

POLICE COMMISSION MINUTES

March 4, 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
Kosta Nuses – Assistant Chief of Police
W. Luther Cuttino– Chief of Police

Commissioner Poling asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and to remain standing afterwards for the invocation by Chaplain Dennis Walton.

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

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

Commissioner Poling asked if there were any discussion.

Hearing non Commissioner Poling stated, “Motion carries”.

ITEM II STATISTICS REPORT

The Chief of Police presented the 2021 Annual report as presented.

The Chief of Police presented the January 2022 Monthly Statistical Reports; 2408 Calls for Service; 558 Total Citations; 132 State Reports.

ITEM III LETTERS OF CORRESPONDENCE

Commissioner Poling read letter of resignation from Officer Hickok.

Commissioner Ward made motion to accept Officer Hickok's letter of resignation and was seconded by Commissioner Dragojevic.

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 letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

I would like to bring your attention to another outstanding job done by Officer's investigating activities that started with an alert from the LPR system on February 16, 2022 at 5:14 a.m.
The LPR alerted officers about a stolen black Mercedes that was picked up on Ridge Road and Cleveland Street. The vehicle was reported stolen out of Blue Island IL.

Officers began to investigate and checked the area for the suspect vehicle. Officer Germonperez checking the area and located the suspect vehicle at the Luke's gas station at 7277 Taft St.
The suspects saw the officer and exited the parking lot northbound on Taft St at a high rate of speed. Officer Germonperez alerted other officers that the vehicle was located and he activated his emergency lights. The suspect(s) refused to stop other officers from our department and the Lake County Sheriffs Department joined in the pursuit. The suspects attempt at eluding officers failed and they were involved in a vehicle accident when they impacted the guard rail at the end of Ridge Road and Cleveland St.

Two suspects exited the vehicle and fled into the adjacent wooded area where the driver was apprehended with the assistance from Officer Popovich, Cpl. Reynolds, Officer Leto and Officer Novak. During the foot chase, Officer Leto recovered a Smith and Wesson Semi auto handgun that the suspects dropped during the foot chase. Further information received from Illinois authorities is that this vehicle was suspected to be involved in armed robberies in several Illinois Communities.

Once the suspect, Keyante McKinney was taken into custody, officers discovered the key fob for the suspect vehicle in his pants pocket.

McKinney is a convicted felon and the stolen vehicle report listed McKinney as the suspect in the theft.

The suspect was transported to the Lake County Jail pending charges of Possession of a firearm by a serious violent felon, Auto Theft and Felony Resisting Law Enforcement.

I would go along with Lieutenant Berzac's request to recommend Officer Germonprez for a Level II commendation in the arrest of this felony suspect. I would also like the rest of his crew recognized that by working as a team, these kinds of criminals can be taken off the street to make Merrillville a safer place to live.

Commissioner Dragojevic made motion to accept the Level II Commendations for Officer Germonprez 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 letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

I would like to bring your attention to another outstanding job done by Officer's investigating activities that started with an alert from the LPR system on February 14, 2022 at 9:49 p.m. Sgt. Lance Schmidt, Officer Sean Leto and Officer Kwata Osborne were alerted of a stolen Chevy Astro van Indiana registration plate of 740DWE.

The above listed officers responded to the area and located the vehicle westbound on 57th Ave at Cleveland St. A short pursuit was initiated after the vehicle refused to stop after Officers activated their emergency lights and the suspect refused to stop. The pursuit continued to 57th Ave and Chase St where the suspect vehicle left the roadway and impacted a snow bank causing the vehicle to come to rest in a creek. Sgt. Schmidt and his K-9 partner Goose began a search of the van and found out the suspect fled on foot.

With the assistance of the Lake County Helicopter, Sgt. Schmidt along with his K-9 partner and Officer Leto were able to locate and

apprehend the suspect. The suspect was transported to the Lake County Jail on charges of Auto Theft and Felony Resisting Law Enforcement.

