a decision or recommendation.

7. Begin procedural discussions to select a new Chief of Police to replace retiring Chief Valliere.

Commissioner Sypek said all he wants to accomplish this evening is to set up some protocol - criteria that can be set out to the candidates for police chief. His goal as part of the criteria is to get letters of intent and resumes submitted to the Commission on or before September 1st. The next meeting following that date would be on September 11th at which time they can review who the candidates are. He spoke with City Councilor Adams regarding procedure for getting funds to do separate evaluations of the candidates, and the protocol is to go through the mayor's office. He would like the candidates to be interviewed and evaluated within a 30-day period using an assessment center so that during the following meeting on October 10th they can begin the interviews. Should they need more time they will call for special meetings to complete the interviews in order to be in a position to select the chief at the November 14th meeting with an effective date of January 21, 2024. That would give the chosen candidate some time to spend with the outgoing chief before his term is up. He said any of those dates are subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances. He stated that they need to move fairly quickly because it is already July and the starting point for discussion is determining the criteria. Commissioner Irwin asked if there was an HR requirement in the city for the posting. Chief Valliere said there was not when he was appointed. Commissioner Sypek said the chief could make a phone call but he did not see anything in the prior minutes with the last commission.

Commissioner Irwin asked if they had the budget for compensation from the city. Chief Valliere said it is a personal service agreement with the mayor. Captain Pitoniak said the salary range should be known going into it. Chief Valliere said it was a great point as it was never posted for the chief or captain's positions before.

Commissioner Velis said he wanted to make suggestions regarding the situation that there is no civil service involvement in the selection. The process they follow is critical regarding its merit. It must be a substantive, comprehensive, ethical process that they follow all to avoid any criticisms. He suggests they operate the commission as a meritocracy, absent from bias and prejudice. The procedure must be prophylactic against any political or departmental influence. He said they owe it to the citizens and

SPECIAL MEETING OF WESTFIELD POLICE COMMISSION

WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

July 17, 2023

to the mayor, who is their appointing authority. The next chief must be the most qualified and of the highest caliber. As there is no exam score, he suggests they limit the candidates to captains and lieutenants only. He also suggested using the scores from previous exams, and inquired from Chief Valliere if those test scores would be available in personnel files. Chief Valliere answered that he thinks they would be available through Civil Service, but the training and education portion may be skewed. Commissioner Velis said he wouldn't use just the score as an evaluation but would use them as a factor to give some weight to the evaluation. Along with those exams he suggests they look at the candidate's current rant, history, work performance, education, special skills, citations received, community involvement and what level of substantive experience they have. He said the most important criteria is the character of the candidate and he would like to get letters of recommendations from the rank and file, but he will not accept a negative opposition letter.

Commissioner Velis continued saying that since we live in a different era now with respect with who our chief ought to be the chief will need to be knowledgeable of the peace officer standards and training commission. Along with that, the commission should get input from police departments in other communities for the process they may have used in their chief selections.

Commissioner Velis spoke about selecting an assessment center by reviewing the center's background and personnel. He asked Commissioner Sypek about his idea of sending out information to potential candidates. Commissioner Sypek said that he thinks they have an obligation to circulate the minimum criteria, or prerequisites, to potential candidates and he would like to complete the list tonight. Commissioner Irwin commented that the letters of recommendation should be signed and confidential.

Commissioner Sypek asked if they wanted to list salary and benefits in the criteria. Commissioner Irwin confirmed, if they can get the salary range. Commissioner Sypek listed the ranks of captain and lieutenant as a minimum requirement and experience of 15 years minimum service with 7 years in a supervisory capacity. Both Commissioner Irwin and Commissioner Velis agreed. Commissioner Sypek said he would like to put the due date of September 1st for the letters of intent and resumes in the minimum criteria letter to potential candidates. Both Commissioner Irwin and Commissioner Velis agreed. Commissioner Sypek said September 11th would be the target date to review the candidates and send them out to the assessment center if they decide to use one. They can discuss which assessment center they may want to use and the cost at the next meeting. He said he thinks the lack of civil service testing and the ability to get objective recommendations, as mentioned earlier, makes having an assessment center or group a good read for all of them. Commissioner Velis said he thinks they need to assess the assessment center. Commissioner Sypek said they will do that at the next meeting. He hopes to start the interview process by October 10th and conclude it by November so they can name a chief in November and start the transition in December. He said he spoke with the chief when he first came on and told him there would be no political influence in the decisions he makes as it would be all merit based. He will send out a memo to the commission members with the dates and the outline of the criteria.

Commissioner Sypek brought up the letters of recommendation and said he agrees with Commissioner Velis that he does not want negative letters. He asked Chief Valliere about sending an internal memo that the police chief selection process has begun pursuant to the Police Commission meeting and that they will accept letters of recommendation, signed and dated, confidentially. Chief Valliere responded that he can circulate the message but he needs the criteria. Commissioner Velis asked

SPECIAL MEETING OF WESTFIELD POLICE COMMISSION

WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

July 17, 2023

how many lieutenants there are and how many applicants does the chief expect. Chief Valliere answered that there are five lieutenants, and he believes they all have the time, rank, and years so he presumes probably two to three of them will apply. Commissioner Velis asked if the personnel files would have the scores of previous lieutenants and captains exams. Chief Valliere answered it may have changed from years back but he would look into it. Commissioner Sypek said in his experience he has been able to look at personnel files by going to HR by appointment, and asked Chief Valliere if they could still do that as commissioners to look at the candidate's files. Chief Valliere said yes. Commissioner Sypek said he would do that and recommended to his colleagues to do the same. Commissioner Irwin said only two lieutenants are qualified along with the two captains. Captain Pitoniak asked if he was counting sergeants time as a supervisor. Commissioner Velis asked if sergeant's time as a supervisor is something they should consider. Both Commissioner Sypek and Velis agreed that it should because it is part of their history.

E. Announcement of next meeting: Monday, August 7, 2023.


Captain Pitoniak said they might want to have a special meeting in August because they are trying to hire 4 full-time officers.

F. Motion to adjourn: At 6:55 pm Commissioner Irwin made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Velis seconded that motion.


Commissioner Sypek - Yes

Commissioner Irwin - Yes

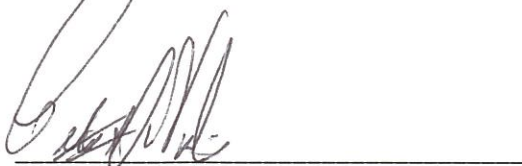
Commissioner Velis - Yes



Chairman, Richard Sypek



Commissioner, James Irwin



Commissioner, Peter Velis

APPROVED FOR RELEASE ON 8/15/2023

