

WOODBRIIDGE BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS

POLICE COMMISSION – SPECIAL MEETING

MINUTES

May 25, 2023

Via ZOOM Platform (In accordance with SB 1202, this meeting was held via electronic transmission.)

The meeting may be viewed on YouTube link: <https://youtube.com/live/DZ2sxGdP5Kg?feature=share>

A Special Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Police Commissioners took place on Thursday, May 25, 2023, at 6:15 p.m., via ZOOM platform. The purpose of this Special Meeting was to discuss manpower and staffing issues as they relate to SRO summer reassignment and to take action, as appropriate.

- Chairman Berke called the special meeting to order at 6:16 p.m.

Commissioners Present-

Chairman Robert Berke

Commissioner Andrew Esposito, Jr.

Commissioner Deborah Desir

Commissioner Mica Cardozo

Commissioner Henry Kopel

Police Administration Present-

Chief Frank P. Cappiello

Deputy Chief Ronald E. Smith, Jr.

Administrative Assistant Janice Innocenzi

CHAIRMAN ROBERT BERKE'S OPENING REMARKS

Thank you all for meeting, I know we just met a few days ago. After the last meeting as I walking out, I was thinking about comments that the Chief and Deputy Chief made to us, as a Commission in a public forum, and one of my fellow commissioners made a comment to me, that I thought made sense. That's why I asked this meeting to be held. It is a little bit concerning that we don't have enough manpower. I would like us to consider removing the SROs, at least for now, right after the school year. I don't know what dates that's effective for Amity and Beecher. The MOU, which is a contract that the Police Department has with both Beecher and Amity, there's a section that provides for us to utilize a transfer of manpower if operational needs exist in exigent circumstances, and I think this certainly qualifies for that based on what the Chief and Deputy Chief mentioned last time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS/CORRESPONDENCE

- There were no Public Comments or correspondence.

MANPOWER & STAFFING – SRO SUMMER REASSIGNMENT

- Commissioner Kopel – *I think that this idea is very appropriate. I found it very concerning, I thought that the Chief and Deputy Chief's factual advisory to the Commission at the last meeting about the state of manpower and its impacts was both factually rich and highly compelling. I actually regret not having raised the question then, is there anything that we should be thinking about how to address this. So, I think this suggestion is very well taken and I support it. The one thing I would suggest is because the schools also have security issues, of which we are all aware, that if we do go forward with this proposal, we promptly and effectively notify the school officials, First Selectperson, so that they can take whatever action they need to do. My understanding, from following some other town affairs, is that there is a good surplus this year in the school budget, and they should be well equipped to be able to provide whatever alternate security is available.*
- Commissioner Esposito – *I agree with Hank, I think that under the circumstances, I don't really feel we have a choice. I think we do have a choice and that choice is to protect the community, that's our responsibility. I think that we have to do everything we can to do to protect the townspeople and our children. I think that since they can hire armed security guards, and they have them at Amity, there's no reason why they can't have one at Beecher, and we can put two officers back on active duty for the department.*

- Chief Cappiello – *If I could just add a couple of points to that, I know we referenced the dates regarding that. Amity High School graduation is slated for June 9th and traditionally, the SRO comes back right after that anyway, so that will be happening as a standard practice and as part of the ongoing MOU with Amity for that region. As far as Beecher Road School goes, their graduation and the last day of the official full enrollment school year is June 14th. Chief Cappiello said that due to the exigency of our current staffing shortage and the effort to get more boots on the ground to assist us in addressing the associated issues that are being raised and continue to come up because of the frequency that we are having to run minimum manpower, I agree with the recommendation that we reassign our School Resource Officer at Beecher, on a temporary basis for the summer months, and put him back in patrol during that time. I ran this by the Finance Director, because as you know, the Woodbridge Board of Education funds that one position fully for the entire year, and the Finance Director said that we would have to reimburse the Woodbridge Board of Ed for the days that he is not at the school. I also gave Superintendent Tencza and Officer Lynch a head's up that we were going to be having this discussion and what the intentions were, so they are aware of our meeting this evening, as well.*
- Chairman Berke – *I would imagine that we will obviously have to revisit this when the school year comes around and see where we stand at that point, we have active openings that we are trying to recruit and hire other officers, so we'll see where we are at the end of August.*
- Commissioner Desir – *It doesn't seem likely that we'd have somebody ready to go before the end of school, so I think we may have to think about it before the beginning of school.*
- Chairman Berke – *I think we can wait and see as we get closer to the school year, we may be in the same situation where we have no applicants, so it's hard to say.*
- Commissioner Cardozo – *I did hear the Chief say he spoke with the Woodbridge Board of Ed Superintendent and did you say anything about Amity, I didn't quite catch that.*
- Chief Cappiello – *Yes, the way the Amity District MOU reads, the School Resource Officer every year ends his role over there after graduation and he returns to patrol for the remainder of June, July and August, until school starts again, so that's already in place, so that's really not an issue. It was the one at Beecher, he is funded and usually there for the full 12 months, so that would be the change we are making.*
- Commissioner Cardozo – *I know when the issue has been broached in the past, there has been a pretty significant outcry from the parents primarily from Beecher Road School as it relates to pulling the SRO. Was there any feedback given as to what we can expect as far as that is concerned?*
- Chief Cappiello – *Yes, when I spoke with the Superintendent for Woodbridge, Vonda, she understood our predicament that we are in, and she was thankful that I assured her we would have him remain there until school got out on the 14th, she was very appreciative. She was not totally pleased that he would not be there for the summer, which is understandable, but she understood the situation we are in and the need for that.*
- Commissioner Cardozo – *But does she also understand that come with the new year, they may need to prepare to hire security for the school?*
- Chief Cappiello – *I'm sure she has that in mind, or at least thinking about it, because she asked if that might extend beyond the summer reassignment and I said at this point I was not sure, we were just going to address the summer right now, and as the Chairman said, see where we're at coming up. But filling these positions, like I said last week and given the experience locally, statewide and nationally, filling these positions is difficult right now.*

A motion was made to reassign the SRO for the summer back to patrol. Discussion took place.

Discussion:

- Commissioner Esposito – *I would think that Amity has hired security guards on the payroll. I think that maybe what we should be able to do for Beecher is provide them with some information on where they can go to find good armed security guards and give them some help in that direction.*
- Commissioner Desir – *I also think that maybe not for this particular meeting, but we should start to formulate a plan for return to school.*

- Commissioner Esposito – *Absolutely, I agree with you there. If it is our plan to have, the motion we are making is to have, these officers come back now and for the summer, but really to have these officers come back on a permanent basis. I think that’s true; we really have to plan for the fall. They have to make plans to have security in place to replace the officers coming back on. Because I don’t think our staffing level is going to change in terms of availability of people between now and the end of summer.*
- Commissioner Desir – *It might, but I don’t think we can count on that.*
- Commissioner Esposito – *I don’t want to bank on that.*
- Chairman Berke – *It likely won’t, but in the sake of fair notice to the public, we noticed this meeting for the summer SRO, we can’t address beyond that, so we should plan on discussing this at the June meeting. It will give some of the interested folks in different departments time to make their pitch to us. I didn’t think it was fair to do it all at once.*
- Commissioner Cardozo – *On the motion specifically to address the force shortage that we currently have in the Police Department to utilize the SRO resources for the summer.*

ACTION, AS APPROPRIATE

The Board voted unanimously (Kopel/Esposito) by roll call, to reassign the SRO for the summer back to patrol.

ADJOURNMENT:

The Board voted unanimously (Esposito/Kopel) by roll call, to adjourn the Special Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Police Commissioners at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Janice Innocenzi, Administrative Assistant

WOODBRIIDGE BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS
POLICE COMMISSION – SPECIAL MEETING

MOTIONS

May 25, 2023

PUBLIC COMMENTS/CORRESPONDENCE

- There were no Public Comments.

MANPOWER & STAFFING – SRO SUMMER REASSIGNMENT (DISCUSSION)

- **ACTION, AS APPROPRIATE**

The Board voted unanimously (Kopel/Esposito) by roll call, to reassign the SRO for the summer back to patrol.

ADJOURNMENT:

The Board voted unanimously (Esposito/Kopel) by roll call, to adjourn the Special Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Police Commissioners at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Janice Innocenzi, Administrative Assistant