

Board: Select Board / Water Commissioner's Meeting
Date: Monday, March 21, 2022
Location: Senior & Community Center, 1 Care Drive, Erving, MA 01344

Select Board Present: Jacob Smith, William Bembury, Scott Bastarache
Also, Present: Bryan Smith, Robert Holst
Press: Otis Wheeler, BNCTV

At 6:33 PM **Chairman Smith** called the meeting to order.

Discussion Regarding Town Response to COVID-19

Chairman Smith explained that the Town continues to monitor the number of positive COVID-19 cases, with one (1) new case in the past week.

Review of Patrol Officer Search Process and Appointment Recommendation & Discussion Regarding Future Staffing Plans

Chairman Smith asked Robert Holst, Chief of Police, to discuss staffing concerns for the Police Department. Chief Holst discussed support for maintaining a staffing structure that would maintain six (6) full-time officers and discussed the challenges with staffing turnover and recruitment. Chief Holst asked the Select Board members for their support in restoring part-time patrol officers that could assist with covering shifts. **Chairman Smith** explained that the current search process was in response to an existing vacancy and that the Department has just become aware of another anticipated vacancy. Chief Holst confirmed that understanding and discussed support for transitioning a full-time officer to part-time, as they are trained and know the community well. The Select Board members discussed support for recruiting part-time officers to augment the Police Department's staffing plan. **Selectman Bastarache** expressed support and asked Chief Holst to confirm that even part-time officers must maintain full-time credentials, as defined by the State. Chief Holst stated "yes" and explained that the State has created the Bridge Academy to help transition part-time certified officers to the higher training requirements.

Chairman Smith asked about the Select Board members' willingness to accept the Bridge Academy certification in place of the full-time Massachusetts Police Training Committee (MPTC) Academy expectations. **Selectman Bastarache** discussed the current difficulties with recruiting and the understanding that other police departments will be accepting the Bridge Academy certification for current part-time officers. **Selectman Bastarache** explained that he is in support of the Town's full-time certification preference but noted that if the Peace Officers Standards & Training Commission (POST-C) has recognized the Bridge Academy certification that he would be in support of the Town recognizing the certification as well. **Selectman Bembury** expressed agreement, explaining that he also prefers the full-time MPTC Academy training but that he will not exclude applicants from hire if they have the Bridge Academy certification. **Selectman Bastarache** added the context that the Bridge Academy was designed by the State for this transition period, and that after 2024, all future law enforcement officers will need to meet the full-time certification process. Chief Holst expressed agreement and highlighted the increased cost of training that all Massachusetts police departments will face to recruit new officers. **Chairman Smith** also discussed his preference for full-time MPTC Academy training but acknowledged that other towns are accepting the Bridge Academy certification and that if Erving does not accept the certification the Town may be creating a detraction for candidates to consider applying for the positions. **Selectman Bembury** added that there are still many unknown factors related to the Bridge Academy certifications, notably if it will be recognized and accepted by other states for officers moving outside of Massachusetts. Chief Holst expressed agreement and discussed the reality that POST-C will be making more decisions in

the coming year and there are many unknowns. Chief Holst explained that it is still not known if POST-C will require full-time MPTC Academy training in the future for officers that complete the Bridge Academy in the short-term. **Selectman Bembury** asked if the Bridge Academy and full-time MPTC Academy requirements have been compared. Chief Holst answered “yes” and explained that the Bridge Academy training requires 100 hours less of training than the full MPTC Academy. Chief Holst will share the training outline for Bridge Academy with Select Board members.

Selectman Bembury asked Chief Holst to discuss the staffing challenges while the Town completes this current hiring process and begins a new search. Chief Holst explained that it would be an unrealistic expectation to provide 24/7 coverage with the remaining officers and expressed concern about relying on the Massachusetts State Police. **Selectman Bembury** expressed agreement but spoke to the serious concern about overworking the staff. Chief Holst expressed agreement and discussed his recommendation for restoring part-time officers to augment the schedule.

Selectman Bembury asked about the compensation rates. Chief Holst explained that challenges for recruitment and retainage of officers include pay, the schedule, and limited options for advancement. **Selectman Bembury** asked Chief Holst about recommendations he may have to address these challenges. Bryan Smith, Town Administrator, reminded all that the Town is still in union negotiations with the patrol officers. **Chairman Smith** discussed a quick review of the FY2021 Franklin County compensation comparison, assembled by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, and noted that based on the information Erving was approximately in the middle of the comparison. **Chairman Smith** discussed the Select Board’s need to discuss potential goals of remaining in top 5 towns of Franklin County, noting that Erving cannot compete with the largest communities.

