

**STONINGTON BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
Thursday, September 16, 2021 at 5:00 P.M.
STONINGTON POLICE HEADQUARTERS
173 SOUTH BROAD STREET
PAWCATUCK, CT 06379**

MEETING MINUTES

Present: Chairman Robert O'Shaughnessy & Vice Chairman Bob Tabor
Commissioners Robert Elmer, Bill Turner & Lisa Tepper Bates
Chief Darren Stewart & Captain Todd Olson

1. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman O'Shaughnessy called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Chairman O'Shaughnessy took this time to thank the Mystic Chamber and Mr. Bruce Flax for making changes to the route for the Art Festival. He hopes they will continue with this new route.

Chairman O'Shaughnessy commented that the Miss America Parade was held on Labor Day. Issues or unexpected consequences are always a possibility for a new event. The parade was on the road for an hour and twenty minutes which was much longer than anticipated. Chairman O'Shaughnessy stated that they will work with the organizers to make necessary changes for next year.

Chairman O'Shaughnessy noted that car thefts have been a statewide issue and that the legislature may make some changes regarding the thefts. He noted that the statewide pursuit policy prohibits police from chasing vehicles.

Chairman O'Shaughnessy recognized Chief Stewart's thirty-eight-year anniversary next week. He has been serving as Chief of the Stonington Police Department for fourteen years making him the longest serving Chief in Department history.

Chairman O'Shaughnessy commented that they held Coffee with the Chiefs at Sift and had a good turnout.

2. Remarks of the Public

None.

3. Action Items

a. Planning & Zoning Special Use Permit Application: Coastal Masonic Temple *COMMENTS NEEDED*
Sergio Cherenzia, Cherenzia & Associated, LTD., on behalf of the Coastal Masonic Temple

Mr. Cherenzia explained that the Coastal Masonic Temple at 673 Pequot Trail is proposing adding an addition and making other improvements, along with making the building ADA accessible. They will be using the two existing curb cuts which both allow for two-way traffic. They are using a Special Use Permit since this is a community center. The Masons host their own meetings as well as meetings for other organizations. There will not be a heavy use or increase of use of the building. This will just be an

improved space. They did increase the amount of parking and Mr. Cherenzia showed the Police Commissioners the parking areas.

Chairman O'Shaughnessy asked if the curb cuts will remain the same to which Mr. Cherenzia stated that they will remain the same but they will add better traffic controls like stop signs. Commissioner Turner asked if there will be an increased use of the building to which Mr. Cherenzia stated that there will not be an increase in use just improvements to the space and there is no anticipated increase in memberships.

Vice Chairman Tabor made a motion to pass along the following comments to Planning and Zoning; that the Police Commission sees no issues with traffic or safety with this application as presented. Motion seconded by Commissioner Elmer. No discussion. All in favor, motion approved.

b. Planning & Zoning Special Use Permit & CAM Application: Mark J. Densmore Living Trust
COMMENTS NEEDED

Art Hayward, Hayward-Holbrook, on behalf of the Mark J. Densmore Living Trust

Mr. Hayward informed the Police Commission that this project has come before this Board before, however, they are reducing the footprint of the building. It is located at the site of the former Holly Tree building. They are now proposing a smaller structure with commercial space on the first floor and only one residential space on the second floor. They reduced the parking to nine spaces with no parking necessary on the street. Mr. Hayward noted that they will also be providing an easement to their adjacent property.

Chief Stewart noted that the Dog Watch management currently utilizes spaces in the lot. Mr. Hayward commented that, at this time, Mr. Densmore allows them to use the lot, however, Mr. Hayward stated that he cannot commit to what the owner will do going forward. He did note that two spaces will be designated for the residential unit and marked as such. The other seven spaces will be free after business hours for the commercial space. Chief Stewart reiterated that it behooves the neighbors in the area to work with each other to solve any parking issues. It would be in everyone's best interest. Mr. Hayward stated that he will pass this information along to his client.

Vice Chairman Tabor made a motion to pass along the following comments to Planning and Zoning; that the Police Commission sees no issues with traffic, parking or safety with this application as presented. Motion seconded by Commissioner Elmer. Discussion: Chief Stewart noted that he sees a problem with parking and he requests stressing to Planning & Zoning that, as a result of this plan, there may be future parking issues on Old Stonington Rd. Commissioner Bates commented that it has been discussed that there could be conversations between the neighbors on that road before it becomes a problem and she also noted that Mr. Hayward stated that he will convey these concerns to Mr. Densmore. Mr. Hayward was compelled to point out that the parking issues on the street are not generated by his client's property and it would be difficult for a business on such a small lot to solve the parking problems. No further discussion. Comments and concerns made by Chief Stewart will be included in this motion and forwarded to Planning & Zoning. All in favor, motion approved.

