

CITY OF GARDNER, MASSACHUSETTS
CITY COUNCIL PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JULY 29, 2020

Committee Chairman Councillor Craig Cormier called the Public Safety Committee meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. via Zoom. Committee members Councillors Karen Hardern and George Tyros were present.

Also present were Chief of Police Richard Braks, Fire Chief Richard Ares, Public Health Director Lauren Saunders, Building Commissioner Roland Jean, and City Clerk Alan Agnelli.

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §20, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Public Safety Committee was conducted via remote participation on Zoom. The audio recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of proceedings will be posted on the City's website as soon as possible after the meeting and the meeting was broadcast live on Gardner's YouTube Channel.

Minutes of Prior Meeting(s).

On a motion by Councillor Karen Hardern and seconded by Councillor George Tyros, on call of the roll, it was voted to accept the Minutes of the May 18, 2020 Public Safety Committee Meeting, as printed.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Building Department Report to the Public Safety Committee

- To date we have issued 402 Building permits, 257 Electrical permits, and 175 Plumbing and gas permits representing a total revenue of \$ 206,607.00.
- In addition, to-date we have done 725 inspections across all departments including virtual inspections. Virtual Inspections were implemented during the time that my staff worked from home and while not ideal, they were helpful in keeping projects going.
- Following an inspection on May 5, 2020 including myself, Chief Ares, and our alternate Electrical inspector Shaun Dame, the power was cut to the building at 2-10 Parker Street due to unsafe conditions. The roof is in poor condition and leaks profusely. In addition, there are electrical issues dating back to 2015, which still have not been resolved. The owner was notified and to date has not made any repairs.
- Building disinfecting has been happening twice a day at City Hall in an attempt to keep the Coronavirus at bay and to my knowledge, there have been no cases in the building. It should be noted that my maintenance staff continued to work full time during reduced hours at City Hall in order to keep the building disinfected and safe.
- We are currently preparing the building for a re-opening, plans include sneeze guards where applicable, as well as stanchions and signage to keep contact with the public to a minimum.

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- We have a prospect for our part time inspector, he is currently going through the process of gaining permission to test for certification. Should he gain said permission he will be hired and training will begin immediately.
- A recent leak in the water main coming into City Hall forced replacement of the exterior shut off valve as well as a pressure reducer and four new valves for the interior. The leak was contained and there was no resulting damage.
- Work is being scheduled in the annex to repair/replace walls and ceilings damaged during a roof leak, the cost of the repairs is being covered by an insurance claim.

Public Health Department Report to the Public Safety Committee

COVID-19:

- We are still participating in two weekly calls with DPH and COVID Command Center for state updates. It will be important to hold a flu clinic this season and stress the importance of the flu vaccine to the community.
- We continue to work with all businesses, groups, churches, sport leagues, etc. to offer guidance on latest COVID protocols and guidelines. There have been many cancelations of large city events due to COVID-19 and restrictions on gatherings. Since Governor Baker announced tip line we have seen an increase in complaints that we have had to investigate. Sometimes we get complaints directly and other times they come through the Department of Labor Standards (DLS) or the AGO. The complaints have all been about local businesses. Complaints are investigated and we follow up with DLS and address the business as necessary.
- Schools – Still no decision on going back to school. Three potential options: Either full in person with safety guidelines, hybrid (combination of in person and remote) or all remote. We will most likely not see a full in person return of students.
- GPS Safety Committee – working on safety plans and precautions for fall. The group is looking at things such as PPE and PPE concerns, protective measures such as Plexiglas and isolation room locations, air quality in the schools, reopening protocols, and trainings for staff.
- New Travel Policy in MA- All visitors entering MA, including returning residents, who do not meet an exemption are required to complete a MA Travel Form prior to arrival, unless individual is visiting from a lower-risk state (CT, NH, RI, HI, NJ, VT, ME, NJ). Individuals must quarantine for 14 days or produce a negative COVID-19 test results that has been administered up to 72-hours prior to arrival in MA. If test is not received prior to arrival individuals must quarantine until they receive a negative test. Failure may result in a \$500 fine per day.

OTHER:

- Housing and food establishment inspections have ramped back up and we have resumed doing in home housing inspections with proper PPE. Septic and percolation testing has increased due to the season.

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Police Department Report to the Public Safety Committee

- First and foremost, I would like to thank and acknowledge the first responders who have continued to operate throughout an unprecedented time in the history of Gardner and our nation. Dispatchers, Firefighters, EMS personnel, Animal Control, Police and members of our civilian administrative support staff has endured great changes and ensured the efficient and safe operation of city departments. All through the pandemic, these essential workers have taken the necessary precautions and successfully performed all the duties they have received during a national movement, pandemic, and call for defunding and reform. I am extremely proud of the men and women that I work with and alongside when I see the resolve they exhibit despite the daily changes, challenges, and pervasive demonization of a profession.
- I would be remiss not to acknowledge the support of the other city departments, and particularly Acting Mayor James Walsh, Acting Mayor Elizabeth Kazinskas and Executive Assistant to the Mayor Rachel Stephano for their understanding and support during unparalleled times. Each have and continue to commit countless hours throughout these challenges as new changes unfold. I have great confidence, as I've observed a seamless transition, and would additionally like to thank Mayor Michael Nicholson for reaching out on day 1, and many more times since. Mayor Nicholson has provided a clear direction that we need and appreciate as we continue to meet the needs of the community together.

