

City of Cambridge

COMMITTEE REPORT FOR THE CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1996

1. A communication was received from Donna P. Lopez, Deputy City Clerk, transmitting a report from Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Chair of the Public Safety Committee for a meeting held on October 7, 1996 to discuss the current and planned programs for the Police Department, including a community policing update and a facilities tour.

City of Cambridge

The Public Safety Committee held a public meeting on Monday, October 7, 1996 at eleven o'clock and forty-five minutes p. m. in the Grainger Room at the Police Station, 5 Western Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss current and planned programs for the Police Department, including a community policing update and a facilities tour.

Present were Councillor Sullivan, Chair; Mayor Russell; Vice Mayor Born; Councillor Davis; Police Commissioner Ronnie Watson and Police Department personnel including Harold Murphy, Superintendent of Police; Dave Degou, Acting Superintendent of Police; Yvonne Hall, Deputy Superintendent of Police and Frank Pasquarello, Aide to the Commissioner and Public Information Officer.

Councillor Sullivan opened the meeting by stating that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss current and planned programs for the Police Department, including an update on Community Policing and a facilities tour.

Councillor Davis stated that she felt that the implementation of community policing should be prioritized.

Councillor Sullivan requested Commissioner Watson for an overview of the current programs, status and the needs of the department. Commissioner Watson stated that an assessment of community policing would be made after the assessment of where the police department is as a department. He stated to the committee that the Police Department is currently in the process of updating the Policy and Procedures Manual which are out of date and go back to 1972. The present policies, rules and regulations are not up to date, which could create liability issues. He cited the use of o.c. spray (oleo capsule pepper spray) as an example which was not outlined in the departmental regulations. Commissioner Watson stated that community policing would be reviewed to include all the different community programs together and a strategy formulated. He anticipated that it would take eighteen to twenty-four months to complete the updating process.

Vice Mayor Born questioned the updating of the procedures, to which Harold Murphy responded that the use of o.c. spray was not in the books when the regulations were written. Councillor Davis questioned if o.c. spray was an issue. Commissioner Watson stated that guidelines about the use of o.c. spray needs to be documented.

Councillor Sullivan asked if lieutenants have been acting as Shift Commanders. Commissioner Watson stated that there would have to be specific duties outlined and that Lieutenants will be acting as Shift Commanders.

Vice Mayor Born inquired if there was any controversy about updating the regulations. Superintendent Murphy stated a question arose to who was in charge if the Shift Commander is on duty.

Councillor Davis asked if there would be an opportunity to have internal involvement with the union and other officers. Commissioner Watson stated that when the update of the regulations is complete, copies will be given to the lieutenants and their input will be welcomed and then the regulations will be sent to the Law Department.

Vice Mayor Born questioned Commissioner Watson on staff changes. The Commissioner responded that officers are in place for their current position and are doing a good job. Their performance will be reviewed within the next sixty days. There may be changes or a shift of responsibilities.

Councillor Sullivan asked if we are down a lieutenant and if sergeants are performing lieutenant duties. Commissioner Watson responded that there are two lieutenant vacancies. Harold Murphy stated that there are nine groups on nights, with six lieutenants on nights and one vacancy for lieutenant in Group Four and there is a sergeant performing the duties of a lieutenant.

Councillor Sullivan questioned if there were 272 budgeted sworn law enforcement officers. Commissioner Watson answered that there are 260 officers and 52 civilians. Superintendent Murphy stated that the existing police exam was challenged and up held in court and there are appointments that have to be made from this list.

Councillor Davis asked whether community policing will be addressed in the updated rules and regulations. Commissioner Watson stated that community oriented policing is a partnership between the city and the community and it will be part of the Community Relations Department and new procedures will be in the rules and regulations. Community oriented policing, he stated, cannot be taught if it is not set up.

Councillor Sullivan asked Commissioner Watson if he had an approach to implement the procedures outlined. Commissioner Watson stated that the Police Department needs to write a training program. The training program must update and effectively lay out what is being taught. He requested two detention matrons to bring the total to three. Three police officers would be freed if civilians could book the prisoners. Automatic video recorders would be used to monitor all booking procedures.