I would go along with Lieutenant Berzac's request to recommend Level II Commendations for these three officers for their efforts to bring this suspect into custody with the pending Felony Charges.

Commissioner Dragojevic made motion to accept the Level II Commendations for Sgt. Schmidt, his K9 partner Goose, Officer Leto and Officer Osborne and was seconded by Commissioner Rich.

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 letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

I would like to submit this request for a Level II Commendation that I received for a call that happened on February 5, 2022 at 6922 Madison St. at 7:56 a.m. (Incident 22ME02407).

Police units were dispatched to the above listed address in reference to a disturbance that involved a subject with a rifle.

Central dispatch advised responding units that the suspect was inside this residence armed with a rifle.

Upon responding unit's arrival, resident Arica Perry, along with her father, William Poe and family friend Derek Hazelett advised that the neighbor Eugene Findlay(suspect), forced his way in through the front door and pointed the rifle at Derek Hazelett. William Poe immediately pushed Findley back and attempted to pull the rifle out of his hands. Findlay then struck Poe in the eye with the stock of the weapon and began a physical fight with Hazelett. Poe and Hazelett were both injured by the suspect Findlay.

Once Arica Perry called 9-1-1, the suspect Findlay exited their residence and returned to his home next door.

Officers formed a perimeter around the residence taking tactical positions around the suspects apartment.

Mr. Findlay refused to open the door, so Officer Osborne who is a trained hostage and crisis negotiator, was able to speak with Mr. Findlay over the telephone. During their phone conversation, Osborne asked Findlay to step outside and speak with officers in which he replied that he wasn't home and then disconnect the call with Osborne. Officer Osborne continued to make contact with Findlay and Lt. Berzac advised that he had overheard some of the conversation on the phone speaker, that Findlay advised Osborne that he would shoot any officer that attempted to make entry into his residence.

Officer Osborne then began texting Findlay on his phone, at which time Findlay would return the text messages to Osborne stating that he got into it with subjects in front of his residence. At this point, Findlay ceased communicating with Osborne.

Once communication ceased with Findlay, Officer Osborne contacted the property owner to have him contact Findlay and ask him to exit the residence. A short time later after contact was made by the property owner, Findlay came out of the residence and surrendered to awaiting officers. Detective Paunicka who was on scene, continued the investigation which resulted in felony criminal charges against Findlay.

I agree with Lt. Berzac that Osborne be awarded a Level II commendation for his professionalism in negotiating with the armed suspect that resulted in Findlay surrendering which resulted in a safe arrest.

I would like to see the supervisors, Sgt. Schmidt and Cpl. Reynolds recognized for their leadership and teamwork that keeps these officers safe. Credit also needs to be recognized for the crew of officers that kept the perimeter secured even in the frosty temperatures it was outside. I would like to have a copy of the incident placed into their personnel files for recognition of a find job for the below listed officers. Officers S. Leto, S. Jordan, R. Kijuma, K. Osborne and A. Germonprez.

Commissioner Dragojevic made motion to accept the Level II Commendations for Officer Osborne and to place letters in the files to recognize Sgt. Schmidt, Cpl. Reynolds, Officers S. Leto, S. Jordan, R. Kijuma, K. Osborne and A. Germonprez 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 letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

I would like to submit this request for a Level II Commendation that I received for a call that happened on February 4, 2022 at 8424 Ellsworth Place at 9:35 p.m. (Incident 22ME02394).

Police units were dispatched to the above listed address in reference to a subject claiming that he wanted to commit suicide with a weapon. Upon arrival of police units, Officers set up a perimeter around the residence for safety. Officer Terry Bronowski #407 used his public address speaker in his police unit and had the suspects wife and children exit from inside the residence. The family members were placed in Officer Hensley's squad car and removed to a safe environment off scene. Sgt. De Salle noted in his memo that during the time when coordination was being made with MTAS units to respond and Department Administration was being advised of the situation, that Officer Bronowski continued to attempt to get the suspect John Brunson Jr. to put down his weapon and come outside and surrender to the police.

