

Public Safety Subcommittee
TOWN OF SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, February 17, 2022 at 8:00 A.M.
Zoom Meeting/Simsbury Community Television Live Stream

Mr. Askham called the Special Meeting of the Public Safety Subcommittee to order at 8:01 A.M. via Zoom Meeting/Simsbury Community Television Live Stream.

Present were:

Melissa Appleby, Deputy Town Manager; **James Baldis**, Chief, Simsbury Volunteer Fire Department; **Michael Berry**, Emergency Management Director; **Nicholas Boulter**, Chief of Police; **Maria Capriola**, Town Manager; **Jenna Caulfield**, Police Commission Chair; **Chris Davis**, Deputy Chief of Police; **Kristen Formanek**, Director of Community & Social Services; **Tom Fitzgerald**, Management Specialist; **Mike Long**, Police Commissioner; **Sarah Nielsen**, Simsbury Mainstreet Partnership; **Chris Peterson**, Selectman; **Tom Roy**, Director of Public Works; **Nancy Scheetz**, CEO Visiting Nurses Association; **Karin Stewart**, Executive Director, Simsbury Volunteer Ambulance Association; **Neil Sullivan**, Assistant Superintendent, Simsbury Schools; **Patrick Tourville**, Fire Marshal, **Gary Wilcox**, President, Simsbury Fire District, and **James Fleming**.

Pledge of Allegiance

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

1) Presentation and Discussion of Police Commission FY 22/23 Budget Priorities

Mr. Long opened the presentation by outlining how the Police Commission operates and the role they play in the community. He said their goal is to provide the citizens of Simsbury public safety at a reasonable cost. He mentioned the town has a balanced program with the three Simsbury public safety organizations consisting of the Commission and the Police department, the Fire department, and EMS. He said that new laws and regulations have added extra tasks and accountability on the police department that has resulted in hours of extra training and record keeping requirements. More police officers and cruisers from neighboring towns are visibly present on the streets of Simsbury performing private duty jobs and the town also loses a share in revenue from this type of work. He provided recognized countrywide metrics on the ratio between number of police officers to 1,000 residents for a town Simsbury's size, and reported nationally it's 1.9, but Simsbury comes in at 1.57 (39 officers divided by 25K residents.) He stated Simsbury is somewhere between 6 and 11 officers short of the average. Mr. Long spoke to the length of time require to train and certify a newly hired officer. He stated that hiring does not take place immediately and takes time. He mentioned that as housing construction continues to be approved and with the possibility of officers retiring, the deficit for police officers continues. He said timing is critical and they need to act now before the need is larger as the town continues to grow. He read a statement from another commission member where he talked about the downside of overtime and the stress that this places on the officers, and that Simsbury needs to be proactive in meeting the challenges of the future. Mr. Long concluded by saying the "the ask is a big one, but the need is even bigger."

Ms. Caulfield reiterated what Mr. Long said to support their request to hire 6 additional officers. Chief Boulter added that they have supporting information if anyone has any questions. He mentioned that there will be 5-6 people eligible for retirement by 2024 and they have experienced difficulties in filling vacancies in the past because the recruitment process can be difficult. He also expressed it can be difficult getting an available slot(s) to enter the police academy training program, which the State is currently working on.

Chief Baldis asked about the accreditation process and Chief Boulter spoke about the possibility of hiring a civilian to perform that role as opposed to a sworn officer performing those duties. Mr. Long defined what the accreditation process means which is to bring their practices and procedures up to the highest level possible.

Mr. Fleming raised his concerns around the Police department being short staffed and spoke about the potential ramifications. He strongly urged the BOS and the BOF to address the issue and come up with funding this year and not put it off another year.

Ms. Neilson asked if there is a way to work together with public works to achieve our public safety staffing goals.

Mr. Wilcox said the Fire District fully supports a well-staffed police force and understands the demands on them. He encouraged being proactive in recruiting.

Mr. Askham provided closing remarks and supported an increase in officers, their training, and equipment. He said this will be discussed further during the budget process. Mr. Long raised a point on ensuring there is a commitment beyond this year to ensure the right number of hires are achieved long-term, as opposed to having a discussing every year to rehash the same request.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:41 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Marion Lynott
Commission Clerk