4. Traffic

a. Ragnar Relay in Stonington *VOTED NEEDED*

Amber Sadlier, Senior Race Director

Chief Stewart commented that Ms. Sadlier is in the process of redoing the route and that Quagatog Hill is steeper than she originally thought. Chief Stewart noted that he has pointed out some issues that he has with the route to Ms. Sadlier.

Ms. Sadlier joined the meeting via phone. They are proposing to start the relay in Groton and end in Massachusetts. She is proposing that they will be going through Stonington on October 22 between the hours of 7 am and 3 pm. They do not require road closures and it would look like everyday pedestrian traffic. There are vehicles that follow from stop to stop. Ms. Sadlier is proposing the stop in Stonington to be at the Pawcatuck Little League Field. There will be staff along the route and all vehicles involved must follow all traffic laws. Ms. Sadlier stated that there will be one runner from each team running at a time.

Chairman O'Shaughnessy asked when the runners switch off? Ms. Sadlier stated that they are only allowed to do exchanges at the designated exchange stops.

Ms. Sadlier informed the Police Commission that they are now looking at running south on Route 184 to North Anguilla Road to the Pawcatuck Little League Field then continuing on down Pequot Trail. If that is not advisable, Ms. Sadlier stated that they could continue down Route 184 and then south on Route 2.

Chairman O'Shaughnessy commented that without a definite plan, it is hard for the Police Commission to approve the event. It was also pointed out that they have not received approvals to use Pawcatuck Little League Field. Ms. Sadlier noted that the reason for the route change was due to safety issues.

Commissioner Bates asked what is the Ragnar Relay? Ms. Sadlier explained that it is a team building race that is for profit. They support local charities at the 35 exchanges along the 200-mile route. Vice Chairman Tabor commented that he is concerned with having 175 runners, even though they will be evenly spaced, on either North or South Anguilla Rd. Chief Stewart commented that people use that road for this purpose all the time. He is more concerned with the follow cars. He also noted that from the Pawcatuck Little League Field, down Pequot Trail and continuing into Westerly is a busy area. Chief Stewart stated that, since there is no past history, he cannot offer any insights to the pros or cons of this event. Captain Olson asked which other towns have they received approvals from to which Ms. Sadlier stated that she is currently working with Groton and Westerly.

Commissioner Bates asked why are they seeking approvals now so close to the date of the event and why do they have runners registered before getting approvals? Ms. Sadlier answered that they usually hold the event from Maine to Provincetown and they had to postpone the event due to Covid. They were still not sure if they would be able to hold the event this fall so that contributed to why they are seeking approvals so close to the event date. Ms. Sadlier commented that they have open registration before events and teams can defer or change to another event if necessary.

Commissioner Elmer asked if, in case of an emergency, are there pull off areas along the route? Ms. Sadlier stated that there are staff members along the route to assist with emergencies and the teams would continue on to the exchange point instead of pulling over.

Chairman O'Shaughnessy noted his concerns with the route as well as not having approvals for the use of Pawcatuck Little League Field. Commissioner Turner added that there seem to be a lot of unknowns. Commissioner Tabor asked Chief Stewart what the process would be with the State on getting their approval? Chief Stewart asked Ms. Sadlier if she has received a Highway Use Permit from the State? Ms. Sadlier stated that she will be applying for that permit and will note that approvals are still pending with the Board of Police Commissioners. Chief Stewart encouraged Ms. Sadlier to get in touch with the State as soon as possible. Commissioner Bates suggested that Ms. Sadlier converse with the Chief so that he is aware of the specifics of the event prior to next month's meeting. Vice Chairman Tabor stated that it is preferable to him for the vehicles go straight to the exchange and not follow the runners. He feels it will be less problematic and safer.

The Board of Police Commissioners agreed that they need more details and a planned route sent to Chief Stewart in advance of next month's meeting.

Tabled until the October 14th, 2021 meeting.

b. North Stonington Road Parking

Chairman O'Shaughnessy stated that this is an ongoing issue and they have met a number of times on this. Chairman O'Shaughnessy and Captain Olson just recently met on the site and noted some areas along North Stonington Road that need to be marked "No Parking." The Police Commission was given a schematic of the area that will be expanded no parking. Chairman O'Shaughnessy noted that they are using the old school administration building lot, however, the signage does not encourage people to park there.

