

POLICE COMMISSION MINUTES

August 19, 2022

2:00 PM

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

Commissioner Poling asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

ITEM I Motion was made to accept the minutes of the Police Commission Meeting dated July 8, 2022 and July 29, 2022, as presented.

Commissioner Rich made a motion to accept July 8, 2022 and July 29, 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 June 2022 Monthly Statistical Reports as presented.

ITEM III LETTERS OF CORRESPONDENCE

Commissioner Poling read a letter of commendation from Commander Gonzales.

I would like to make you aware of some exemplary police work carried out by our officers. This work spans several months involving numerous members of our department. It is a model for effective policing amongst different divisions and units of our department. Over the course of this investigation the Patrol Division, Investigations Division, Evidence Technicians, and Merrillville Tactical Apprehension Squad (MTAS) played a vital role leading to its conclusion.

On 01/19/2022 the Merrillville Police Department was dispatched to 7811 Hendricks Street in reference to an active disturbance. While en route to the scene responding officers were advised the altercation became more heated and a shooting occurred. Officer Dugan arrived on scene first and upon being met at the doorway by the armed suspect he observed the deceased on the interior stairwell. Officer Dugan was able to take the suspect into custody without incident. Officer Reid, Officer DeBenedetti, Officer Enyeart, Officer Olson, Lt. Smith, and Lt. Kijurna would all subsequently arrive on scene. The responding officers cleared the residence for any other threats or injured parties and promptly secured the scene.

Detective Vasel took the role of lead investigator for the case and was assisted by Detective Miskus. Officer Dugan and Officer Reid undertook the heavy responsibility of documenting and processing the crime scene of the homicide.

After speaking with involved parties who remained on scene and conferring with the prosecutor it was determined at the time of the incident there was not enough information available yet that the prosecutor's office would be able to draft charges against the suspect.

Over the course of many months Detective Vasel dedicated countless hours to this case that included follow-ups in other jurisdictions, lengthy interviews, and several search warrants. Throughout his investigation Detective Vasel was assisted by every one of our investigators in carrying out various tasks pertinent to the case and its eventual successful presentation to the Lake County Prosecutor's Office.

On 07/21/2022 Detective Vasel met with Supervisory Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Michelle Jatkiewicz where the 17-year-old suspect in the case was charged with Murder through the Lake County Court. The warrant would later become active around 3:00 p.m. on that date.

On 07/21/2022 at approximately 12:00 p.m. the Merrillville Police Department was investigating a separate incident involving 7811 Hendricks Street and learned the suspect from 01/19/22 had been previously observed inside the residence on this date but his current whereabouts were unknown. Detective Vasel distributed a department wide bulletin outlining the suspect's information and charges.

On 07/21/2022 at approximately 11:00 p.m. Officer Solis, an MTAS operator, conducted a spot check of 7811 Hendricks Street and observed a subject who he identified as the suspect in question in the driveway of the residence. Officer Solis then observed the suspect enter the residence. Officer Solis contacted his shift supervisor, Sgt. Fields, and other available units of his observations. Officers on scene then developed a plan to make contact and apprehend the individual.

Officer Solis, along with MTAS operators Officer Wright, Officer Reid, Officer Germonprez, and Officer Dugan, as well as Sgt. Fields, Officer DeBenedetti, and Officer Olson successfully executed their plan making contact with the residence and taking the suspect into custody without incident.

I could not be prouder of each member of this police department who played a role in the success of this case.

I am recommending Officer Dugan be awarded a Level III Commendation for a successful act involving personal danger, performed in the line of duty during his initial encounter of the armed suspect and taking him into custody on 01/19/22.

I am recommending Lt. Kijurna, Lt. Smith, Officer Reid, Officer Debenedetti, Officer Enyeart, and Officer Olson be awarded Level II Commendations for a successful act involving personal danger, performed in the line of duty for their response, clearing, and securing of the homicide scene on 01/19/2022.

I am recommending Detective Miskus be awarded a Level I Commendation for being the co-case lead and assisting Detective Vasel heavily during the height of the investigation. At the time of the initial incident Detective Miskus was only weeks into his new assignment as a detective and did not hesitate to become involved in a major incident.

