

WEST LAFAYETTE POLICE MERIT COMMISSION MINUTES
REVISED
July 11, 2016

The West Lafayette Police Merit Commission met in regular session at the West Lafayette Morton Community Center on July 11, 2016, at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Commission President Rollock, Commission Vice President Corrigan, Commission Secretary Parker, and Commission Attorney Representative Williams

ABSENT: Commissioner Troyer

ALSO PRESENT: Mayor Dennis and Chief Dombkowski

OATH OF OFFICE

Mayor Dennis administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner Bradley Cohen.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Vice President Corrigan moved to accept the minutes of June 13, 2016, meeting, and Secretary Parker seconded the motion. The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.

PROPOSAL FOR RULE CHANGE PURSUANT TO PROMOTIONS

Chief Dombkowski, noting that Deputy Chief Harris is on vacation, stated that there has been a conversation about this and he can speak to the Department's need. He explained that the Department is going through a lot of retirements, and has depleted the list. This precipitated the Department to ask for innovation solutions because there are a lot of young Sergeants in the ranks. They are not eligible to take exams, and the Lieutenants list has been exhausted. The Department has an immediate need to ask the Commission to solve that issue. He stated that this will be our new normal as we go through this retirement cycle over several years.

Attorney Williams stated that Attorney Burns has taken a look at this and the rules indicate that the Commission could adopt a slight change, which basically would remove the two-year minimum service requirement for Lieutenant and Captain, on a case-by-case basis. It would not remove it completely, but if the Commission determined that particular circumstances existed which would make the normal two-year requirement contrary to what the Department needs, then the Commission can make that determination and waive that requirement. He stated that from a logistics standpoint, this means that the Commission would amend the rules, and it would become effective 30 days from when it is passed. He stated that Attorney Burns did prepare a draft resolution.

Chief Dombkowski confirmed for Vice President Corrigan that there is no one currently on the list for the rank of Lieutenant. There is a Sergeant's list, and he will be calling for three names from the Commission soon. In response to a question from Vice President Corrigan, Chief Dombkowski stated that there will be an opening for Lieutenant after the retirement of Lt. Gallagher this month. He stated that there is not an immediate need. He stated that for the rank of Sergeant there is a large pool of candidates of every officer who is not a ranking officer. He confirmed for President Rollock that he thinks it makes good sense to continue the two-year rule in general, but it may not always be practical.

Commissioner Cohen asked if the Department ever has transfers from another police department who may have served long enough. Chief Dombkowski responded that we do, but explained that their rank does not transfer.

Vice President Corrigan asked if it would be better to do this year-by-year rather than making a permanent change to the rules. Chief Dombkowski stated that he likes the legal opinion of doing this on a case-by-case basis for a temporary situation.

Attorney Williams confirmed that this would be giving the Commission the option with the determination made at a public meeting. He specified that the proposed change would add in language that reads, "However, the two-year minimum in-service requirement for Lieutenant and Captain may be waived on a case-by-case basis if the Commission finds particular circumstances exist which make the requirement contrary to the best interest of the Police Department." He stated that the idea is to add the option as a tool for the Commission to weigh these decisions.

Commissioner Cohen asked how many officers are in each position.

Chief Dombkowski responded that there are 49 sworn Officers in the Department, and the Commission has purview over 47 of them. He noted that he and Deputy Chief Harris are appointed and answer directly to Mayor Dennis. Everyone else answers to the Commission for discipline and promotion. All new hires answer to the Commission to be hired. There are six at the rank of Sergeant and five at the rank of Lieutenant. Chief Dombkowski explained that the part of the reason for the two-year rule is that when the Lieutenant is running a shift at 2 a.m., that person becomes everybody for that time—the Street Commissioner, the Mayor, everything—with hard decisions and responsibilities. There are three Captains. He spoke of the positive reasons to have the various divisions.

President Rollock asked if Chief Dombkowski feels confident that they can get someone up to speed if this rule change was made. Chief Dombkowski responded that he does, as there have been some good people that the Commission has promoted.

Vice President Corrigan asked if this will open it up so that it does not depend on how many years a Sergeant is in rank. Chief Dombkowski responded that if all of the Sergeants test, then with the way the law is, three of them would be presented in no order to the Chief's Office for selection. The Commission still presents and still filters who is qualified for the position.

After discussion, the Commission chose to take this proposed rule change under advisement and vote on it at the next meeting in August. They confirmed with Chief Dombkowski that duties will be covered with this wait, even though it means there would likely not be someone in place until the first of the year.

OLD BUSINESS

Retirements

President Rollock stated that the retirement of Lieutenant Gallagher at the end of this month is the only officially known retirement for this calendar year. There is at least one scheduled for 2017 and potentially three for 2018.

In response to a question from Vice President Corrigan, Chief Dombkowski stated that of the four newer officers, one is on his own as he had previous experience. The other three just graduated from the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy in June, and they are all assigned to Field Training Officers. They will transition to solo patrol late this year. He noted that Officer Lutz graduated as

number one in his academy class. President Rollock asked that the Commission's congratulations be extended to Officer Lutz.

Hiring Process

Chief Dombkowski confirmed for President Rollock that there are two positions open, and the hiring process has started.

