



CITY OF CONCORD

New Hampshire's Main Street™

PUBLIC SAFETY BOARD

Draft Minutes

September 30, 2019

Call to Order

Councilor Grady Sexton called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

Board Members Present: Councilor Grady Sexton (Chair), Councilor Candace Bouchard, Mr. Anthony Bourque, Councilor Mark Coen, Mr. Steve Edwards, Ms. Carol Hargrove, Councilor Zandra Rice Hawkins(arrived 3:39 p.m.), Mr. Michael Russell.

Members Excused: Mr. Don Carter, Ms. Lisa Brown, Councilor Alan Herschlag, Councilor Fred Keach, Mr. Jim O'Neill

City Staff Present: Police Chief Brad Osgood, Human Services Director Karen Emis-Williams, Fire Chief Dan Andrus (staff liaison), Deputy Fire Chief Aaron McIntire

Approval of Minutes

Councilor Bouchard moved to approve the minutes of March 25, 2019. Ms. Hargrove seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Communication from Monique Scharlotte, Concord Resident

Councilor Grady Sexton reviewed the letter from Monique Scharlotte, expressing concern about the impact of homelessness and substance abuse on crime in the City. The purpose of this meeting is to put forward recommendations on policy issues that the City Council should consider.

Councilor Grady Sexton invited Chief Osgood to testify.

Chief Osgood said that it is true that we have had some significant incidents involving violence, including four murders, in the last few months. There have been

two murder-suicide incidents, another homicide involving an acquaintance, and an attempted murder on Market Lane for which a person has been apprehended. There have also been some very significant assaults. There is a perceived increase in homelessness. He and Deputy Chief McIntire met with Ken Beaulieu, a Riverbend outreach worker. Mr. Beaulieu said that there are an estimated 350 homeless persons in the area, including couch surfers. Chief Osgood agreed that the homeless population is much more visible and they are hanging out in public places. People will see more homeless camps as the leaves fall. When Mr. Beaulieu was asked how you stop homelessness, he said that you have to stop methamphetamine. Concord is dealing with a meth problem that emerged in 2014-2015. He met with the Salvation Army. Their facility has 42 beds and there are 15 men on the waiting list and 59 women.

Councilor Grady Sexton invited Deputy Chief McIntire to testify.

Deputy Chief McIntire said that overdose is a very large term. The opioid crisis is levelling off, but there are more meth incidents from the emergency medical services (EMS) perspective. Project FIRST has a full time coordinator who has been visiting homeless camps and has been out in the community. We need to expand beyond opioids. Patients with heroin and fentanyl overdoses are often found unconscious and do not pose the risk that persons using methamphetamine do.

Councilor Grady Sexton invited Director Emis-Williams to testify.

Director Emis-Williams said that her office has seen 200 cases involving homelessness or the risk of homelessness. There has been an increase in the homeless population that is seeking services. Many of these cases involve health issues and large families. The family shelter has eight beds, and it is a struggle to house a family of five, as well as individuals. It is much easier when people are housed and they can address that situation. The homeless resource center is seeing 60-70 people per day.

Ms. Hargrove said that she shared the letter with her daughter, who is a probation and parole officer in Burlington, Vermont. Her daughter told her that it is happening everywhere, not just Concord. Ms. Hargrove said that people are capable of doing a lot of things.

Councilor Bouchard asked that if the homeless population is increasing, how much is due to addiction and mental health issues. Employment is under 2.9%, which makes finding a job easier. Homelessness is not a crime. Are we seeing health issues?

Director Emis-Williams said that some people are coming in with hepatitis, which must be reported to the NH Public Health Department. She recently talked to Claremont Town Welfare which had 13 cases involving homelessness in one week. They are seeing many people in their office, and many of them are underemployed or experiencing addiction.

Councilor Grady Sexton asked how we address the uptick in crime? Other communities are having the same experience. Are we seeing “frequent flyers?”

Chief Osgood said yes, they are arresting the same people over and over due to bail reform, which contributes to the increased numbers. Mr. Edwards asked him to describe bail reform. Chief Osgood said that people are not being held in custody. Merrimack County has started a drug court. Many people who would have been detained are on the street. The SOAR program is underutilized. People who would go to SOAR are going to drug court. Many have concurrent disorders.