I am recommending Officer Solis, Officer Wright, Officer Reid, Officer Germonprez, Officer Dugan, Sgt. Fields, Officer

DeBenedetti, and Officer Olson be awarded Level II Commendations for a successful act involving personal danger, performed in the line of their duty for their apprehension of a dangerous individual at a location known to harbor countless other dangerous individuals at any time.

I am recommending Officer Solis be awarded a Commendation for Excellent Police Duty for an intelligent act materially contributing to a valuable Police accomplishment for his initiative, skillful observation, and mindfulness that lead to the apprehension of this dangerous suspect.

I am recommending Detective Vassel be awarded a Commendation for Excellent Police Duty for an intelligent act materially contributing to a valuable Police accomplishment for his effort and countless hours of dedication spanning months that lead to the successful charging of a murder suspect.

Commissioner Dragovjevic made motion to accept the letter of commendation awarding the officers as recommended in the letter and was seconded by Commissioner Ward.

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."

Commissioner Poling read a letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

I would like to bring to your attention an excellent act of Police work that was done by Officer Solis #398 on August 9, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.

Officer Solis was made aware of a silver GMC Acadia bearing IL registration that fled from the Dalton Illinois Police earlier in the day. One of the occupants of the vehicle was identified who is a notorious car jacker from Illinois and was considered armed and dangerous. From the information received, Dalton PD was attempting to take him into custody when he fled in the above listed vehicle.

Officer Solis was made aware that the above listed vehicle had entered Merrillville after being alerted via the town's License Plate

Reader. Officer Solis then used his mobile data terminal in his vehicle and with the information of a local search through Spillman files, he was able to locate an address associated with the owner of the GMC Acadia.

Officer Solis then went and conducted a drive by of the address and located the GMC parked in the driveway at the residence. Officer Solis notified his crew members about the incident, and they set up a perimeter around the area in case the vehicle left the area. Officer Solis then contacted Chicago Police Department along with the U.S. Marshalls where he advised them that he located the suspect vehicle at the address.

Our Officers kept the perimeter secure until the U.S. Marshalls arrived in the area and took over the investigation where Merrillville unites were released from scene.

I feel that the pride that Officer Solis has in his daily job duties where he took the extra effort to look up the vehicle information to see if there were any local ties to the area and located the GMC Acadia in town is some great investigative skill.

I would like to have Officer Solis recognized for his efforts that gave the investigative agency information that would lead to the arrest. I would like to see Officer Solis receive a Level II Commendation for his efforts to keep Merrillville a safe Community to reside in.

Commissioner Dragovjevic made motion to accept the letter of commendation awarding a Level II Commendation and was seconded by Commissioner Ward.

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."

Commissioner Poling read a letter of commendation from Operations Commander Dillahunty.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of MPD Lieutenant James Bogner on Monday, August 1, 2022.

Lt. Bogner, who is currently assigned to the DEA HIDTA Task Force as a Task Force Officer (TFO), was able to develop a high-level cocaine target that resides within the Town of Merrillville. During TFO Bogner's investigation, he developed probable cause to obtain a federal search warrant for the target's residence. DEA HIDTA with the assistance of Merrillville's Tactical Apprehension Squad (MTAS), coordinated and executed an operation to safely take the target into custody prior to the execution of the search warrant.

Upon this, DEA HIDTA was able to safely execute the search warrant without incident at the residence. As a result of the search warrant, DEA HIDTA was able to seize over six (6) kilograms of cocaine and several firearms. TFO Bogner's diligence and assiduousness with his investigation and resulting arrest will have a strong positive effect on the safety of the Town of Merrillville and its residents. I recommend TFO Bogner be given a Level II Commendation.

Commissioner Dragovjevic made motion to accept the letter of commendation awarding a Level II Commendation and was seconded by Commissioner Ward.

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

Commissioner Poling read Resolution 989 Approving a Full Time Records Secretary Annabel Perez effective from and after 12:01 AM, August 15, 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.

Commissioner Dragojevic made a motion to accept Resolution 989 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."

Commissioner Poling read Resolution 990 Approving Employment of a Probationary Patrolmen Amanda L. Earley effective from and after 12:01 AM, August 23, 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 990 and was seconded by Commissioner Rich.

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."

Amendment of General Order 11.1 Off Duty Employment.

Commissioner Dragojevic made a motion to accept the Amendment of General Order 11.1 Off Duty Employment and was seconded by Commissioner Ward.

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

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 September 9, 2022 at 2:00 P.M.

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