CHIEF'S REPORT

Chief Dombkowski stated that June and July are not the Department's busiest months, but June was fairly significant, with an increase in the amount of calls from June 2015. He spoke about two major cases, including the solving of a robbery case at the Four Points Sheraton hotel, and a burglary at an apartment on Soldiers Home Road. He spoke about the radKIDS camp, which went through a transition with the retirement of Cindy Marion. He explained that Ms. Marion is now a civilian employee who is overseeing those programs in a different role. He stated that Officer Slifer ran his first radKIDS camp. He noted that though we host this camp, some of the manpower comes from the Lafayette Police Department, and at times the Purdue Police Department, the Prosecutor's Office, the Sheriff's Office, and the Hartford House. Chief Dombkowski noted that West Lafayette was ranked as the 11th safest city in Indiana, which is a difficult achievement for our City that adds over 40,000 young students each year. Chief Dombkowski described the challenges he and other members of the West Lafayette Police Department faced in safeguarding a recent march on the Purdue campus. This gathering had been organized to protest shootings of unarmed African-American men around the nation. Since the local event followed one day after a similar peaceful march in Dallas had been disrupted by the shooting of twelve police officers, the West Lafayette officers had to promote safety despite the sensitive context, and to maintain respect for citizens' rights of assembly and free speech. Chief Dombkowski reported that the West Lafayette officers' professionalism was well-received by the marchers, generated additional positive response from other sectors of the community, and that he was proud of the officers' performance. He stated that he would not have asked them to do that without doing it with them. Chief Dombkowski described these social issues as a challenge for any small community, and, outside of Indianapolis, unique in Indiana to Bloomington and West Lafayette. Commissioner Cohen asked what we do with our officers as far as continued training. He asked if there are whole-team seminars or webinars about the importance of social consciousness. He stated that something like the Dallas incident will surface in West Lafayette due to being an academic community. Chief Dombkowski responded that one of the main reasons that our hiring standards are different than near-by communities is that West Lafayette is different. We have special standards for hiring people, and they have to understand when we talk about remembering what it was like to be 19 years old going off to college, with growing up still to do and the guidance still needed. That is a philosophy that we weave in. Chief Dombkowski stated that when it comes to training, we did not always do due diligence in that area, but now it is a part of the Department's culture. One training area was in culture diversity training with different speakers and topics. He stated that he is convinced that the training transcends when there is a rally like this. The training is incremental over a long period of time, and it does not happen overnight. He noted that Mayor Dennis expects that after growing up in this community, and this community expects that.

President Rollock spoke of how good contact, communication, and reach-out to the community helps. Chief Dombkowski agreed and noted he gets input from his relationships with Sadie

Harper-Scott, President of the local NAACP chapter; Renee Thomas, Director of the Black Culture Center; and Sana Booker, the West Lafayette City Clerk.

President Rollock spoke of how we have to keep active, and one of the reasons this Commission exists is to make sure that those issues continue to be aired. Keeping up professionalism and communication will be crucial for these kinds of issues. We want our officers to be safe, and we want our citizens to be safe and reassured. We want everybody to be safe.

Chief Dombkowski stated that our people do recognize that many people are not originally from here. When someone is talking to an officer, they have experience that is not West Lafayette Police Department, and they may have biases that are not positive. To get the officers to recognize that, and not take their words personally, is important.

NEW BUSINESS

Recognizing Retiring Officers

President Rollock stated that we have talked about recognizing retiring officers that would be outside of the usual award structure. He stated that the Commission presented a memento to Officer Hetrick, and thought we might like to do that for others as well. President Rollock proposed that the Commission make it a standard consideration to recognize all of the retiring officers for their years of service. It would be separate from the other awards in place as a way for the Commission to express appreciation for service. He noted that he does not want to propose it was a rules change, but just ensure that it be taken into consideration.

Vice President Corrigan stated that Article VI is about awards, and there are more than the ones that the Commission has been giving. It could be revised and the Commission could do a better job with it.

President Rollock stated that he would like to provide a memento to Lt. Gallagher who is stepping down after over 21 years of service. The Commission discussed presenting something at the August Council meeting, and Chief Dombkowski noted that Officer Winslow will be recognized at that Council meeting for winning the D.A.R.E. Officer of the Year Award.

Testing Procedures and Validity

Secretary Parker stated that there were some test questions that were outdated. She asked if there is a timeframe for having new questions based on policy changes. Chief Dombkowski responded that a firm, Lexipol, is working on the policy updates, which will get the Department ready to be an accredited agency. This would offer a stamp of approval from an organization that determines the best practices and standards across Indiana, and that West Lafayette's policies would qualify.

President Rollock stated that at this point the items that are on the exam will be managed by Captain Sparger and Secretary Parker. He stated that Captain Sparger mentioned that they had managed to update items to be consistent with law. We also want to make sure that the items maintain integrity and validity, so at some point we need to take a look at the entire item set. Vice President Corrigan spoke about the history of the exam.

Exchanging Documents

President Rollock stated that he had raised concerns about security of documents, such as background reports which need to be convenient to share. He stated that we resolved to exchange those with password protected PDF files.

Recording Meetings and Meeting Time

President Rollock stated that Secretary Parker has agreed to make sure the meeting recordings are transmitted appropriately to Nichole Foster, who is not here partly because this meeting is late in the day. President Rollock asked if this meeting time of 7:00 p.m. makes sense. One suggestion was to move it to 5:30 p.m.

After discussion, including that more people may be able to attend at an earlier time, the consensus of the Commission was to hold the next meeting at 5:30 p.m. on August 8, 2016. President Rollock noted that he would check on the room availability.

President Rollock asked everyone to check their calendars to prepare for the 2017 schedule.

ADJOURNMENT

Vice President Corrigan motioned to adjourn the meeting, and President Rollock adjourned the meeting.



Kathy Parker, Secretary

Attest:



David Rollock, President