

STONINGTON BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
Monday, July 13, 2020 at 5:00 P.M.
VIRTUAL WEBEX MEETING
Dial: 1-408-418-9388
Access Code: 129 462 1780#
-OR-
Streaming on the Town of Stonington Facebook Page

MEETING MINUTES

Present: Chairman Henri Gourd & Vice Chairman Robert O'Shaughnessy
Commissioners Bill Turner, Bob Elmer, & Bob Tabor
Chief Darren Stewart, Captain Todd Olson & Detective Greg Howard

BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED:

Status report on Quality Inn incident

Chairman Gourd opened the special meeting of the Stonington Board of Police Commissioners, July, 13, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Gourd wished the victim of the horrible assault on June 26th a speedy recovery.

Chairman Gourd stated that the regularly scheduled Police Commission meeting was postponed for one week due to the fact that the two members of the IT Department were not available to run the virtual Webex meeting on the regularly scheduled date.

Chairman Gourd welcomed everyone then laid out the format for the meeting, he will read his opening statement then invite the public to comment. Chairman Gourd relayed that, in addition to his fellow Police Commissioners, the Chief, Captain and Detective Greg Howard are present. He noted that the goal is to be as transparent as possible and to solicit the public's comments. The Police Commissioners will not directly answer questions since this is an ongoing investigation. Chairman Gourd stated that, following his comments, the media moderator will unmute those who press *3 on their phone and each caller will, one at a time, state their name, address and their comments. Each commenter will be allowed three minutes to ensure all that wish to speak will have time to do so. The caller will hear an audio signal at the end of three minutes to indicate that their time to speak has concluded. Chairman Gourd noted that sometimes this technology can be challenging and he reminded that this meeting is being recorded.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am Henri Gourd, Chairman of the Stonington Board of Police Commissioners. I have called this meeting to give a public status report of the incident that took place at the Quality Inn on Friday, June 26th. I am very pleased to say that the suspects are in custody and we hope will soon be returned to face numerous charges including hate crime. Thank you also to the US Marshal service, the FBI, the New York City P.D., and the Nassau County Police Department for their assistance with this case.

This is what I know about the case: The Stonington Police were called to the scene at approximately 11:35 a.m. after receiving two 911 calls, one from the front desk and one from the male suspect. The victim, witnesses and suspects were interviewed at the scene. The victim and suspects were transported to area hospitals. The suspects returned to the hotel before 3 p.m. and quickly departed. Officers at the scene were able to see just part of the total videos captured by the hotel's security cameras and were not able to view the video we have all seen of the horrible assault by the ice machine until Monday, three days after the assault. What is clear is that the suspects assaulted the victim. There is no audio with these recordings. With further information gathered, Stonington Police Department applied for arrest warrants for the assault and bigotry and bias crimes. On Wednesday, July 1st warrants were secured for both suspects for the assault charges but in the past week further charges were added to include hate related crimes. Both warrants are now felony and are extraditable and as I said earlier, we hope they will be returned to Connecticut soon.

There has been much said in print and online about the incident and how it was handled at the initial phases for this investigation. At the request of the Chief, and supported by me and the First Selectwomen, an independent review of the response has been initiated by a third-party investigator. As the Chair, I have been involved in many of the discussions leading up to this point. The selection of the third-party investigator came through our Town attorney, with recommendations from the attorney appointed by the Town's insurance carrier to assist the Town. The investigator is an attorney and a former police detective with experience in external review of police department matters dealing with personnel and policy. I concurred with the Chief that in the interest of expediency, the Town hire this investigator and proceed with the review. The Board fully supports this independent review and we are very interested in the findings. As the fact finder and the decision maker for any serious disciplinary actions, should they be warranted, the Board of Police Commissioners cannot and should not be involved in the investigative process. The Board of Police Commissioners is an independent, civilian oversight Board charged with the Department's personnel in the hiring, termination and promotion as well as equipment and budget matters. All of us take this responsibility seriously. We have been in very close communication with the Chief and the Captain throughout the last two weeks. As Chair of this Commission, I have personally sat in on several of the meetings and have been updated on almost a daily basis. We are pretty fortunate as a Town to have an Administration that wants the facts. If we leave allegations of poor police work or mishandling of this incident unaddressed, they become the only story. I hope you would agree that it is in the best interest of every officer, and the Department and the Town to investigate and tell the public all the facts that we possibly can.

