

PUBLIC SAFETY STANDING COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting
Oak Harbor Fire Department
August 19, 2010

ATTENDANCE

The meeting began at 6:58 a.m., with the following in attendance: Council Members Severns, Munns, and Dudley, and Mayor Slowik.

Staff present: Law & Justice Coordinator/Prosecutor Bill Hawkins, Police Chief Rick Wallace, Fire Chief Mark Soptich, Battalion Chief Ray Merrill, and Police Administrative Assistant Martha Folsom

Others present: None

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public attendance; no comments

REVIEW OF JULY 15, 2010 MEETING NOTES

Notes were reviewed. No questions or comments

POLICE

Jail Contract – Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC)

Police Chief Wallace reported this item is scheduled for the September 7th Council meeting. Signed copies of the contract are on their way from DOC. One of the stumbling blocks was the costs for inmate medical and pharmaceuticals – the State wanted the City to pay the costs, and then the State would reimburse. We wanted the costs to be direct billed from the service provider directly to the State, and they finally agreed to that. Mr. Hawkins said that this is basically the same contract as the previously approved contract with Anacortes Police Department, except for the medical/pharmaceutical costs. One benefit was that DOC negotiated a 15% discount with local pharmacies for pharmaceuticals, and now the Oak Harbor City Jail will get that same discount for our inmates. Mr. Hawkins said the proposed contract has the standard waivers of liability on both sides, which is very beneficial.

Committee Discussion

Mr. Dudley commented that the direct billing makes sense and that he is glad to see that in place. Mr. Severns said that (when this comes to Council) it would be nice if the differences from the Anacortes contract are pointed out, as they have approved the Anacortes contract previously.

Citizen Certificate of Appreciation – Devin Brooks

Police Chief Wallace reported a Citizen Certificate of Appreciation will be given out at the September 7th Council meeting to Mr. Devin Brooks, for his actions on March 31, 2010. Mr. Brooks witnessed an auto accident, where the vehicle drove off the roadway and crashed into a tree. The vehicle was still running, and the interior was filling up with smoke. Mr. Brooks ran up to the vehicle and got a 10-year old child out of the back seat, then ran back and assisted the driver, who was having a seizure, (which is what appears to have caused the accident), until medical units arrived. Chief Wallace said that he has always taken the position that citizens of Oak Harbor are not afraid to get involved, and he feels it is important to recognize those who do. He said that, as far as Mr. Brooks knew when he ran to the car, it could have been on fire, but he didn't hesitate to give assistance.

Committee Discussion

Mayor Slowik noted that Devin Brooks is a former Corpsman, and he worked with the Marine Corps in the field, and that there is no question about his courage.

FIRE

Mutual Aid and Automatic Aid Incidents

Fire Chief Soptich reported a recent fire on SW Fairhaven as an example of mutual aid response. The fire started in the landscaping, and spread to the roof of a house behind this property. We worked with North Whidbey Fire and NAS Whidbey on this incident, and the crews worked very well together. This is an example of the success of our training program. Chief Soptich reported that we are on pace with 800 incidents by the end of this month, which is a small amount more than last year.

Committee Discussion

Mayor Slowik asked Chief Soptich to describe the difference (between Auto and Mutual Aid Responses). Chief Soptich said that Mutual Aid was when we request aid, and that agency will respond (if available). Auto Aid is generated due to the geographic areas that we have identified as requiring a response by two departments. This is beneficial to both agencies, and is pre-determined and automatically done at dispatch. He said we have Auto Aid with North Whidbey Fire and Rescue, for areas immediately adjacent to the City limits. He feels it is a good program.

Recent Incidents

Fire Chief Soptich had previously reported the SW Fairhaven brush fire (above). He also reported an incident at the home of the Fire Department's Administrative Assistant. They were staining a fence, and put the rags in a container, which then spontaneously combusted and ignited the outside of the house. There was about \$14,000 in damage, with light smoke damage to the inside of the house, but no injuries. This was a case of automatic aid response from North Whidbey Fire.

Committee Discussion

No discussion.

Emergency Operations Center (EOC) - Tour

The Tour was held at the end of the Standing Committee Meeting

SAFER Grant (Additional Agenda Item)

Chief Soptich reported that there is a SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) Grant available through the Department of Homeland Security. It is similar to the past COPS Hiring Grant that the Police Department utilized. The grant would pay all costs for staffing for two years, and the City would commit to retaining the position for the 3rd year. Chief Soptich will be meeting with the Mayor and Doug Merriman soon to see if there are any benefits to the City applying. The grant closing date for applications is September 17th.

