

Minutes for June 2, 2022 Safety Committee Meeting

In attendance:

Chairman David Phares

Committee members Theresa Bisbee and Charlie Malta

Safety Director Rich Regovich

Fire Chief Joe Tennyson

Councilwoman Koudela

Councilwoman Anthosh

Councilman Vanni

First item on the agenda was fireworks. The ordinance remains the same as the committee agreed from the last meeting - certain days you can let them off and no sales in the city. Committee agrees to send ordinance as stated to Council for a final vote.

Councilman Vanni wanted to speak up about fireworks and stated that the city should keep it to just the Fourth of July instead of allowing the 20 days per the Ohio Revised Code. He would really like to keep it prohibited altogether.

Chief Tennyson reiterated what Chief Turner stated at the last Safety Committee meeting about allowing residents these days to set off fireworks might allow them to get it out of their system. Willowick has never had any serious injuries or structure fires due to fireworks.

Councilman Vanni hopes residents will only set off fireworks during Fourth of July and not the rest of the year. Chief Tennyson states that the goal of other cities and fire prevention personnel is to make it illegal to sell in the entire county and that will prevent a lot of it. Nonetheless, it is going to happen no matter what law you pass. Councilman Vanni realized that we can always revisit this in the future if we need to.

Mayor Regovich stated that the real problem is pets that have a problem with the loud noises, residents with PTSD etc., these are what the police will get calls about. He doesn't feel that fireworks are a big problem in Willowick. He feels that if you make it illegal across the board, residents will complain that the law is not being enforced and it will put a bigger burden on the police department. If we stay with what the State has adopted that might not be the case. If it gets out of control then we can revisit it.

Councilwoman Antosh would like it to be only allowed on Fourth of July. Councilwoman Bisbee stated that that would be discriminatory against the other groups and their holidays allowed by the State. She has gotten calls about that. Councilwoman Antosh then stated that we should not allow them at all. Mayor Regovich feels that you either follow the State law or do not allow them at all. Councilwoman Antosh says that her neighbor has a professional fireworks setup that disrupts traffic on E305th Street.

Chairman Phares would like to see if allowing fireworks on these days will change anything.

Councilman Vanni feels that if traffic is stopping on E305th Street to watch fireworks then the police should cite them for blocking traffic. Chief Tennyson stated to Councilwoman Antosh that she should call as soon as her neighbor starts setting up.

The next agenda item is nuisance mitigation. This issue stems from BZA member and resident Phil Yarets and his complaints regarding a house on 328th Street that has had the police respond 27 times in just over three years. Violations include drunken behavior, fighting outside, riding motorcycles up and down the sidewalk, parking trucks on the wrong side of the street, parties, noise and fireworks. A nuisance mitigation ordinance such as Lakewood's, would spell out a list of certain nuisances and if a resident is cited for any of these nuisances twice in a 12 month period, they will receive a letter stating that on the third violation, they will be financially responsible for all of the services required to respond to the call. Lakewood has an appeal process that goes to the Mayor first then to a nuisance mitigation board.

Chairman Phares went through the list of nuisances that Lakewood has in their ordinance. Councilman Vanni state that he has spoken to Mr. Yarets about the same house. He also spoke with Law Director Stephanie Landgraf about the issue and she brought up the same concerns about discrimination against minorities. Chairman Phares states that if we provide multiple levels of appeals and use common sense with each case we can avoid problems. Councilwoman Bisbee stated that we need to make the ordinance detailed and specific as to what the nuisances are.

Mayor Regovich mentioned a house where a woman keeps coming back to take her child even though there is a restraining order against her, she breaks into the house and the husband calls police and says she is doing all of this but they need to realize that the City is not social services. He needs to get the courts involved to take care of this. And it takes up a lot of City resources. He also talked about the resident that called 260 times because they couldn't give themselves insulin or other medications. This would be a good case for this type of ordinance.

The committee agreed that we should move forward with this. Get with Stephanie and work out some of the details and make sure we are doing things properly from a legal aspect first and go from there. Councilwoman Koudela feels an adequate appeals process is necessary to make this work. Mayor Regovich related his dealings with businesses in the city where a complaint is made and he meets with the owner and asks how and when are you going to fix the problem.