Deputy Chief McIntire noted that both departments work closely with Riverbend, which has expanded its services to include addiction medicine.

Chief Osgood said that there are services available at the county jail. We don’t want to penalize people for being addicted thus many are diverted to drug court and not the Jail SOAR program.

Councilor Coen said that he is concerned about the recent volume of homicides. Is this being more frequent? Are homicides due to drugs? Passion? Why are we having more homicides?

Chief Osgood said that the recent tragedy is due to domestic violence, as was the one in Concord Garden. Three of the four were in the domestic violence category. The attempted murder involved known acquaintances.

Councilor Coen said that the issue is huge, but homicides are the real headlines

Chief Osgood talked about violence in the homeless environment. They will see an increase in property crime.

Ms. Hargrove asked if weapons are easy to get ahold of. Chief Osgood said “No.” Ms. Hargrove asked if we are allowed to set limits on what people can buy for weapons. Chief Osgood said not really. Manchester has almost a crisis.

Councilor Grady Sexton asked if we know where people are coming from. Director Emis-Williams said that most are from Concord, but some are here from out of town and even out of state due to services. There is no way to distinguish mental health

from substance abuse issues, and it's often intertwined. She asked how you can address those issues when you don't have a place to stay tonight? There is a lot of pressure. The average American nationally cannot deal with a \$400 emergency.

Deputy Chief McIntire said that it is often a case of whittling down the story until you find a point where you can intervene. Some people are more comfortable in the homeless environment.

Chief Andrus asked Chief Osgood and Deputy Chief McIntire to talk more about ACERT (Adverse Childhood Events Response Team) and the Riverbend crisis unit.

Chief Osgood said that society is recognizing that we have a drug problem. He is active with Riverbend in the CHOICES program, and also involved in complex care with the Fire Department.

Deputy Chief McIntire explained that complex care entails working with high frequency users of services in collaboration with Concord Hospital and other entities to find appropriate services.

Chief Osgood said that the ACERT program starts tomorrow. The program involves intervening with children who have experienced traumatic events. `

Deputy Chief McIntire said that we are 21 weeks into Project FIRST (First Responders Initiating Recovery, Treatment, and Support). Fourteen classes have been taught, first responders have been trained, and 70 naloxone kits have been given out.

Chief Andrus noted that there are classes for the community on the second and fourth Mondays of the month at 6:00 p.m. at Fire Department Headquarters and all are welcome.

Mr. Bourque said that this is easy to dismiss as a downtown problem, but there have been homeless people on his property.

Deputy Chief McIntire said that the language of grant programs needs to be opened up to include more than just opioids. The scope is too narrow.

Chief Osgood said that he had identified this with a senator and that Granite Shield was changed. The opioid epidemic has created a new norm. There is a lot of burnout and compassion fatigue, some police officers have been out for up to a year due to injuries and three officers have been forced to take disability retirements. He said that the Fire Department needs another ambulance and he needs more people.

Councilor Coen said that the flip side is recruiting. Councilor Grady Sexton asked about having a recruiter.

Chief Osgood said that a homicide investigation shuts down the Detective Division for two months. There is a need to work on resiliency training.

Mr. Edwards asked about compassion fatigue. Deputy Chief McIntire explained that this is a common occurrence among EMS providers and comes from seeing the same patient over and over.

Councilor Rice Hawkins said that the Seacoast with people who have been successful in recovery. Deputy Chief McIntire said that they have had that person as a speaker. Chief Osgood said that Riverbend is using peer support specialists to work with individuals and families.

Ms. Hargrove asked if there are programs in schools. Deputy Chief McIntire said that these are already in existence. The four City staff members here are also members of the Capital Area Substance Abuse Leadership Team which includes several other stakeholders.

Councilor Grady Sexton commented on the great value of the ACERT program. Chief Osgood said that Riverbend had invited the Police Department to address a group of people in recovery. They brought the new comfort dog which made people more receptive to the police presence.