Committee Discussion

Mr. Dudley asked if the position could be utilized in any role, and Chief Soptich said it is for Fire Suppression only. Mr. Dudley asked if the department has a succession plan – any individuals retiring, and/or replacements – and if that counts under this grant. Chief Soptich said that person/s hired under the grant must be brand new, additional personnel, and it can be used for personnel who have been laid off. Mr. Severns asked if grant personnel had been hired in the department in the past, and Chief Soptich said no. Police Chief Wallace said that the Police Department has utilized/hired positions in the past under the COPS Hiring grant, and that we currently have the High School Resource Officer (HSRO) grant application in process. Mayor Slowik said we worry about the “out” years (after the life of the grant and retention requirement), as far as how would we fund it. He said we really need to look at it, and if we can afford it.

Mr. Dudley asked Chief Wallace if he knew when we would be hearing about the HSRO grant, and Chief Wallace said we expect to hear in mid-September. They only notify the agencies that are selected, so we are watching the website for news.

Ms. Munns went back to the “Recent Incidents” topic, and asked Chief Soptich if we responded to the barn fire (Crescent Harbor Road). Chief Soptich said we were not called to assist. He said that the cause appears to be electrical –someone had stuck a penny in an old-time screw in fuse, in order to bypass the fuse and continue to receive AC power.

ADMINISTRATION

Work Crews

Mr. Hawkins reported that he has been working on a Work Crew program for the City. This is another sentencing alternative the courts can use for offenders, and is an inexpensive source of additional labor in the community. He said work crews would not consist of felons or violent offenders, but for more low-level crime offenders. Typically in the courts, an offender is looking at up to 90 days of jail time for a Misdemeanor and up to 365 days for a Gross Misdemeanor. The court can also impose a fine. Community service has always been a sentencing option, but somewhere in the past it ceased being utilized, perhaps due to the cost of running it, and without professional supervision, it was abandoned. Work crews could be sentenced by the court, they would schedule a

day/days to show up for work, and would pay a fee. The city would provide the required tools and L&I mandated safety equipment. They would be transported to the work site in a van, and limited to work parties of ten, with one supervisor. He has a lead on a DOC van that may be available at little or no cost. No shows would be reported back to the court and they would face the judge again. Mr. Hawkins feels that an expectation of 1-2 jail bed spaces could be freed up due to this Work Crew program, and that space would be available for the new bed space rental program, which could generate up to \$20,000 to \$25,000 per year.

Committee Discussion

Mr. Severns asked about the workers who used to come in from Monroe and wondered if that was the van that had become available. Mr. Hawkins said he did not know, but that a local DOC employee had told him about the van. Mayor Slowik advised that the program where the workers from Monroe come to the City may be started up again. Back to the Work Crew program, Mr. Hawkins assured that any Work Crew candidates would be carefully screened for any criminal history which would preclude them from being on a Work Crew. Mr. Severns commented that he likes the idea (Work Crew), but it sounded like it would entail more costs in the form of tools and staff. How would those costs be offset? Mr. Hawkins said that Mr. Schmidt has talked of using the "510" Public Works account, and that the money generated would go back to that account. He felt we should come close to breaking even, including the added revenue from increased jail bed space rental.

Bike Helmet Program – Funding/Possible Expansion

Chief Soptich advised that the Fire Department has a helmet program, where they use either grant or budget funds to provide helmets to those children in need. He thinks that perhaps Mr. Schmidt (who put this item on the agenda) wants to expand this program. Mayor Slowik said we will follow up with Mr. Schmidt on this issue. Chief Soptich said that they have not had a chance to get out and promote the program, as that will take more helmets. He believes it is a good program.