Vice Chairman Tabor made a motion to approve the no parking areas on North Stonington Road in the proximity of Clyde's Cider Mill as prescribed in the attached schematic and recommended by the Stonington Police Department. This expansion of the no parking zone is being done to ensure pedestrians and vehicular safety in the area while still allowing for some parking on the road. Motion seconded by Commissioner Elmer. Discussion: Commissioner Turner noted that the use of the old school administration building lot needs to be encouraged and that they may need an employee from Clyde's during peak hours to encourage the use of the lot. He did go by several times during peak hours and it was very disconcerting to him to see the school lot empty. Chairman O'Shaughnessy agreed and noted that he has seen on weekends people just pull over and park on the side of the road without even checking to see if the Clyde's lot has available parking. Chief Stewart noted that he has received complaints and hopefully expanding the no parking and encouraging the use of the old school administration building lot will address the issue. Clyde's is a great asset for the community. This item may need to be readdressed in the future. No further discussion. All in favor, motion approved.

c. Letter Re: Coogan Blvd. Traffic Light

Chairman O'Shaughnessy stated that the Police Commission received a letter from Mr. Ralph Wheeler, a resident at Masonicare, requesting a left turn arrow to be added to the Coogan Blvd. and Clara Dr. intersection traffic light and also a traffic light at the Jerry Brown Rd and Coogan Blvd. intersection. Chairman O'Shaughnessy stated that he sees no issues with the areas as they exist. There have not been any accidents at the Jerry Brown Rd. and Coogan Blvd. intersection. Chairman O'Shaughnessy recommends no action and asked Chief Stewart to send a letter to Mr. Wheeler stating such. Chief Stewart commented that this is the only traffic light owned by the Town of Stonington and any improvement would be a major CIP project costing around \$300-500,000 in improvements including a major engineering study.

No Action.

d. Letter Re: Lantern Hill Road

Chairman O'Shaughnessy noted that the writer of this letter has been spoken with numerous times. Captain Olson commented that the data collected from the traffic sign has been pretty consistent with only the occasional speeder. The speed sign can identify times and days for those speeding occurrences and the Department can then assign an officer during those times. Chief Stewart also noted that he has explained to the writer that there is the occasional speeder. Commissioner Bates commented that it seems the Department is doing everything that is reasonable to address and monitor the issue. Chief Stewart further commented that studies show that what slows people down is the actual cruiser in the area and the possibility of getting a ticket. This is only a temporary fix as drivers will not see a cruiser for some time and will revert back to speeding. Chief Stewart also explained about the optical illusion of speeding and sometimes associating increased road noise as speeding.

e. Montauk Speed Sign Data

Captain Olson thanked Chairman O'Shaughnessy for his help in getting the Department additional speed signs. He stated that he has given the data from the speed signs to those residents that have been concerned with speed to show them that it might not be as bad as they originally thought.

Commissioner Bates thanked Captain Olson for taking the time to provide the residents with the data.

f. Cottrell St. Parking – Crop Salon

Tabled.

Chairman O'Shaughnessy stated that a letter was received concerning a hazard at Field Street and Moss Street. Chairman O'Shaughnessy, Captain Olson and Vice Chairman Tabor visited the area and did not see any hazard. The request was also for the curbing to be painted 100 feet from the intersection. Chairman O'Shaughnessy stated that only 25 feet of curbing needs to be painted at an intersection. He further noted that the trees in question are Town owned, however, they are not creating an obstruction. Chairman O'Shaughnessy suggested they paint 25 feet of curbing at that intersection.

5. Approval of Minutes from Thursday, August 12, 2021 Regular Meeting *VOTE NEEDED*

Commissioner Elmer made a motion to approve the minutes for the Thursday, August 12, 2021 Regular Meeting as submitted. Motion seconded by Vice Chairman Tabor. No discussion, all in favor, motion approved.

6. Report of the Chief of Police

a. Budget Report

Chief Stewart noted his concerns with the Overtime Training budget since they are still paying the recruits for travel time to and from the Academy. This amounts to approximately \$3,000 per week out of that line item. This is a burden on all towns that are far from the Academy. Chief Stewart explained some issues down the line for small Departments if there are changes to how the Academy operates in regard to training. They may decide on having regional training facilities. Commissioner Bates asked if this training can be done remotely to which Chief Stewart commented that the structure of the Academy and the discipline would be lost. They are seeing pros and cons to remote training.

b. Monthly Report

Chief Stewart stated that there were 225 medical calls last month which is close to an all-time high. There was one Narcan save. There were also 46 Human Services / 211 referrals. Commissioner Bates stated that she will get the 211-call data for Stonington at the next meeting.

Chief Stewart commented that at the previous night's Board of Finance meeting, the Department got funding to go ahead with installing the microway link which connects North Stonington's tower to Stonington's tower and they also got funding for an additional dispatcher. Chairman O'Shaughnessy asked Chief Stewart to send a letter to the Board of Finance in appreciation for their support.

