

POLICE COMMISSION MINUTES

April 8,2022

2:00 PM

IN ATTENDANCE: William Poling – Police Commissioner Chairman
Petar Dragojevic – Police Commissioner Vice Chairman/Secretary
Thomas Pawlak – Police Commissioner
Michael Rich – Police Commissioner
Gene Ward – Police Commissioner
W. Luther Cuttino– Chief of Police
Michael Deppe – Commission Attorney

Commissioner Poling asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and to remain standing afterwards for the invocation by Attorney Deppe.

ITEM I Motion was made to accept the minutes of the Police Commission Meeting dated March 4, 2022, as presented.

Commissioner Pawlak made a motion to accept March 4, 2022, minutes and was seconded by Commissioner Ward.

Commissioner Poling asked if there were any discussion.

Hearing none Commissioner Poling stated, “Motion carries”.

ITEM II STATISTICS REPORT

The Chief of Police presented the February 2022 Monthly Statistical Report as presented.

ITEM III LETTERS OF CORRESPONDENCE

Commissioner Poling read letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

I would like to bring an incident to your attention that occurred on January 12, 2022 at 5:23p.m., that involved Officer Andrew Germonprez #419.

Germonprez was on routine patrol and overheard over the police radio that Lake County Sheriff's Police were in pursuit of a black Mercedes Benz in the Area of US 30 & Pine Island Drive and lost site of the vehicle in the area of 73rd Ave and Whitcomb St.

Officer Germonprez was traveling southbound in the 5800 block of Hendricks St. and observed a black Mercedes northbound on Hendricks St. that matched the description.

He turned around and began to catch up to the vehicle and observed the Mercedes passing other northbound vehicles traveling left of center. As the vehicle was approaching Nicholson Road, the officer advised the vehicle was fleeing and not yielding to his lights and sirens. The suspect vehicles reached the 57th Ave and Chase St. intersection and the suspect vehicles turned eastbound on 57th Ave. Officer Kloc was in the area and joined in the pursuit and confirmed that the vehicle was the one Lake County Sheriff was looking for.

As the pursuit continued eastbound on 57th Ave. the suspect lost control and stuck the utility pole at 57th Ave. & Pierce St. Officer Germonprez with assistance from Officer Kloc were able to apprehend both suspects. The driver of the vehicle was transported to Lake County Jail on charges of Felony Resisting Law Enforcement and Possession of Marijuana.

Officer Germonprez should be commended for this alertness that he was monitoring other police departments and did not hesitate to respond to the area to assist the Sheriff's Department. Once the vehicle was located, he and Officer Kloc pursued the bad guys and made an apprehension of the suspects.

Germonprez being recently hired by this department has been actively involved in arrest to continue to protect the citizens of Merrillville and he and Kloc should be considered for a Level II Commendation.

Commissioner Poling read letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell

On February 28, 2022 at 7:01 a.m., Merrillville Police and EMS were dispatched to Extended Stay Motel at 1355 East 83rd Ave. in reference to a female tenant who had overdosed in one of the rooms.

Officer De Cero and Officer Fultz responded to the overdose call and upon their arrival they found an 18-year-old female unconscious and she had shallow breathing.

Both De Cero and Fultz began to render aid to the female because the medics had not arrived on scene yet.

The officers administer NARCAN to the female subject and aided her until EMS arrived on scene. The medics on scene administered a second dose of NARCAN and the victim was transported over to the hospital.

Both of these officers went above the call of duty by putting their own lives at risk by exposing themselves to whatever the female had taken.

The officers took the NARCAN training after the course was approved by Chief Cuttino for officers to voluntarily carry NARCAN on their person.

The officers completed the course that was set up by the Merrillville Fire Department. Once the course was completed, the officers were given their supplies by the Fire Department.

For their actions of rendering aid to the victim and administering the NARCAN, I believe the officers turned a situation from negative to positive by giving her a chance at life instead of the alternative.