During the incident the suspect refused to exit the residence and had pointed the handgun at his head. Officer Bronowski's continued efforts to deescalate the situation by continually speaking to the suspect over the public address system in his patrol unit, which caused the suspect Brunson to put the weapon down and surrender to the awaiting officers outside. The suspect was placed into custody and transported to a local hospital for treatment.

I would agree with Sgt. De Salle's recommendation that Officer Bronowski receive a Level II Commendation because he maintained a professional level of discipline and was able to resolve the issue without any harm coming to anyone.

I would like to see that you place his memo into the personnel files for the following officers. Officer Nash, Officer Hensley, Officer De Cero, Officer Fultz, Officer Novak, along with the supervisors Sgt. De Salle and Cpl. Besse. These officers worked well together in a situation that could of went bad at any time and with the assistance of

the above officers and supervisors, the incident was resolved without any officers and civilians being injured.

Commissioner Rich made motion to accept the Level II Commendations for Officer Bronowski and to place letters in the files to recognized Officer Nash, Officer Hensley, Officer De Cero, Officer Fultz, Officer Novak, along with the supervisors Sgt. De Salle and Cpl. Besse 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 letter of recognition from Commander Horvath.

I would like to take this opportunity to bring to your attention the actions of a couple members of our support staff, Joree Solomon and Olivia Bermudez. On 2/8/2022, a homeless woman and her small child found their way to the Merrillville Police Department and were in the lobby seeking assistance. Joree and Olivia jumped in and provided assistance that is normally beyond the realm of the clerical staff. They purchased food for the mother and her child. They began calling shelters and seeking a place for them to seek refuge from the brutally cold weather. They even obtained and administered COVID tests for the safety of everyone involved. They did all this in addition to their daily responsibilities. I feel their actions are deserving of recognition. They went well above the normal scope of their duties and stepped up to help out without even being asked. I would like them to know that their actions do not go unnoticed and are truly appreciated.

Commissioner Dragojevic made motion to have the letter placed in their personnel file 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 letter of recognition from Commander Bunnell.

I would like to bring to your attention two Officers that are under the command of Sgt. G. Croarkin who have been doing some outstanding police work during the month of December 2021.

Officer Bronowski #407 and Officer De Cero #410 who have produced some of the highest statistics on their crew for the month.

Officer Bronowski during the month wrote 74 traffic citations, 30 traffic warnings, had 8 adult arrest and responded to 187 incidents.

Officer De Cero during the month wrote 29 traffic citations, 29 traffic warnings, had 14 adult arrest and 1 juvenile arrest while responding to 191 incidents for the month.

These two officers remain motivated in both traffic and criminal activities to keep the residents safe in the Town of Merrillville.

The previous administration used to award high productivity which was stopped several years ago but with these two officers ongoing dedication, I would like to see this letter placed in their file and the officer's statistics be recognized by the police commission.

Commissioner Dragojevic made motion to have the letter placed in their personnel file 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

Chief Cuttino presented a Conditional Offer of Employment to George Fields Jr.

Commissioner Dragojevic made a motion to extend the Conditional Offer of Employment to George Fields Jr. and was seconded by Commissioner Pawlak.

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 986 Approving Employment of a Probationary Patrolmen George E. Fields Jr. effective from and after 12:01 AM, March 8, 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 Pawlak made a motion to accept Resolution 986 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."

Motion was made to expire the 2021 Emergency Police Officer hiring list.

Commissioner Dragojevic made motion to expire list and was seconded by Commissioner Rich.

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."

Motion was made to begin a 2022 Emergency Hiring List effective March 7, 2022 to March 25, 2022.

Commissioner Dragojevic made motion to expire list 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 Rich made motion to adjourn and was seconded by Commissioner Ward.

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
April 8, 2022 at 2:00 P.M.

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