

City of Cambridge

The Public Safety Committee held a public meeting on April 3, 1998, beginning at 10:15 a.m. in the Ackermann Room for the purpose of discussing staffing levels at the Police Department.

Present at the meeting were Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Chair of the Committee, Councillor Henrietta Davis, Councillor Katherine Triantafillou, and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury. Also present were Robert W. Healy, City Manager; Ronnie Watson, Police Commissioner; Michael Gardner, Personnel Director; Harold Murphy, Police Superintendent; David Degou, Police Superintendent; Steven Hall, Police Officer and President of the Patrol Officers' Association.

Councillor Sullivan convened the hearing and explained the purpose. He explained that this is a follow-up meeting to the meeting held several months ago regarding community policing and what the staffing is to make it work.

Councillor Sullivan asked what the budget level is, is it 271 sworn officers? Mr. Healy said that it is and that there are 218 patrol officers budgeted.

Councillor Sullivan asked about the long-term disability which the City Council is often given as a reason for lower levels of staff than the budgeted level. Mr. Healy stated that there are a number of vacancies. In addition, the recent disability reform legislation has mandated a medical exam and return to work of persons who have been a disability if the exam finds that there is any work ability.

Mr. Healy stated that at the time of the last meeting, there were nineteen vacancies. They have agreed to leave three vacancies available for those seeking to return under the Pension Reform Act, for which corrective legislation has been filed but not acted upon pending court action. Mr. Healy stated that he had declined to hire one officer and Boston did the same. The court action will take place in May.

Mr. Healy said that yesterday, he and Commissioner Watson went over the civil service list. Of the sixteen, there are three that have been certified and do not need to go to the Police Academy. Thus, Cambridge will be hiring nineteen, and sending sixteen to the Academy. The three with certification will get local training. Three slots will be left for disability re-employs.

Mr. Healy concluded that the City recognizes that the Department is short staffed. This shortage was not done on purpose. Cambridge is doing everything it can to hire up and will reserve the seats in the Police Academy.

The disability situation is not the same as in other city departments. Police get 100% of their pay if they are injured in the line of duty, and they get 100% sick pay so there are not accrued salary outages with which to hire any replacements.

Commissioner Watson stated that he has seven officers on long-term disability, three on leaves of absences and three who are on limited duty and cannot perform full job functions. The total coverage is 258.

Officer Hall said that his figures show 197 on the payroll, and that three of the employees on disability have filed retirement papers. The State Department of Personnel Administration (DPA) is now called the Human Resources Division (HRD).

Mr. Healy stated that a new state statute authorizes a fee of \$1,800.00 per officer sent to the Police Academy. The amount is just deducted from the Cherry Sheet. This time there is an opportunity for training at \$1,000.00 per officer but it will have to be paid up front, so the City Council will see a request for appropriation for this purpose.

Councillor Triantafillou asked how many women there will be. Mr. Healy stated that there will be two, and that there will be five people of color.

Inga Metcalf, 10 Magazine Street, asked if details could be filled by auxiliary police. Mr. Healy stated that under current law, that is not possible. In addition, these officers are working off-hours, so it would not result in more officers on the street.

Ms. Metcalf described seeing four teenagers in Central Square smoking pot and she could not see a patrol officer anywhere. Where are they? Commissioner Watson stated that there are two police officers assigned to Central Square but they do not stand in one place. There are also narcotic officers in Central Square all the time. If you see illegal activity, call 911.

Councillor Sullivan asked about filling vacancies in specialized units while patrol officer positions are unfilled. Commissioner Watson stated that bicycle officers are patrol officers, that is not specialized service.

Councillor Sullivan asked about the recent complaints the City Council received regarding the Friday and Saturday night staffing pulled out of West Cambridge to cover bar closing time in Harvard Square. Mr. Healy stated that the normal staffing assignment of cars is one. However, supervisors have the authority to assign more if there is a particular crime problem.

Councillor Sullivan stated that he would advocate for a power shift to cover closing hours in Harvard Square so as not to have to take police out of neighborhoods to cover those closing hours.

Mr. Healy stated that he agrees with the concept. There was a joint meeting with the two associations to discuss their differences. He emphasized that superior officers have the judgment to modify the neighborhood pullout in a crime situation. There is a bargaining issue about overtime. He is willing to authorize four hours of overtime to deal with this situation but not eight hours.

Councillor Triantafyllou asked about the times of the shifts. Commissioner Watson listed the shift times as follows:

7:40 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
4:00 p.m. to midnight
Midnight to 8:00 a.m.

Then there is a fourth platoon from 6:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m.

Councillor Sullivan noted the particular problem with a shift that went below minimum due to sickness and vacations. Mr. Healy stated that this matter is under investigation because too much vacation time was granted in that case. Mr. Healy noted that there were only fifteen calls for service.

Councillor Sullivan observed that you cannot count on that. Superintendent Murphy said that approximately 50% of calls received in the last half are "assigned 86" from the Police Department to the officers directing them to a particular location.

Mr. Healy stated that Cambridge has a staffing level per capita per square mile that is above the state and national average. This is appropriate, Cambridge is a busy city. Crime is down; the staffing is working. He noted that the three officers who have already has their academy training are police officers from other municipalities who want to work for Cambridge.

Councillor Sullivan asked whether in 24 weeks from June, Cambridge police will be back to full staffing. Mr. Healy said yes, by the third week in November all will be out on the street.

Ms. Metcalf asked how far police can go to intervene with buses parking in front of 10 Magazine Street. They are not supposed to lay over. City Foods is having trouble with buses laying over on Green Street. Councillor Davis said that starting in September, two buses will lay over at University Park.

Councillor Sullivan asked if Cambridge could build a layover place somewhere else.

Councillor Davis stated that the MBTA takes the position that the driver should get a ticket for this illegal behavior. Mr. Healy stated that the MBTA has motorized police staff and they should take some enforcement responsibility.

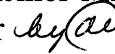
Councillor Sullivan thanked all those present for their attendance.

The meeting adjourned at 11:05 p.m.

For the Committee,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael".

Councillor Michael A. Sullivan

Chair 

A communication was received from D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk, transmitting a report from Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Chair of the Public Safety Committee, for a meeting held on April 3, 1998 for the purpose of discussing staffing levels at the Police Department.

In City Council April 27, 1998

*Report Accepted. Placed on
file*