I would recommend these two officers for a Level II commendation and a copy of this letter into their personal file.

Commissioner Poling read letter of commendation from Commander Gonzales.

I would like to make you aware of the commendable police work of one of our patrolmen. In January of 2022 Officer Nick Wright was temporarily assigned to the Investigations Division while placed on light-duty. Officer Wright recognized the opportunity this temporary assignment presented and took full advantage. Officer Wright quickly grasped basic concepts required of a detective and often only needed things explained to him one time.

Officer Wright greatly reduced the workload from other detectives in my division due to his capability and willingness to help out. Officer Wright never shied away from any case or task presented to him. Due to his ability Officer Wright was able to investigate a wide range of cases from frauds to a sex offense. Officer Wright investigated and cleared out 23 cases during his two-month time assigned to the division.

Officer Wright shows great promise for a future in investigations should the opportunity ever be presented to him. I am recommending Officer Wright be awarded a Level I commendation and this letter be placed in his file.

Commissioner Poling read letter of commendation from Commander Gonzales.

I would like to make you aware of the exemplary police work of one of our patrolmen. On March 2, 2022 Officer J. Olson responded to the area of 6842 Van Buren Place in reference to the complaint of a male subject in his 40's possibly attempting to lure a 13-year-old boy into his vehicle as he got off the school bus. The complainant was able to provide a description of the suspect vehicle as well as the plate. A check of the vehicle's records indicated it was registered to a 76-year-old male.

On March 3, 2022 Officer Olson took the initiative to further look into the incident from the previous day. Officer Olson conducted an extra patrol in the area at the time the children were getting off the bus. Officer Olson observed the suspect vehicle in the area of the bus stop and conducted a traffic stop. Officer Olson was able to identify the driver of the vehicle as the registered owner's son, who matched the original description provided by the complainant from the previous day.

Officer Olson's actions ensured the safety of the children getting off the bus and further aided in Detective Buck's investigation of this incident. I am recommending he be awarded a Level I commendation and this letter be placed in his personnel file.

Commissioner Poling read letter of commendation from Commander Gonzales.

I would like to make you aware of the outstanding work and dedication to the department by one of our officers. In the Fall of 2021 Detective Derek Diehl undertook the project of implementing a license plate recognition (LPR) camera system in the Town of Merrillville to further enhance the service of the Merrillville Police Department.

Once tasked with this project Detective Diehl began diligently researching the technology without hesitation. Detective Diehl initiated contact with Motorola Solutions, the parent company of Vigilant Solutions, to arrange several meetings with their sales and engineer departments on how their LPR camera system could best be utilized by the police department. Detective Diehl arranged for six sites throughout the town to be outfitted with multiple LPR camera units. In addition to this Detective Diehl negotiated for the acquirement of two mobile LPR camera systems to be installed into two of our police vehicles.

Detective Diehl was able to work along with Motorola to put together a very appealing package to be presented to the Town Council. The Town approved, however Detective Diehl's work with this project was far from over.

Detective Diehl then took it upon himself to become versatile and trained in both the management and use of the Vigilant Solutions platform. This included countless hours of on-demand training and video meetings with Vigilant representatives. Once confident in his abilities to manage and use the system he now had to set up accounts for any officer in the police department that wished to utilize this technology as well as train the officers in its use.

In addition to becoming versed with the software, Detective Diehl has worked closely with the contracted installer of the hardware to become knowledgeable of the fixed and mobile LPR camera system units. Detective Diehl again spent countless hours dedicated to this process.

Detective Diehl recently compiled the statistics associated with the LPR camera system throughout the first 60 days. The LPR camera system contributed to 28 total arrests, 10 felony arrest, 6 HTV arrests, 4 warrant arrests, 3 recovered stolen vehicles, 17 vehicles impounded, and 1 firearm seized. It should be noted at the 60-day mark only 5 of our 6 sites were active and our two mobile units were not yet installed. Additional technology alerting officers via their MDT for "hot listed" vehicles was not available to most officers until after the first 30 days. To that end, we can reasonably assume these numbers will increase going forward.

