

City of Cambridge

The Public Safety Committee held a public meeting on December 16, 1997, beginning at 5:18 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber for the purpose of discussing neighborhood policing, particularly ways to have police officers remain for longer periods of time in any one neighborhood, and any other business before the Committee.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Chair of the Committee, Councillor Henrietta Davis, Councillor Francis H. Duehay, Councillor Katherine Triantafillou, and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury. Also present were City Manager Robert W. Healy, Police Commissioner Ronnie Watson, Superintendent Harold Murphy, Superintendent David Degou, Patrol Officer Steve Hall, Ray Santilli, Director of Police Planning, Vickie Boulrice, Community Affairs Office, Michael Gardner, Personnel Director.

Councillor Sullivan convened the hearing and explained the purpose. He requested that Commissioner Watson give a brief overview of community policing.

Commissioner Watson stated that by contract, officers can bid two times a year for their assignments. Permanent night officers can bid for two, three or four different assignments. All assignments are based on seniority. Community policing requires some continuity of assignment. Due to the assignment system, only supervisors can be assured to be on site at all times, so a lieutenant is assigned to each sector and a sergeant is assigned to each neighborhood. The Department uses 86's (assignment at a particular location and time of day) for selective enforcement - cars, trucks, neighborhood issues. The goal is to get officers out walking. He has assigned internal affairs persons to do integrity checks, to ensure that these assignments are being carried out.

Councillor Sullivan asked Commissioner Watson if the department had ever been fully staffed with 271 police officers in the fifteen months of his tenure, and Commissioner Watson replied that it had not, the maximum has been 262.

Commissioner Watson stated that he has had permission from the City Manager to fill every slot. There are currently nine in school and sixteen additional vacancies. Thirteen are out on medical leave.

Councillor Sullivan then invited public comment. There was none.

Councillor Sullivan stated that there have been many meetings where the citizens have expressed their desire for continuity of assignment. He asked how assignment rules apply to new hires.

Mr. Santilli stated that during police officers' first year of service management has the full power to assign them.

Councillor Duehay asked whether there are changes and improvements that could be made in the contract to better achieve the goal of more continuity. He added that perhaps the first consideration should be looking at what would be an ideal.

Commissioner Watson stated that the best arrangement would allow people to pick their shifts, allow management to make assignments and give supervisors some ability to pick the people who work for them. Where he came from, management got 20% of assignments per shift and the union got 80%. Police picked the shift. He is not sure of cost/benefit analysis in trying to move to that structure here. It is important to have buy-in of supervisors and officers. Good policy comes from good information. The Department is trying to put as much information as possible in the officers' hands, through lieutenants and sergeants. They are also working with surrounding communities to share information. But in the end it falls back on the individual officers and it is about accountability.

Michael Gardner, Director of Personnel, provided some history of the previous contracts. There are about 168 hours per week required to staff a public place. Of that, a single officer works 30 hours per week or less over the course of a year.

In 1989, shift bidding was put into the contract to promote greater beat stability and beat identification. This contract also allowed introduction of the "power shift" to put different numbers of staff on at times of more need. The hope was that officers would pick places they were interested in and that there would be added stability and commitment to a particular neighborhood. Management also got the right to void a particular choice of assignment.

Mr. Gardner noted that the cycle of tours of duty and the groupings mean that officers cannot always work together. On nights, there is the right to four separate bids. However, 58 of the 75 night shift officers have picked only two assignments or fewer.

Councillor Sullivan stated that the moving of sergeants and lieutenants to particular sectors and neighborhoods has been good for community policing, but it is the line personnel who actually interact with the community. It sounds like that happened in Chicago.

Commissioner Watson stated that the Chicago model cannot work with the 4 and 2 situation that exists in Cambridge. That works with three different straight shifts. Commissioner Watson added that he would like to see management have a right to make certain assignments to select some of the people who will be working for them.

Noelle Johnson, 139 Pine Street, stated that she finds the technical description confusing, but it sounds like the union is hampering police assignments.

Superintendent Degou gave an example as further explanation. Officers select an assignment two times per year, April and October. On Western Avenue, there were excellent officers, but they bid out and now there will be a whole new group.