Chairman Gourd opened the meeting for comments from the public and repeated how to be unmuted.

Sandra Laub, 28 Mechanic St., Pawcatuck

Ms. Laub asked, after the facts are uncovered and the investigation is complete, will the Board recommend that the Stonington Police Department apologize to the victim and her family for what she has suffered since her attackers were at liberty after the event.

Chairman Gourd reiterated that the purpose of this session is to get input and comments from the public. The Police Commission is not in the position to answer any questions.

Ms. Laub stated that the Stonington Police Department should, after the investigation is completed, whatever the result, make a public apology to Ms. Caldwell and her family for the suffering she has experienced since her attackers have been free these weeks after the initial hate crime was committed.

Chairman Gourd thanked Ms. Laub.

Therese Alexander-Ssebagala, Stonington

Ms. Alexander-Ssebagala first asked whether the Police Commission could share the name of the third-party investigator and asked how long the investigation would take to complete.

Chairman Gourd reminded that the Police Commission cannot respond to direct questions but welcomed comments.

Ms. Alexander-Ssebagala commented that she is happy to hear that a third-party independent investigator has been hired to investigate this matter.

Chairman Gourd thanked Ms. Alexander-Ssebagala for her comments.

Betsy Bartholet, Stonington

Ms. Bartholet stated that it is important that this investigator be truly independent. She asked Chairman Gourd to clarify the process of obtaining the investigator.

Chairman Gourd reread from his introduction, "The selection of the third-party investigator came through our Town attorney, with recommendations from the attorney appointed by the Town's insurance carrier to assist the Town. The investigator is an attorney and a former police detective with experience in external reviews of police departments and matters dealing with personnel and policy."

Ms. Bartholet further commented that she cannot tell if we have a guarantee that this person is truly independent and whether there is some risk of the protection of the institution as opposed to a real search for the truth.

Chairman Gourd thanked Ms. Bartholet for her comment.

Timothy Tyler, Stonington

Mr. Tyler joined the meeting and noted that he was very glad that the two offenders were arrested and asked when they will be brought back to Connecticut.

Chairman Gourd stated that the Department is working with local law enforcement agencies and hopes to have them back in Connecticut soon. Chairman Gourd further stated that he cannot answer where and when they will be back in Connecticut and he reiterated that the Police Commission is not at liberty to give any further information than what he already stated in his introduction.

Mr. Tyler noted that he is just joining in so he asked Chairman Gourd to give a short recap so Chairman Gourd gave the highlights, the suspects have been arrested in New York and an independent, external review has been initiated.

Elizabeth Leamon, 10 School St., Stonington

Ms. Leamon is pleased to hear there is going to be an investigation but would like the Police Commission to seriously consider immediately committing to anti-bias training and body cameras. She knows the Board has been looking into body cameras but she would like them to focus on them now as an urgent need for the police force.

Chairman Gourd thanked Ms. Leamon.

Sarah Baker, Mystic

Ms. Baker agrees that it is necessary to have anti-bias training as well as funding and support for body cameras for the police officers. Also, Ms. Baker would like to advocate engaging in a public review process of policies and procedures. She nominated Jean Jordan, President of the NAACP New London branch to assist the Town in moving forward with those measures. Ms. Baker thanked the Police Commission for providing this opportunity for public comment.

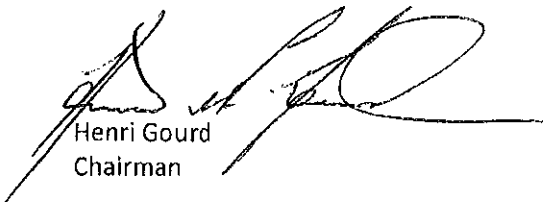
Chairman Gourd thanked Ms. Baker for her comments.

Douglass Rice, Stonington

Mr. Rice thanked the Board of Police Commissions for calling this meeting. He also thanked the US Marshals and Detective Howard for diligently pursuing the attackers of Ms. Caldwell. He looks forward to them being extradited and for justice to be served. Mr. Rice is glad that the Town has hired a third-party to investigate and hopes the \$15,000 that was allocated is enough. He hopes the Police Commissioners actively look into what happened; why the suspects were allowed to escape three times, why a boot was not put on their car and why an officer was not stationed at the car. He thanked the Police Commission for the opportunity to speak.

Chairman Gourd thanked everyone for joining and for the comments. At 5:23 p.m. meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,


Henri Gourd
Chairman