Fire Department staffing is the next agenda item. Chairman Phares feels that we have been talking about fixing this problem long enough and we need to put together a framework and figure out how we want to go about solving this problem. Chief Tennyson stated that he has been working on this problem since last June.

The Mayor stated that the short term strategy is the negotiations that we just went through. We now need to figure out if we want to go full time, split full time/part time or merge with someone else. Other Mayors have reached out to him about doing the joint fire district idea. The biggest question is what will the financial impact be. A merge sounds great if each entity is putting in

equal shares. Chief Tennyson stated that because all cities on the west end of the county are charter cities, anything like this has to go to a vote of the people. Plus there are two unions involved. It would be a lot of work to get everyone on the same page.

Chairman Phares stated that going to a full time staff sounds like it would be the easier solution. Willoughby was used as an example of how we might model our department. They have 5 full time firefighters and then they fill out the rest of their shifts with part-timers. Chief Tennyson would like to start with 9 full timers and 3 per shift and allow only one full timer off at a time. Chairman Phares asked if he would be able to fill those full time positions right now. Mayor Regovich stated that the full time positions are not the problem, the part time positions are. Other departments can't fill their part time positions either.

Councilman Vanni stated that many departments fix this problem by using mandatory overtime to cover shifts. Eastlake is all fulltime - 9 full timers per shift.

Councilman Malta asked about the finances. Chief Tennyson stated that there are 16 potential firemen that could go full time. Per the contract we would have to go by seniority. There is one person that would leave his full time position immediately but the rest would be maybes when it came to working full time in Willowick.

Councilwoman Koudela asked why those 16 are not full time elsewhere. They want to give back to their community and they grew up here. Others are so new that they would go elsewhere if they were not happy here. Councilwoman Koudela asked if we would even want some of these people full time here? Chief Tennyson replied that yes we would but some of them need to go through paramedic school still.

Chairman Phares asked how would we go about doing this? Could we fill in one full time spot and then gradually go from there and eventually get everything filled? Chief Tennyson said that you could get away with two full timers. Nine is the magic number to start with. He then went over the average salaries for the county. Part time does not pay into PERS, just Social Security.

Councilwoman Koudela asked if we could possibly offer some kind of retirement benefit for the part timers. Like a 401K. Maybe the City could offer something like this. The Chief said this would be beneficial but Cheryl Benedict, our Finance Director, was not in favor of this.

Councilwoman Antosh stated that we would have to talk to Stephanie because with the unions involved, it would be a long process. Councilwoman Koudela asked if a full time union would be necessary. Chief Tennyson said the administration would have to take care of this. She asked if they would need a union and Mayor Regovich said it will be whatever they want to create. The IAAF would have to come up with a restructure plan.

Councilman Vanni feels that we might need to get a joint Budget/Safety Committee meeting together with Cheryl from Finance. Mayor Regovich feels we might need a third party to look at this and see what is the best road to take. He feels that we need to see how a new levy would

affect the city finances. There is someone at Cleveland State that can do a study like this. Mayor Regovich will look into the cost. Councilman Vanni brought up grants and whether there are strings attached like having to be full time. In the past that was the case but now they give you the money whether you are full time or not.

It was decided to have the Mayor look into the cost of getting a third party plan together to look at all of our options and get the Law Director involved to see what legal barriers there are to this. Financial Director Cheryl Benedict would have to look at the financial numbers also. Mayor Regovich wonders if this will solve our problem. Councilman Vanni feels that four per shift is the number we get now so if we go three full timers then we would only need one part timer. Chief Tennyson stated that last year we had 6 working 60% of the time and 3 or less 5% of the time and this year will be worse.

At some point when we will get full time, we can and back-fill with the part time and we won't need mandatory overtime and things will settle down. The Mayor feels we need to make decisions that set us up for the next 10 to 15 years. The Chief feels that we can't put our residents' lives at stake.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:20pm

David Phares