Councilor Grady Sexton commented on a letter from a constituent on issues at the Concord School District. Chief Osgood said that he had a disagreement with the school district on the handling of a case involving a teacher. He had a very good response from the superintendent's office. He is not investigating the school. He was asked if he will see the report. He said that he will, if the school board says so. He said that the Police Department was not involved with the investigation that generated the report.

Councilor Grady Sexton asked about questions and recommendations. Councilor Coen remarked that there has been a very proactive approach involving many agencies. Chief Osgood commented that we are doing everything that we can. Councilor Coen commented that having a chart or other visual would help people understand. Chief Osgood said that the annual report would have charts and that he would send a draft to the City Council.

Mr. Bourque moved to recommend that the City Council look into increased staffing for emergency services. Ms. Hargrove seconded the motion.

Mr. Russell said that he was reluctant when it is so hard to get staffing now. Chief Osgood gave a breakdown of dispositions of officers. He will have 5 vacancies at the end of October with a pending retirement, four police officers in the Academy, two active in Field Training, one on Military Leave, and three on injury leave.

Ms. Hargrove asked if the school district issue is a police problem or a school problem. Can parents be assured that students are safe? Chief Osgood said that the school is sure, they are in charge of school safety in collaboration with the Police Department.

Councilor Bouchard talked about the need to be more creative. Chief Osgood said that he would work on the 12 vacancies. Mr. Bourque commented that they should look at pay and benefits.

Mr. Bourque withdrew his motion and Ms. Hargrove withdrew her second.

Councilor Rice Hawkins moved to establish a subcommittee of the Public Safety Board to look into staffing and equipment for emergency personnel. The motion was seconded by Mr. Bourque. Councilor Grady Sexton asked if this should be a subcommittee or a committee of the whole. Mr. Bourque said that subcommittees have been used in the past, with the fireworks issue. Councilor Grady Sexton asked people to raise their hands if they want to be involved. Mr. Russell said that (Lt.) Steve Smagula does a phenomenal job.

Mayor Bouley asked to address the Board. He talked about the role of advisory committees. The role of this committee is to answer the question Is the City safe? He said that he had heard several good ideas, including the SOAR program. He asked if we should be working with the delegation to expand the program. There are lots of policy issues here that are linked to each other. There is a need to work with the county delegation. There is a need to work with the state delegation on bail reform. What else can we do? He said that the hub and spoke system is a failure in other parts of the state. It is working in Concord. He supports an additional ambulance but does not know how to pay for it. We need to talk to the community. The school district is another issue.

Mr. Russell asked when the change occurred with the drug court. Chief Osgood said that happened in about 2016. Mr. Russell asked if he had approached the county. Chief Osgood said that he had brought the subject up with the County Attorney's Office. Mr. Russell asked if they are working on this program. Chief Osgood said that it is a matter of how we organize internally. The SOAR program requires a degree of incarceration.

Mr. Bourque asked if there is anything that the Council can do to move this forward?

Councilor Grady Sexton asked if there are people who are interested in meeting on these issues. She would like to move forward with the school district, also something looking at homelessness and substance abuse issues.

Mr. Edwards asked if we can approach the county. Councilor Coen said that he does not know all that is out there. Councilor Bouchard asked about doing a committee of the whole.

Councilor Grady Sexton asked if there was someone willing to sit with her and with Chief Osgood to come up with an agenda? Councilor Bouchard said that she would. Councilor Grady Sexton asked about looking at the Concord School Board issue. We may look at scheduling something in the next few weeks.

Councilor Rice Hawkins asked where people are coming from for services. Councilor Grady Sexton said that she would like to know who is coming here. Councilor Rice Hawkins will work with Director Emis-Williams on that.

Councilor Rice Hawkins withdrew her motion. Mr. Bourque withdrew his second.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be at the call of the chair and will address these issues.

1. State and county polices that are impacting the criminal justice system and crime rates in Concord
2. Issues relative to the Concord School District's handling of sexual misconduct and abuse
3. The impact of the state prisons, the state hospital, and surrounding municipalities on the rate of homelessness in Concord

Adjournment

Councilor Bouchard moved to adjourn the meeting. Councilor Coen seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 p.m.