Since the 60-day mark, the Department has seen the installation of the first mobile unit which has been averaging 7,000 scans during that officer's shift. The second mobile unit is currently being installed on a second patrolman's vehicle. The sixth fixed site is planned to be installed and active once the ground thaws.

Detective Diehl selflessly has devoted himself to this department and this project. Detective Diehl has made himself available above and beyond to anyone needing assistance during this process from our officers to the installer. Detective Diehl has effectively communicated every step of this project to his superiors and peers alike by providing timely updates.

I am recommending Detective Diehl be awarded the commendation for Excellent Police Duty which is awarded to an officer for an intelligent act materially contributing to a valuable Police accomplishment or for submission of a device or method adopted by the Department, to increase efficiency in the administrative or tactical procedure.

Commissioner Poling read a letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

On Monday March 21, 2022 at 9:21 a.m., Merrillville Police Units were dispatched to the Menards store at 6300 Mississippi St. in reference to a theft, with the suspect still in the store. Officer Knight #397 was the first

unit on scene, and he observed store loss prevention personnel speaking with the suspect, who was later identified as Bradley James Fastabend. Officer Knight advised that as he approached the scene, the suspect placed both hands in his pockets.

Knight asked the suspect to remove his hands from his pockets and conducted a pat down for officer safety. During the pat down several currency bills fell out of his jacket pocket along with a clear plastic baggy with an unknown white powdery substance. The suspect picked up the money and plastic baggy and made a fist in the hand he was holding the items in and brought his fist up against his chest. Officer Knight attempted to retrieve the plastic baggy from the suspect and the suspect refused to comply and pulled away from the officer resisting arrest. Officer Knight took the suspect to the ground in an attempt get control and secure the suspect but he continued to resist Knight.

Lt. Rice# 112 arrived on scene and observed Knight in a scuffle with the suspect and went to assist him. Lt. Rice was kicked in the face by the suspect fighting with the officers. Both officers continued to get wrist restraints on the suspect but he continued to refuse to place his hands behind his back.

After getting the suspect cuffed and in custody with the assistance of Officer Novak #401, Officers again attempted to conduct a pat down for officer safety. Lt. Rice advised that he patted down the suspects chest, the palm of his hand was stuck by an unknown object, which was removed from his person and found to be a homemade weapon described as a prison shank. Cpl. Henry and his K-9 partner arrived on scene and assisted units with the scene and suspect. Officer safety was a concern due to the fact that the suspect had both his hands in his chest area during the fight of getting cuffs on this subject because of his access to his weapon.

Lt. Rice had the EMS respond to the scene and treat the area of his palm that was punctured by the contact with the shank. He was also complaining of minor face pain for being kicked in the face by the suspect.

The suspect was transported to the hospital by the EMS for unusual physical behavior which they wanted to have him evaluated in case he took some of the unknown white substance.

I would like to recommend a Level II Commendation for Lt. Rice and Officer Knight for the professional conduct in apprehending the suspect and no civilians or officers were injured during the altercation. I would also like a copy of this placed in Cpl. Henry's and Officer Novak's personnel file for their involvement in the arrest of the subject. I have attached the officer's narratives for you review of the incident. Thank You for your consideration in this matter

Commissioner Poling read letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

I would like to bring to acknowledge some excellent police work performed by Officer J. Solis #398 on March 26, 2022 at 12:55 a.m. Officer Solis, while on routine patrol, observed a vehicle commit a traffic infraction (speeding) and curbed the vehicle for the traffic violation in the 6400 block of Harrison St. The vehicle was occupied by five subjects and they were identified by the officer. During his inquiry identifying the occupants, he asked if anyone in the vehicle had weapons which one subject did and the weapon was taken off the subject for officer safety. During the investigation, Officer Solis ran the driver Chris Rias and Solis noticed that Rias has been flagged in Spillman by Detective Corporal Matt Vassel) as a witness in a homicide investigation he was handling. Solis contacted Vassel) about the subject being flagged and Detective Vassel) requested that Solis transport Rias to the station so that Vassel could interview him on the homicide investigation.

