

POLICE COMMISSION MINUTES

September 9, 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
Michael Deppe – Commission Attorney

Commissioner Poling asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and remain standing for invocation from Pastor Walton.

ITEM I Motion was made to accept the minutes of the Police Commission Meeting dated August 19, 2022, as presented.

Commissioner Rich made a motion to accept August 19, 2022, minutes and was seconded by Commissioner Pawlak.

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 July 2022 Monthly Statistical Reports; 4,355 Calls for Service; 2,449; 178 Total Citations.

ITEM III LETTERS OF CORRESPONDENCE

Commissioner Poling read a letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

On Friday August 26, 2022 at 7:30 a.m., Police units were dispatched to 7314 Taft St. in reference to a domestic battery in progress.

Upon arrival, they located the victim sitting in a vehicle a couple houses down from this address. The victim had significant injuries but refused medical treatment from EMS. She didn't want any kind of assistance and wanted law enforcement to leave the area.

The Officers went to the residence to speak with the male suspect involved but he refused to answer the front door.

The female victim returned to the residence and sat down on the front porch. Officers spoke with the female about leaving the residence fearing for her safety from the suspect.

The female victim made suicidal comments about hurting herself, so the officers on scene called EMS back to the scene to transport her for a 72hr medical evaluation at the hospital.

Officer DeBenedetti #386 was standing by at the residence with EMS and he was going to follow them out to the hospital.

A short time later after most of the officers had cleared the scene, the suspect exited the residence and was upset and yelling at Officer DeBenedetti and came at him in a confrontational matter.

DeBenedetti radio to the other officers that the suspect was outside.

DeBenedetti drew his department issued taser and gave commands to the suspect to get on the ground which the suspect disregarded his commands.

The suspect continued to not follow commands given by DeBenedetti and the suspect then pulled out a twelve-inch knife out of his back pocket and began to raise the knife toward officers.

Officer Davidson Dugan #413 arrived on scene and was able to get behind the suspect and attempted to gain control of the suspect by using a body lock. The suspect turned towards Officer Davidson-Dugan, so the officer transitioned to controlling his arms and swept the leg knocking the suspect to the ground.

With the assistance of Officer DeBenedetti who knocked the knife away from the suspect, he was placed into police custody.

The knife was secured by the officers on scene.

The suspect had recently lost his son in a traffic accident and it was Lt. Smith's belief that the suspect wanted to end his life by coming out towards the Officers with a knife. Lt. Smith advised he believes the training and law enforcement experience that these two Officer's have received in physical tactics avoided a potentially lethal outcome. He is proud of the bravery and professionalism of both these officers and believe they should be commended.

I would like to go along with Lt. Smith on his recommendation that Officer DeBenedetti and Officer Davidson Dugan be awarded a Level IV commendation on this incident.

The suspect was transported to the Lake County Jail pending charges.

Commissioner Pawlak made motion to accept the letter of commendation awarding a Level IV Commendation 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 a letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

On Monday August 29, 2022 at 10:59 p.m., Officer George Fields Jr. #422 was dispatched in reference to a missing 74-year-old female. Upon Fields Jr arrival at the family residence, he spoke with family members of the victim. During the investigation into the missing person, the family advised she had left to go to Chicago Illinois to take care of some business and hasn't yet returned home and this was late for her to be out. The family had been trying to call her on her cell phone with no luck. Officer Fields contacted dispatch in an attempt to have the victim's cell phone pinged and he entered her license plate number into the LPR system so area police agencies would be alerted if she drove through their area.

Fields had taken it upon himself to contact law enforcement agencies in Chicago and the surrounding area with her description.

During the attempts to locate this female, the LPR system alerted to her driving through some intersections in Chicago.

Chicago Police patrol units and their helicopter began to search the areas where the LPR system alerted to with negative results.

A short time later the victim, found her way out of Chicago and returned home safely

Sgt. Croarkin requested this letter submitted to you to request a Level I commendation be given to Fields Jr. Since Fields Jr. transferred to this department in March 2022, he has taught himself to use the LPR system himself and his knowledge of the system helped get the alert out to look for this female.

Commissioner Dragojevic made motion to accept the letter of commendation awarding a Level I Commendation 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 a letter of commendation from Commander Bunnell.

On Tuesday August 30, 2022 at 1:30 a.m., Police units received an alert on the LPR system that a stolen vehicle alert of the vehicle exited I 80/94 and was traveling southbound on Broadway.

Officer Fultz and other officers responded to the north end of town to wait for the vehicle to cross over into Merrillville Town limits.

As the vehicle entered Merrillville, Police units attempted to curb the vehicle. The driver refused to stop and fled. Officers noted that the vehicle has a shattered window and was reported stolen out of Homewood Illinois. Officers pursued the vehicle to the west side of town where the driver abandoned the vehicle and fled on foot.

Officers were quickly able to apprehend the driver on foot without any further incidents. Once the suspect was identified information revealed that the suspect was involved in a pursuit with the Gary Police Department just days prior to this incident.

The officers listed on Sgt. Croarkin memo used the tools and training available to them to work as a team to recover a stolen vehicle and make an apprehension of the suspect safely so injuries were reported to the officers.

These Officers effort and hard work is what keeps Merrillville as a safe place to live for all its citizens.

Commissioner Rich 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 recognition from Assistant Chief Nuses.

I would like to bring to your attention an observation I made a little over a week ago. As you know we hired a new secretary, Annabel Perez. Ms. Perez has done a fantastic job on picking up and learning the job. I feel this was made possible by the detailed and careful training provided by her coworkers, especially Joree Salomon. I observed Joree several times, training Annabel. She was patient and very informative, by providing Annabel with notes and hands-on instruction. Joree seemed very passionate and determined to train Annabel correctly. I am very appreciative of Joree going above and beyond to properly train Annabel and feel that that she needs to be recognized for her efforts. I am asking that this letter of recognition be placed in her personnel file. Thank you.

Commissioner Pawlak made motion to accept the letter and place in personnel file 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."

ITEM IV

OLD BUSINESS

NONE

ITEM V

NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Poling presented Extended Sick Leave request from Officer Jordan.

Commissioner Dragojevic made a motion to accept Officer Jordan's request per our departments Rules and Regulations 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 Pawlak made motion to adjourn and was seconded by Commissioner Rich.

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 October 7, 2022 at 2:00 P.M.

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