Vice Chairman Tabor made a motion to have Chief Stewart prepare a letter to the Board of Finance demonstrating the Police Commission's support and that they will revisit the issue with the Board of Finance. Motion seconded by Commissioner Turner. No discussion, all in favor, motion approved.

c. Alarm Report

d. Special Events Schedule

e. Recognition of Michael Gomes 20 Years Since Volunteering at Twin Towers/911 Site

Chief Stewart thanked Mr. Michael Gomes for volunteering to help at the World Trade Center site after 9/11. Mr. Gomes is currently the Department's part-time maintenance worker. He is retired after forty-three years at Electric Boat and was a member of the Westerly Fire Department. Chief Stewart took a moment to recognize Mr. Gomes and his service.

Chief Stewart noted that there were a series of memorials over the weekend in memory of twenty years since 9/11.

*Chief Stewart commented that there will be a training this Friday. He put together a coalition of people in town since there is an increase in homelessness and public drinking and they have been seeing tents pop up in the area. There have also been numerous medical calls and disturbances. Human Services, the New London Shelter, Always Home, the Warm Shelter, Westerly Police Department and the Chaplains have been collaborating. Chief Stewart noted that a common theme is the lack of hope. Commissioner Bates noted that the Covid unemployment benefits have ended, evictions are to resume and the labor market is unstable. She also noted that mental health issues are up 300% since before the pandemic. Commissioner Bates stated that housing resources are state-specific. Chief Stewart is trying to get Connecticut and Rhode Island to work together. Commissioner Bates commented that a lot of times people actively resist help out of paranoia and that she has never come across anyone that wants to be homeless. There are challenging times ahead.

Chief Stewart noted that the goal is to not have police involved since the police are only a short-term solution to a long-term problem. There was some discussion about enlisting the Chaplains to help with homelessness. Chief Stewart stated that the training on Friday will focus on what can be done and the resources available. Chief Stewart is trying to start the conversation ahead of the winter months. This takes relationship building and trust.

Commissioner Turner invited the Police Commissioners to a benefit for Almost Home at Kentford Farm on Thursday, September 23rd at 5:30 p.m..

Vice Chairman Tabor thanked Chief Stewart for his efforts and stated that it is necessary to get boots on the ground to help those in need. Chief Stewart commented that three out of ten ambulances are called for mental health issues. Commissioner Bates further commented that the utility moratorium is also ending.

Vice Chairman Tabor made a motion to accept the Report of the Chief of Police. Motion seconded by Commissioner Elmer. No discussion. All in favor, motion approved.

7. Consent Agenda

- a. Memos Re: P&Z Motions**
- b. Memo & Letter Re: Great Job Officer Brito**
- c. E-Mail Re: Nice Job Officer Rathgaber & Detective Howard**
- d. Letter Re: CIRMA Law Enforcement Advisory Committee**
- e. E-Mail Re: Route 1&2 Roundabout**
- f. E-Mail Re: "Hidden Driveway" Sign Request Route 1A**
- g. E-Mail Re: "Hidden Driveway" Sign Request Farmholme Rd.**
- h. E-Mail Re: Traffic on Greenmanville Ave/Route 27 •**

Chairman O'Shaughnessy commented that he looked at the issues with the signals on Greenmanville Ave. in the area of the Mystic Seaport and he asked if Chief Stewart could reach out to the State to check the timing on the traffic light cycles.

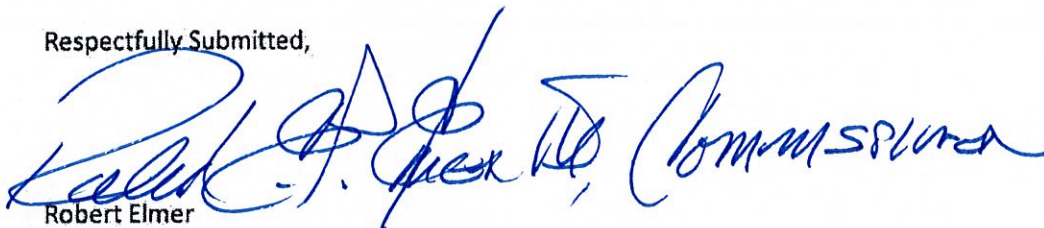
i. E-Mail Re: U.S. Attorney Press Release

Commissioner Bates made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Motion seconded by Commissioner Turner. No discussion, all in favor, motion approved.

8. Adjourn

At 6:44 p.m., Vice Chairman Tabor made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Bates, all in favor, motion approved. All in favor. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,



Robert Elmer
Secretary