Councillor Davis said that alcoholics are not always able to go the CASPAR shelter and they end up at the police station which is a poor use of the facility. Central Square, she stated, has a lot of this type walking around and the residents are afraid. Commissioner Watson stated that the beat officer was taken to the community and heard from the residents that they were afraid. He further stated that the selling of NIPS is a problem and this practice was banned in Chicago. Councillor Sullivan informed Commissioner Watson that the city was sued by a panhandler who felt his rights were violated and the panhandler won.

Mayor Russell questioned if CASPAR was doing outreach work. Councillor Davis stated that outreach needs to be done. Councillor Sullivan stated that the City Council funded an outreach program through the Human Services Department. Commissioner Watson stated that with the plans of Forest City for a twenty-four hour Stop & Shop the problem of alcoholics in the area will be increased. Superintendent Murphy stated that Jonathan Ginsberg from Forest City has been at the CASPAR meetings.

Councillor Davis stated that at the Quality of Life Conference she attended, the issue of noise in the neighborhoods was raised. She cited an incident of a neighbor who called the police station several times regarding the noise ordinance and was given a different answer each time. The officers did not have any knowledge of the current ordinance. This issue should have been put on a list of problems to be solved she said. Commissioner Watson stated that with the new CAD System the police will have the ability to track these types of issues, the Police can then send a letter which tells the person what they can do. Councillor Sullivan asked if a decibel meter was needed to record the level of noise. Commissioner Watson stated that you only have to hear the noise around fifty feet from the source. Superintendent Murphy stated that it has to be a citizens complaint. Commissioner Watson stated that the CAD will drive the department to rewrite its procedures.

Vice Mayor Born asked if citizens who call 911 have to give their name and address. Commissioner Watson responded in the negative. He further stated that extension 3301 should be listed as a non-emergency telephone number and an education process is needed to train the dispatchers on how to direct the call. Councillor Davis stated that it will take a while to incorporate the telephone number in the telephone book.

Councillor Sullivan questioned Commissioner Watson on the morale of the department. Commissioner Watson responded that there was no problem he could see with the morale. He stated that the professional appearance of the department was important. He met with the new recruits and answered their questions and he also met with the older officers. Commissioner Watson stated that he met with the police women. He stressed the importance of the professional image and the minimum use of jewelry and the length of hair for the safety of the officers. He expanded the women's locker room. He moved Liz Dillon so that she would have space for the domestic violence unit.

Councillor Sullivan asked Commissioner Watson what he wanted from the City Council. Commissioner Watson responded that he would like support for a new or totally rehabbed facility. He would rather have new facility, however if this is not possible he would like the city to consider purchasing the Unemployment Office building across the street and building a tunnel to connect the two buildings with the Community Relations housed on the first floor, Operations on the second, Investigation on the third floor, and the Administration on the fourth floor. Mayor Russell asked Commissioner Watson if it was important to stay in Central Square. He responded that it was important. Mayor Russell asked Commissioner Watson if it was important to have the training facility on the premises. He responded in the affirmative. Secondly, he stated that community policing requires new staffing levels. Three positions will be repositionized.

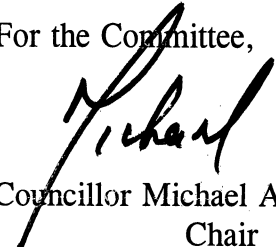
Mayor Russell stated that some officers on the details need to be reminded to direct the traffic. Commissioner Watson stated that the officers will be taken off of details if they are not performing their duties until they know they have a job to do.

At one o'clock and fifteen minutes a tour of the facility was given to the committee.

It was the sense of the committee that this is the worst publicly owned and occupied building in the city.

At one o'clock and fifty-five minutes p. m. the meeting adjourned.

For the Committee,


Councillor Michael A. Sullivan,
Chair

Committee Report for the City Council
Meeting of October 21, 1996

S-509

Committee Report #1

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In City Council October 21, 1996

Report Accepted,
Placed on File,
Order #61 Adopted.