



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY &
NEIGHBORHOODS
DATE: MARCH 8, 2023
TIME: 7:03 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS BRIAN GOMES, CHAIR; DEREK BAPTISTE; SHANE BURGO; NAOMI CARNEY; MARIA GUESTA; WILLIAM BRAD MARKEY; LINDA MORAD; SHAWN OLIVER; RYAN PEREIRA

ABSENT: COUNCILLOR IAN ABREU

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Councillor Gomes called the Public Safety Committee Meeting to order and took attendance. The Clerk read a Communication from Councillor Abreu into the record explaining his absence. The Communication was received and placed on file by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Burgo.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes requesting that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meet with Police Chief Paul Oliveira, Lt. Evan Bielski from the New Bedford Police Union, a representative from the Mitchell Administration and the Massachusetts State Police Interim Lt. Colonel John E. Mawn, Jr. or a representative from the Massachusetts State Police Dartmouth Barracks to discuss the Police Department's decreasing staffing levels, the level of staffing not only jeopardizes the Police Officers that serve the City each and every day along with constituency it protects and serves; and further, that letters be sent to the Police Chiefs of Fairhaven, Acushnet and Dartmouth, notifying them of the short staffing within our department, and further, requesting mutual aid assistance if needed in an emergency, furthermore, that the Administration explain how it's addressing this issue that has left the City in a crisis situation (Ref'd 02/23/2023) was received and placed on file by Councillor Carney and seconded by Councillor Burgo. (1)

The Chair recognized New Bedford Police Chief Oliveira who was asked to address the shortage in the Police Department's staffing and what steps were being taken to increase the numbers in the rank.

The Chief explained the City has instituted a \$5,000.00 signing bonus to attract interest in serving on the Police force. His department is also holding testing seminars to help those preparing for the Civil Service test with the hope of having them pass the test and seek employment in the Police Department.

The Chief explained the staffing shortages are not applicable to New Bedford only, there are communities nationwide that are suffering from the same issue. The interest in serving in law enforcement has dramatically changed over the years. Chief Oliveira also explained that unfortunately there are Officers that are currently serving that are taking jobs in rural communities.

The Chief was asked if there was some form of financial compensation to aid in the retention of current Officers. He explained that they are not able to offer this type of compensation as it would have to be negotiated in the contract between the Police Union and the Administration. It is his hope that some form of compensation would be negotiated into the new contract.

He was asked if there were any other types of compensation for overworked and stressed Officers. The Chief explained there are support assistance and peer support programs available. He stressed that an Officer being forced to work overtime every single day is not healthy and he recognizes this. Officers also have 10 extra training days, a total of 80 hours.

The Chief was asked if ARPA funds could be used as an incentive in retaining Officers and the Chief explained that they could not. He was also asked and agreed that the current residency requirement contributes to the lack of interest. The Chief stated he is constantly researching innovative ways outside of the contract process, but at the end of the day, money is a motivating factor.

The Chief was asked if the 35 people who had signed up for the study seminar were a good sign for the Police Department, and he agreed that it was. He stated he is also looking towards initiating early advertising to attract Gen Z and minorities to consider serving as a Police Officers. He is also looking at the Student Resource Officers as another way of attracting future employees.

The Chair recognized Lt. Michael Fitzgerald and Sgt. Fahey of the Massachusetts State Police – Troop D. They were thanked for their attendance and asked about their providing support to the City where there is a decrease in Officers on the force.

Lt. Fitzgerald stated they would continue to provide support to the City when they were able to. They were asked about the Community Action Team and how it relates to the City. Sgt. Fahey stated this program provides State Police assistance to the Cities of Taunton, Fall River, and Brockton in a rotating format. They acknowledged that they too have a similar shortage with the number of Officers serving as State Police.

Lt. Evan Bielski, President of the New Bedford Police Union was recognized by the Chair. Lt. Bielski gave an overview of the retention issues. He went on to explain that turnover plays a big role in the lack of numbers currently on the force. This is caused by staff retiring or moving to other Police Departments. He also stated that compensation is an issue as well. It is hard to hire an Officer when you are offering them \$22.00 an hour to put their lives on the line, when communities like Fall River offer \$24.00 or more, a 401k and gym membership options. He explained the staffing issues have been going on for years and should have been dealt with at the onset of the problem.

Lt. Bielski went on to say that it is difficult to attract new officers; the City has only seven individuals in the academy. It is an 8-month process to hire a new Officer. He stated that retention is helped by opportunities for growth, promotions, etc. Unfortunately, this is not happening within the Department.

On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council request that the Administration look into the possibility of an Educational Bill and incentives for current Police Officers to increase steps and hiring pay. This motion passed on a voice vote.

On a motion by Councillor Giesta, seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: to Table the matter.

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Councillor Burgo made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Oliveira.
This motion passed on a voice vote.

This meeting adjourned @ 8:19 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.
Clerk of Committees