Selectman Bembury discussed a program idea to launch an Explorer Program for individuals who could become volunteer auxiliary members of the Department; that could help to develop long-term relationships with the Department and may serve as a recruitment process for future officers. Chief Holst discussed the interest in the potential to create a volunteer auxiliary program. **Chairman Smith** asked the Select Board members if they want to launch an auxiliary program. **Selectman Bastarache** discussed support for the long-term approach, after the Department has worked through the short-term staffing concerns. Select Board members expressed agreement.

Selectman Bembury discussed his support for the work that Chief Holst is doing. The Select Board members expressed agreement. Chief Holst acknowledged the support and discussed spoke highly of Sergeant Adam Paicos and his work to support the Department through the transition period. **Chairman Smith** restated the need to be cautious about overburdening the staff. In summation, **Selectman Bembury** discussed support for augmenting the Department staffing with part-time patrol officers. The Select Board members expressed agreement. The Select Board members discussed support for accepting Bridge Academy certification during the hiring process, as appropriate. The Select Board will revisit the full-time MPTC Academy training requirement. The Select Board discussed support for sponsoring an auxiliary program to build interest in law enforcement and possible future recruits.

Review of Screening Committee process

Chief Holst explained his part-time appointment recommendation until candidates have completed an acceptable Academy. The Select Board members reviewed the search process memo that outline the Patrol Officer Screening Committee’s work and recommendations. The Select Board members discussed support for accepting the recommendation of the Screening Committee and Chief Holst.

Selectman Bastarache made a motion to appoint Joshua Barber to the position of Patrolman, Grade P2, Step 1, for 38 hours per week, benefited, in accordance with MGL Chapter 41, Section 133 for a term of one (1) year pending a pre-employment CORI, driving history check, health exam and drug screen, and psychological examination. Further, continued employment is contingent upon successful completion of the next available full-time Massachusetts Police Training Committee Academy or Bridge Academy, effective May 2, 2022, or sooner. **Selectman Bembury** seconded. **Vote:** Unanimously approved.

Selectman Bastarache made a motion to appoint Brian Tennyson to Patrolman, part-time up to 19.5 hours per week, non-benefited, for a term of one (1) year pending a pre-employment CORI, driving history check, health exam and drug screen, and psychological examination. Continued employment is contingent upon successful completion of the next available full-time Massachusetts Police Training Committee Academy or Bridge Academy, effective May 2, 2022, or sooner, at Grade P2, Step1. **Selectman Bembury** seconded. **Vote:** Unanimously approved.

Chairman Smith explained that Officer Mitchell Waldron has submitted a letter of resignation from his full-time position, effective March 28, 2022, and has expressed interest in remaining as a part-time officer. The Select Board members expressed support for the transition. **Selectman Bastarache** made a motion to appoint Officer Waldron as a part-time Patrol Officer, up to 19.5 hours per week, non-benefited, with continued employment contingent on successfully completing the next available full-time Massachusetts Police Training Committee Academy or Bridge Academy, with an appointment date of March 28, 2022, continuing at current pay rate. **Selectman Bembury** seconded. **Vote:** Unanimously approved.

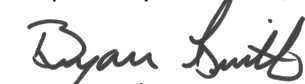
Review and Approval of MassDMH Jail/Arrest Diversion Co-Responder Grant Application

The Select Board reviewed the draft grant application for the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (MassDMH) Jail/Arrest Diversion Co-Responder program, that was prepared by Chief Holst. **Selectman Bastarache** and **Selectman Bembury** discussed their review of the draft application and support for the proposed program plan and description. Chief Holst explained that he has worked with Clinical & Support Options on the proposed program structure with Clinical Support Options (CSO), which currently provides this service for Greenfield Police Department. Chief Holst explained that CSO is preparing to identify a potential clinician to serve in the program and maybe able to have a clinician begin working with communities as soon as May 2022. The Select Board members and Chief Holst reviewed the proposed budget detail. Bryan explained that the Town will begin working with the program member towns to draft a memorandum of agreement for how the towns will work together to operate the program if the grant is awarded. **Chairman Smith** discussed his support for the program and the draft grant application as reviewed and discussed this evening. **Selectman Bastarache** made a motion to approve the grant application for the Department of Mental Health Jail/Arrest Diversion Program and authorize **Chairman Smith** and Chief Holst to be signatories on the grant. **Selectman Bembury** seconded. **Vote:** Unanimously approved.

Adjournment

At 7:38 PM **Chairman Smith** made a motion to adjourn. **Selectman Bastarache** seconded. **Vote:** Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,



Bryan Smith
Town Administrator