

C. C. 106

City of Cambridge

The Public Safety Committee held a public meeting on Wednesday, September 18, 1996, beginning at 2:10 p.m. in the Emergency Communications conference room at Fire Headquarters, 489 Broadway, for the purpose of discussing present and planned programs of the Fire Department, the Emergency Communications Department and the Emergency Management Department.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Chair of the Committee, Vice Mayor Kathleen L. Born, and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury. Also present were Fire Chief Kevin J. Fitzgerald, Police Commissioner Ronnie Watson, who arrived slightly late because he and Officer Pasquarello stopped to apprehend a purse snatcher on the way; Director of Emergency Services George Fosque, Emergency Manager Director David O'Connor, Deputy Fire Chief Gerald Reardon, Fire Captain Peter Cignetti, Chief of Emergency communications Thomas Cabill and Police Officer Frank Pasquarello.

The meeting began with a tour of the Emergency Communications center during which George Fosque provided a comprehensive description of the Emergency Communications system. Thereafter Councillor Sullivan re-convened the meeting and explained the purpose.

Councillor Sullivan noted that the idea for these informational meetings came out of the budget wrap-up meeting held by the Finance Committee. This is an opportunity to learn about the departments and their upcoming plans before the budget process begins.

There was a discussion of plans for fire house renovation and rehab. Engine Two and Ladder Three in Lafayette Square will be tightened up. The department has a state historical grant to do some work. Water infiltration must be addressed.

In response to a question from Councillor Sullivan, Chief Fitzgerald reported that staff as budgeted is adequate. At the moment the staff level is five below budget. Chief Fitzgerald also said that he does not anticipate any problems with the availability of a class when Cambridge is ready for one. Chief Fitzgerald stated that the second new rescue truck arrived this weekend. At the end of the meeting, Deputy Chief Reardon provided a tour of the new rescue truck.

Deputy Chief Reardon noted that the department keeps its engines in good shape but it is doing more work on engines with less money. Many old companies have gone out of business, so getting parts for 1978 vehicles is difficult.

Councillor Sullivan asked about expected vacancies in addition to the budgeted vacancies already mentioned. Chief Fitzgerald said that he didn't know for sure, because he does not yet know the impact of the new law crediting veterans' service.

Deputy Chief Reardon then provided a description of the rescue services.

The discussion then turned to Emergency Management. Director David O'Connor distributed copies of information he has made available via the City's homepage on internet, with links to other emergency information (attached).

There was a discussion of techniques for hazardous waste disposal. Deputy Chief Reardon noted that the problem for homeowners comes when the container in which the hazard is located is broken or leaking. The disposal techniques are federally mandated and are expensive to the homeowners.

Discussion returned to the Emergency Communications Center. Mr. Fosque noted a staff issue. Prior to the merger of police and fire dispatch, there were two dispatch centers, one for fire and one for police, with thirty-five employees. Now there are twenty-four dispatchers and six supervisors. There were going to be five police officers as dispatchers, but they chose to bid back onto the street. As of now the center is operating with substantially fewer people than planned, operations are strained, and overtime expenses are way up.

Police Commissioner Watson noted that the police dispatcher positions are the subject of a union grievance regarding what route should be assigned. His position is that the supervisor on the street is in control, not the dispatcher.

Mr. Fosque noted that in general, the transition to the unified dispatch center has gone very well. Chief Fitzgerald stated that the dispatch transition was the smoothest he has seen in the state. In some other cities it has been a disaster. Mr. Fosque noted a \$75,000 savings in Nynex expenses over ten years by having dispatch at this location rather than Miller River.

Mr. Fosque stated that enhanced 911 will be operative as of December 4, 1996 and will enable the dispatcher to see the name and address for the phone number from which the call is placed. Commissioner Watson noted that this will raise an issue about sending police to the door, when the caller is a witness who wants to remain anonymous. Mr. Fosque noted the additional issue of how to treat hang ups. There tends to be an 8-10% increase in police work because of this issue. Deputy Chief Reardon noted that in some cities, the increase was more like twenty-eight percent at the beginning but then leveled off. All agree that it is necessary to send a police car to the address when there was a hang-up, because there could be a dangerous situation that caused the person to hang up.

Police Commissioner Watson noted that the number presently listed as the business telephone number for the Police Department (349-3300) is currently answered at the Emergency Communications Center. It was agreed that this must be changed.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

For the Committee,

Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Chair

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A report for a meeting held on September 18, 1996 for the purpose of discussing present and planned programs of the Fire Department, the Emergency Communications Department and the Emergency Management Department.

In City Council September 30, 1996

Report Accepted

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