Due to his proactive police work in looking into the individual at the time of his traffic stop, Solis assisted Vassel with his case. Detective Vassel) advised that Solis had previously volunteered to help with this case in locating individuals that the detectives needed to speak with who were staying at the area hotels.

I would like a copy of this letter placed in his personnel file for his continued dedication on his job in the Patrol Division. Attached is a memo from Detective Corporal Vassel about Solis Excellent police work and the actual traffic stop made by Solis.

Commissioner Poling read letter of recognition from Commander Bunnell.

On March 28th and March 31st 2022, Lieutenant Patrick Westbury put training on at the Fire Department for Stop the Bleed class for our Officers who had not yet been through the training. Patrick & his wife Brittany put together trauma kits for the two K-9 Officers to keep in their police cars. Sgt. Schmidt and Cpl. Henry received orange IFAK kits to keep with them in case some type of emergency happens to their partners. I wanted to make you aware of the donation by Lt. Westbury and he advised me that he has become an instructor of the K-9 TCCC two-day course and would be interested in teaching a two-day course sometime in the future.

Commissioner Poling read letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

On April 3, 2022 at 1 :32 a.m., police units were dispatched to 8375 Georgia St. in reference to a trespassing call. Upon arrival of officers Fields Jr., Bronowski and Nash, they were advised of a female subject with two children who were no longer welcome at the motel and the staff wanted her removed from the property. The female subject advised the officers that she and her children had nowhere to go since her family was being evicted from the motel. Officer Fields Jr. took it upon himself to keep the mother and children together by getting a room at the Hampton Inn and paying for the room out of his own pocket.

Officer Fields Jr. should be commended on going beyond the scope of his job by paying for the room to keep the family together. He could of contacted CPS and had the kids placed somewhere else which would of upset the mother and children. With the positive police work he did on helping the mother and kids stay together and gave them a place to stay. All the officers involved were on social media in a very positive light about their professionalism and compassion while handling the incident.

Please take this into consideration and forward a copy to the administration.

Commissioner Poling read letter of commendation from Commander Gonzales.

I would like to make you aware of the commendable performance of one of our patrolmen, Officer Taylor Hensley, brought to my attention by Detective Alex Van Rite. Ofc. Hensley had produced a "Spillman Cheat Sheet" for all Merrillville Personal to utilize to help them complete various tasks on Spillman. The cheat sheet contains well-written and easy-to-follow how-to guidelines for the following tasks: Creating a local name file, creating a local vehicle file, how to add people/vehicles/property to the involvement tabs, vehicle inventory sheet, and how to complete a vehicle impound. I reviewed the cheat sheet personally and observed it to be accurate and easy to follow.

As you know some officers have struggled from time to time with the full use of Spillman after our transition to paperless. This type of self-initiation should be recognized as her intent was to help Merrillville Police Department overall function more efficiently. Her cheat sheet has helped several officers and will be a fantastic training aid for new officers while in FTO. The "cheat sheet" has since be made readily available in the MDT for all personnel to refer to at any given

moment. I believe Officer Hensley should be commended for her actions and this letter be placed in her file.

Commissioner Poling read letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

On April 2, 2022 at 1:15 p.m., police units were dispatched to 98 East 70th Avenue to conduct a welfare check involving a veteran who was dealing with PTSD. Officers Leto #383 and Osborne #411 responded to the residence and made contact with the reporting person, Jason Zaideman who is the Director of Veteran Services at Operation Combat Bike saver.