POLICE DEPT

- Officer Alexa Morgan graduated the 31st ROC Recruit Officers Course in Reading on July 2 and is now in field training with an FTO Field Training Officer to ensure her knowledge of the city.
- Recruit Anthony Webb is currently in the 11th ROC in Randolph completing week 6 of 20 and is scheduled to graduate in November 2020.
- The police department has two additional officer vacancies from FY20 that need to be staffed.
- The Police Department applied for and was awarded a JAG Grant dedicated to reimbursable costs for Law Enforcement relative to responding to the coronavirus (\$50,933).
- In comparison to 2019: Accidents down 26.48%, Offense Calls down 3.24%, Arrests are up 3.8%.
- The police department has operated within the appropriated budget for FY20.

DISPATCH

- Laurie Lyons retired from the Communications Director position, effective June 30th and the process of filling this position is in the final stages. 29 applicants, narrowed to 4 interviews. Our current Dispatch Personnel are well trained and particularly capable multi-taskers who are constantly seeking out the best methods to incorporate, train and excel in ensuring call safety. Despite the vacancy of 2 positions, the center has performed at an exceptionally high level of efficiency. Interviews for the 2 open positions will occur ASAP.

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ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS/SHELTER

- Animal Control was also a department that continued to respond to related calls, provided care for animals in shelter and ensured an often overlooked area of public concern was addressed within our community. The ACO's also cover the towns of Ashburnham, Hubbardston and Westminster.
- ACO Alanna Meserve was hired in the position of Animal Control Officer in May 2020.
- The shelter has required several updated in FY20 and will receive a new epoxy finish on the floor and walls of the kennel area in late August 2020.

CIVIL DEFENSE

- Emergency Management Director Paul Topolski has been an invaluable asset to departments within the city throughout the pandemic. As the primary liaison with FEMA and MEMA, Paul scheduled and ran multi-agency pandemic update meetings for city departments and originally secured the necessary PPE that was distributed to first responders. As the liaison between outside agencies, Heywood Health Care and City Departments, Paul ensured vital updates were relayed to all departments as well as opportunities to secure depleting PPE supplies. Paul met with city departments to discuss the process for offsetting costs with MEMA and FEMA.

Fire Department Report to the Safety Committee

- As with every aspect of life, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an effect on fire operations. The station has been closed to the public since March 16th.
- Other than vacant buildings or safety concerns, routine inspections were suspended until June 23rd. A great deal of effort was put in to procure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). I put into place several General Orders and Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) to provide for the safest operations possible. Daily cleaning procedures were upgraded. Personnel are screened twice per day for symptoms. I am happy to report that due to these requirements, and buy-in by the Firefighters, that we have not had a single case of virus infection in our staff. It is my sincere hope that we will continue that trend.
- Since resuming inspections, the acting Fire Prevention Officer has been very busy catching up on inspections that were allowed to be deferred by the State.
- We did have one Firefighter resign on May 23rd to take a job with another fire department. We also still have our Fire Prevention Lieutenant out on extended injury leave. He is in the process of medically retiring but that also has been delayed due to the virus. I am hoping he is able to complete his documentation soon so we can move forward replacing both his position and the other open firefighter position.
- Captain Lagoy was injured at an accident at his home in May. He required knee surgery and so is currently out on extended sick leave as well. I have moved the senior Lieutenant to the position of Acting Captain until Captain Lagoy is able to come back. Right now he is expecting to be able to return to administrative office duties only, sometime toward the end of August or September. He is expecting to be back to full duty before the end of the year.

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- All of these openings have once again created overtime to fill vacant positions. I have moved people and filled acting positions to minimize the need for overtime at the pay rate of Lieutenants.
- I have been in contact with HR regarding the hiring of firefighters but unfortunately the Civil Service process is time consuming.
- I have applied for two FEMA grants, one for self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) and another that is restricted to COVID related items. I am attempting to get face mask respirators on that grant. I have not received notification on either grant yet.
- Tower 1 had to have extensive repairs to the hydraulic system, as well as brakes and springs. This approximately \$11,500.00 repair was essential to the continued safe operation of the truck.
- Our ambulance service continues to be successful. The City Auditor shows \$102,525.62 in revenue after all expenses have been paid. This shows we are providing the ambulance service and 8 Firefighter/EMTs to the City at no cost to the taxpayers. I have provided a breakdown of our incidents for January 1 through June 30, 2020 with this report.

#10295, An Application by Gardner Ten Pins, Inc., 560 West Broadway, for Renewal of a Bowling Alley License (In City Council and Referred to Public Safety, 7/6/2020).

On a motion Councillor George Tyros and seconded by Councillor Karen Hardern, on call of the roll, it was voted to recommend to the City Council to grant to Gardner Ten Pins, Inc., 560 West Broadway, a Bowling Alley License for the period expiring April 30, 2021.

Adjournment.

On a motion Councillor George Tyros and seconded by Councillor Karen Hardern, on call of the roll, it was voted to adjourn at 4:40 p.m.