Ms. Johnson noted the need for the neighborhood to know who is there.

Commissioner Watson stated that if management had complete authority to make the assignments, the community still would only see the same officer two times per week in the neighborhood. He noted that there are strategies that help community policing. For example, police are now required to walk every block in every neighborhood. In addition, police attend more community meetings.

Councillor Triantafillou said that people do not tell her they want more police at neighborhood meetings; they tell her that they want to see more police walking around their neighborhoods.

Commissioner Watson stated that while a certain number of police cars must be staffed, the police have full authority to get out of the car and walk. He wants them to make decisions about how and when to get out of the car and walk and look around.

Councillor Sullivan stated that this is harder to accomplish when the department is not at full staff.

Commissioner Watson agreed, he said that he wants to fill the vacancies. He noted that the very generous unlimited sick leave tends to result in long absences which in turn creates staffing shortages that cannot be filled.

Councillor Triantafillou asked what other police departments do. Mr. Healy stated that this is very unusual outside of the Boston area.

Police Officer Steve Hall stated that the union is not preventing community policing. The management has the right to assign 40%. There are nineteen primary routes at night. It is an issue of understaffing. An officer assigned to seven enforcement areas in one day cannot do quality community policing.

Commissioner Watson stated that he disagrees. Community policing is not just walking around. Right now, the supervisors are directing officers to the enforcement areas but hopefully it will become more self-directed, as officers take the initiative to cover areas that need enforcement on their routes on their own.

Virginia Ward, Abundant Life Church on Harvard Street, Riverside, stated that yesterday Sergeant Gardner had a police-sponsored party which was a very nice thing. Some of the officers do not seem to care about the community.

Commissioner Watson stated that Sergeant Gardner is doing some very good community work and it is a good foundation. A lot has to come from the individual officers.

Noelle Johnson stated that she still has fears that Area IV will be shortchanged. Union staff and management obviously have major problems. The end result will not be good unless everyone gets on the same page.

Commissioner Watson stated that improvements will only come through the involvement of all.

Superintendent Murphy stated that there is a lot of excellent police work going on. Crime is down and officers are spending more time on quality of life issues.

Ms. Johnson stated that unless citizens build up trust for a particular officer, all the computer information in the world will not help.

City Manager Healy stated that even with an officer who stays in the same neighborhood assignment, in a six day time frame a citizen will only see an officer two times; because of the way the schedule works.

Commissioner Watson stated that these officers do get to know the neighborhood.

Councillor Sullivan asked whether the 4-2 issue is exacerbated by a six month assignment period.

Ray Santilli stated that a high percentage of officers actually pick the same assignment.

Police Officer Hall said that with full staff and the right to assign 27 officer per shift, there is a strong management capacity.

Mr. Healy stated that it took hard negotiating to get to the present agreement.

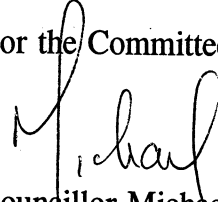
Councillor Sullivan emphasized the need for full staff. Commissioner Watson said that even with full staff, if the department doesn't improve on the medical leave outages, there will still be thirteen less than full staff.

Councillor Sullivan asked how the sixteen vacancies came about. Mr. Gardner stated that it was mostly retirements, some early outs. There is a long time when people are eligible to leave with the full pension before they are 65, and the City does not know who will exercise that option at any given time.

Councillor Sullivan stated that he assumes that all present understand that the community strongly supports more police continuity in neighborhoods. Commissioner Watson agreed that this is something all must work on.

Councillor Sullivan thanked all present for their attendance. The meeting was adjourned at 6:26 p.m.

For the Committee,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael", written over the printed name below.

Councillor Michael A. Sullivan
Chair

Committee Report #1

S-29

A report from Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Chair of the public Safety Committee, for a meeting held on December 16, 1997 for the purpose of discussing neighborhood policing, particularly ways to have police officers remain for longer periods of time in any one neighborhood, and any other business before the Committee.

In City Council January 26, 1998

All items carried forward to be a part of City Council Meeting of February 2, 1998 on motion of Councillor Sullivan.

In City Council February 2, 1998

Report Accepted.

PLACED ON FILE