The reporting person was concerned about the welfare of a fellow veteran because he was recently hospitalized after a recent suicide attempt. Officers found the residence to be empty and the back door was standing open. Officer Leto requested that Central Dispatch conduct a ping of the veteran's cell phone while officers Osborne, Kloc, Germonperez and Cpl. Reynolds began a search of the area for the veteran.

A short time later, the officers located the veteran sitting in his vehicle in a field in the area of 73rd Avenue and Mississippi St. The officers checked on the welfare and had the medics respond to the scene to evaluate the subject. Although the subject declined EMS services, he agreed to seek counseling from Mr. Zaideman.

Attached is an email from Mr. Zaideman expressing his appreciation for these officers' concern and efforts displayed in finding the veteran to get him the help he needed which I believe kept the victim from hurting himself.

I agree with Lt. Berzac that these officers be recognized and given the Excellent Police Duty Award.

Commissioner Dragojevic made motion to accept all 11 letters of commendations as presented and was seconded by Commissioner Pawlak.

Commissioner Poling asked if there were any discussion.

Commissioner Poling stated all in favor signify by saying, "Aye."
All replied, "Aye."
Commissioner Poling stated, "Opposed, same sign."

Hearing none Commissioner Poling stated, "Motion carries

ITEM IV

OLD BUSINESS

NONE

ITEM V

NEW BUSINESS

Chief Cuttino presented the Eligibility list for Emergency Hire for the Position of Police Officer.

Commissioner Dragojevic made a motion to ratify the Emergency Hire eligibility list for Position of Police Officers and was seconded by Commissioner Ward.

Commissioner Poling asked if there was any discussion.

Commissioner Poling requested that Chief Cuttino take a roll call vote.

Chief Cuttino took a roll call vote.

Commissioner Dragojevic, "Aye"
Commissioner Rich, "Aye"
Commissioner Poling, "Aye"
Commissioner Pawlak, "Aye"
Commissioner Ward, "Aye"

Commissioner Poling stated, "Vote is unanimous, and the motion carries."

Chief Cuttino presented a Conditional Offer of Employment to Nicholas Gould.

Commissioner Rich made a motion to extend the Conditional Offer of Employment to Nicholas Gould and was seconded by Commissioner Dragojevic.

Commissioner Poling asked if there was any discussion.

Commissioner Poling requested that Chief Cuttino take a roll call vote.

Chief Cuttino took a roll call vote.

Commissioner Dragojevic, “Aye”
Commissioner Rich, “Aye”
Commissioner Poling, “Aye”
Commissioner Pawlak, “Aye”
Commissioner Ward, “Aye”

Commissioner Poling stated, “Vote is unanimous, and the motion carries.”

Commissioner Poling read Resolution 987 Approving Employment of a Probationary Patrolmen Nicholas Gould effective from and after 12:01 AM, April 18, 2022. This position will be for the duration of a one-year probationary period from this date and that the rate of pay will be set by the Chief of Police for the first year of employment.

Commissioner Dragojevic made a motion to accept Resolution 987 and was seconded by Commissioner Ward.

Commissioner Poling asked if there was any discussion.

Commissioner Poling requested that Chief Cuttino take a roll call vote.

Chief Cuttino took a roll call vote.

Commissioner Dragojevic, “Aye”
Commissioner Rich, “Aye”
Commissioner Poling, “Aye”
Commissioner Pawlak, “Aye”
Commissioner Ward, “Aye”

Commissioner Poling stated, “Vote is unanimous, and the motion carries.”

ITEM VI

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Dragojevic made motion to adjourn and was seconded by Commissioner Pawlak.

Commissioner Poling stated all in favor signify by saying, “Aye.”
All replied, “Aye.”

Commissioner Poling stated, “Opposed, same sign.”

Commissioner Poling stated, “Adjourn.”

Commissioner Poling stated the next regular meeting will be Friday
May 6, 2022 at 2:00 P.M.

AS THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS, THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED.