

Minutes for the April 5, 2022 Safety Committee meeting

In attendance:

Chairman David Phares

Committee members Theresa Bisbee and Charlie Malta

Police Chief Turner

Fire Chief Tennyson

Councilwoman Koudela

Mayor/Safety Director Rich Regovich

Chairman David Phares stated that we have discussed two options for fireworks. One is to leave the current ordinance in place which bans them or go with the State law, which will go into effect in July and sets 20 specific dates that fireworks will be allowed. He mentioned the State Fire Marshal efforts which were basically to go with the State of Ohio law.

Fire Chief Tennyson stated that we do have the possibility of modifying the State law if we choose to or go with the original setup. Mayor Regovich asked Chief Tennyson to read the official State law to get it on the record.

Chairman Phares stated that his opinion is whether we keep it prohibited completely or go with the State's option, residents are still going to set fireworks off. Councilwoman Bisbee acknowledges that we don't have enough police officers to enforce the current ban and going with the State law will mean residents will think that it's alright to use fireworks anytime. She feels we should keep the current ordinance. Councilman Malta feels we should go with the State's new law. He would like to try the new State law and we can always revisit in the future if we need to.

Police Chief Turner feels that we should give residents the chance to get the urge to set off fireworks out of their system on these specific dates and then make it clear to his officers that it is allowed only on these certain dates and anyone setting them off on dates outside of these will be cited. The Fourth of July is the main problem and he feels it should be enforceable the rest of the year. He also feels that we should not alter the State law because it could be construed as some kind of bias.

Chief Tennyson agrees with the Police Chief that making them illegal has not worked up to this point. He also agrees with what the City of Willoughby has done by banning the sale of fireworks. The upcoming State law allows big box stores to sell fireworks. He feels that Willowick should ban sales at any store in the City.

Mayor Regovich agrees with these statements and feels that except for the Fourth of July when you have huge numbers of complaints for fireworks, these other days it will be fairly easy for the Police Department to enforce the law.

Councilwoman Koudela asked if the penalties for violating the State law are set by the City or the State? Police Chief Turner will have to check on this. He feels that possession will not be the big issue but setting them off on non-designated days will be the enforceable issue.

Mayor Regovich will encourage Law Director Stephanie Landgraf to look into modeling our ordinance to match what surrounding cities are putting on their books. We can really stand apart if we make sure we enforce the ordinance outside of these dates. We need to give Police the ability to enforce this ordinance. If we can predict the dates then it should help.

The committee recommends going with the State law and banning sales as well as looking to the Law Director to revamp the consequences for violating the law.

David Phares