Committee Discussion

Ms. Munns said she doesn't think it is necessary or fruitful to issue tickets to kids for not wearing helmets, if we had a helmet law. But, she wonders if we saw someone wearing a helmet, a certificate could be issued. Chief Wallace said the 7-11 Corporation recently gave us vouchers for free Slurpees. Lt. Dyer is handling this project, and we originally discussed stopping "Good Drivers" and issuing the voucher, but this has a tendency to backfire (motorists irate at being stopped for not doing anything wrong). So, discussions have been held about using the vouchers for kids on bikes who are wearing helmets and following traffic rules. He said it's been since 2005 that we had a helmet program, which was held in conjunction with the Bike Rodeo event. Ms. Munns talked about soliciting funds for helmet purchase from service clubs and perhaps military groups. Chief Wallace agreed that, if we were proactive and solicited funds, we could have a bigger and more successful program. Mr. Hawkins mentioned that, years ago, Rotary did a "Headsmart" program where they went to elementary schools, did helmet fittings and provided helmets. The program died out the next year. Ms. Munns said she wouldn't mind helping out with this program. Chief Soptich said that one of the positions that Council approved in the Fire Dept. re-organization was for a Public Educator. He would like to see programs covering Smoke Detectors, Bike Helmets, Senior Injury Prevention, among others. Ms. Munns asked if we have a Public Educator type position at the Police Department and if we could team up with the Fire Department, and Chief Wallace replied that we have partnered with the Fire Dept in the past and could do so on this. He advised that we do not have a Crime Prevention officer designated, but use a variety of different officers.

Mayor Slowik said that he was proud of our outreach, but we could always do more, and commended Council for their interest in this issue, saying that we need to convince kids to wear helmets.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION (Not on Agenda)

Defibrillator Grant (FIRE)

Chief Soptich reported that we had applied for a grant for Defibrillator Units and were denied, but that funds have become available. The County will be getting multiple units and, of those, the City will get ten. Four will go to Police, four to Fire, and 2 to the Senior Center. Training will be provided and he hopes that the units will be in service within the next 3-4 weeks.

HSRO Officer (Council Member Dudley)

Mr. Dudley returned to the subject of the HSRO grant. He asked if it is approved in mid-September and we split the 3rd year funding 50/50 with the School District, do we need approval for that 3rd year funding before we can accept the grant. Chief Wallace said that the 3rd year agreement with the School District would have to come before Council. Mayor Slowik advised that we have verbal assurance from the Superintendent for 3rd year funding. Mr. Dudley asked if we could choose to, or not to, retain the position in the 4th year, and Chief Wallace said that was correct. Mr. Severns asked if we could ever consider a Citizen on Patrol working in the High School. Chief Wallace said that there are numerous liability issues, relating to officer training, powers of arrest, and that the scope of the Citizens on Patrol program is to drive around the City and be another set of "eyes" for the officers. He said he would have concerns to that type of approach and an officer would still be required to respond to calls. He doesn't know if it would weigh itself out as a benefit in the end. Mayor Slowik gave some history of the partnerships with the school district, beginning with the DARE officer many years ago. He also said that, when we lost the HSRO, he feels that we lost the ability for that officer to go into the classrooms and get to know students on a different level. He felt the position humanizes the police and is a very positive thing. Chief Wallace agreed with the Mayor's statements and added that he feels we also lost the "intelligence" gathering aspect, of knowing what is going on at the school, as well as the ability to keep parents informed and calmed about things they are "hearing" are happening at the school. Mayor Slowik said it isn't about the money, but about the HSRO being a part of the culture at the school, and that culture being "adopted" by the School Board.

Mr. Dudley asked if we could keep the partnership going if funding was not split 50/50 with the School District, but they provided access and space. Chief Wallace said we could, but his opinion is that it is the "partnership" that keeps the officer in the school (rather than re-assigned somewhere else dependent upon crime levels). He said that is the danger of not having this partnership.

Mr. Severns asked if the DARE Program was still around, and Mayor Slowik said that it was discontinued, that it was felt nationwide that the program had lost its effectiveness, and many districts transitioned to the HSRO program, finding it to be more effective.

Liquor Initiatives (Council Member Munns)

Ms. Munns said that AWC was addressing the issue of what costs will be to cities if both Liquor Initiatives pass and cities become responsible for the Liquor Control function. She asked if that has been looked at, and Chief Wallace said that he does not have any information as to what actual response would be required. He said that the State Liquor Control provides a very important service with their undercover operations, but he doesn't know what impact we would feel if the enforcement services were discontinued.

COMMENTS

No comments.

NEXT MEETING

September 16, 2010

MEETING ADJOURNED

8:06 a.m., August 19, 2010

TOUR

The tour of EOC commenced immediately after the meeting, all Committee members present attended; tour ended at 8:31 a.m.