

PORTSMOUTH POLICE COMMISSION

Minutes of the March 7th, 2006 Special Meeting
Public Hearing on the FY '07 Police Budget

6:00 P.M., City Council Chambers

John D. Kelley, Chairman
Gerald W. Howe
John C. Russo

- I. **CALL TO ORDER:** The Chairman called the March 7th, 2006 special police commission meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Present: Commissioners Kelley, Howe, and Russo, Chief Magnant, Deputy Chief Len DiSesa, Captain Bill Irving, Budget Coordinator Karen Senecal, IT Manager Felicia Donovan, Executive Assistant Kathe Hoyt, Councilor Harold Whitehouse, members of the press, and via cable access television, residents of Portsmouth.

II. **Public Hearing**

Police Commission Chairman Jack Kelley welcomed the residents of Portsmouth to the hearing. In his opening remarks, Chairman Kelley introduced the commission and Chief Magnant. He thanked the Chief and his staff for the preparation work that went into producing the Powerpoint presentation.

Commissioner Kelley gave a brief explanation of the structure and function of the police commission. He used the analogy of a board of directors and its relationship to a corporation. As a body of elected individuals, the police commission provides citizen oversight and advocacy for the police department. Chairman Kelley explained that the commission works closely with the Chief and the police administration and receives detailed monthly reports on all aspects of the police department's operation. However, the annual budget for the department must be submitted and approved by the city council.

Commissioner Kelley said that law enforcement today is tasked with providing a widening range of services to the public they protect, and the nature of these services is changing. They find themselves providing everything from social services to the homeless to literally being the frontline

of defense against foreign enemies – sometimes in the same eight-hour shift. Chairman Kelley said the Chief and his staff have put together an excellent presentation. He explained that when the Chief and the Deputy first presented the budget to the commission at the end of February, the commission voted to send the budget back to the department with the instruction to “sharpen the pencils” yet again. At this time, the chairman asked the other commissioners if either of them had any comments to offer before the presentation began. Commissioner Howe added his thanks to the administration for the additional work they put into returning a smaller budget for presentation to the public.

Chief Magnant began the power point presentation with a look back at the bygone era of doing police work, which was – you call, we come. The Portsmouth Police Department, like most others in the nation, operated like this for many years. Crime prevention meant bars on windows, alarms, and upgraded locks. Photos from the ‘50s and 60s were exhibited.

The Chief moved forward in time to the late 1980s when Chief Bill Burke brought the police department and the community together, and with the support of the city council and the police commission, developed a strategic plan that has brought Portsmouth to where we are today. This model of policing is community-focused, problem-oriented, and proactive, rather than reactive. Via the power point, Chief Magnant highlighted some of the initiatives and programs the department employs to achieve this community-based model:

- By directing our efforts to address citizen’s concerns, i.e. speed on town streets;
- By doing proactive patrols; Chief Magnant explained that each patrol shift begins in the roll call room and part of the shift preparation includes a review of current beat activity and highlights. The police department works closely with neighborhoods and citizens to identify where extra attention in the form of directed patrols, is needed. In 2005 the police department performed over 3200 directed patrols throughout the city.
- By being good neighbors; our officers participate in a number of fundraising and community-based events each year. Our officers also volunteer to coach at the high school level in both JV and Varsity volleyball, football, and lacrosse.
- By hiring and promoting top quality professionals; Chief Magnant highlighted the recent graduation of Captain Janet Champlin from the

prestigious National FBI Academy. Each year, only a small number of applicants *from around the world* are accepted to this program.

- By working cooperatively with other law enforcement agencies; we collaborate on DWI Hunter Patrols, field sobriety checkpoints, regional alcohol compliance checks, and loud exhaust checkpoints.
- By recognizing that crime has changed; Chief Magnant read the compelling cover of a recent 'Parade' magazine which addressed the egregious crime of child sexual exploitation. He went on to inform the audience that almost eight years ago, the Portsmouth Police Department took the lead in establishing one of the first Internet Crimes Against Children programs in the nation. He also stated that as we continue to evaluate our policing methods, we need to acknowledge that technology has changed the nature of crime.
- By working to stem the tide illegal narcotics; for example, in 2005 our narcotics officers, working with the DEA, broke a drug ring operating in this area, making 22 arrests and confiscating 22,000 ecstasy tablets, 2 kilos of cocaine, four firearms, and \$30,000 in cash.
- By deploying the latest technologies to fight crime in the New Millennium; each cruiser is equipped with a mobile laptop, enabling the officers to spend more time on city streets, while still completing reports and having the laptop with them at crime scenes.
- By approaching problems as a team; the police department recently worked cooperatively with other city departments, including the fire dept., the legal dept., as well as zoning officials to address recurring problems at a particular city location. We will continue to work in partnership with other City departments to address crime and quality of life issues as a team.
- By being willing and able to go where no one else will; the Chief used this statement to open a brief update on the Seacoast Emergency Response Team, which trains regularly to maintain readiness.

In both law enforcement and community circles, the Portsmouth Police Department is known for excellence. In 2004 we were the recipients of the Trojanowicz Award for Community Policing Excellence. For two years running, individual officers have received Heroes Awards for actions in connection with the performance of their duty. And, with a steady stream of wonderful letters and notes, the community continues to thank this police department for the work of our officers who have gone above and beyond the call of duty.

At this point in the hearing, Chief Magnant took the audience out into the night, via a replay of an actual dispatch call. The audience was able to hear firsthand the rapidly unfolding events in connection with a purse stolen from the victim's car. They heard the radio communication of the pursuit and apprehension of both suspects.

Following the replay of the call, Chief Magnant supplied additional information about the arrests, and asked the audience to place themselves in the victim's shoes for a minute and consider what the thieves had access to, her Social Security Number, her address, her prescription medications, etc. He elaborated on what additional crimes could have come from this. In this particular case, confessions were obtained which solved additional crimes.

Chief Magnant explained that we presented this real-life snapshot of what goes on in policing in the hopes that the audience will understand that the stream of management decisions are not and cannot be made in a sterile, detached environment, based solely on statistical analyses. He also pointed out that Portsmouth is a vibrant, safe community because of the fact that our department will be aggressive towards any crime small or big. This is what it takes to create a climate where crime does not thrive.

The next portion of the hearing dealt with the future challenges facing our department, among them:

- Urban Growth & Development
- Pedestrian and Traffic Issues
- Illegal Drug Abuse
- Prescription Drug Abuse
- CyberCrime
- The Homeless Population
- Downtown as a Venue for Free Speech
- Quality of Life
- Critical Infrastructures and anti-terrorism readiness

Chief Magnant closed out this portion of the hearing quoting the words of Thomas Jefferson: 'The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.' He assured the residents of Portsmouth that their police department is working tirelessly to maintain vigilance on the streets of Portsmouth. But that vigilance, that quest for freedom from crime and the fear of crime, does have a price.

With that said, the meeting turned to the details of the police department proposed FY '07 budget. The Chief reviewed the five main sections of the budget, indicating that at the direction of the police commission, the administration had 'sharpened their pencils' as indicated earlier, and revised what they had originally presented to the commission, to reflect a budget that was more in line with city objectives. Other than gasoline, he explained that the police department had pretty much frozen all other operating costs to bring the 6.75% budget forward.

This concluded the budget portion of the public hearing. Chief Magnant then directed the audience to an area of some concern to the department. He explained that information is the life-blood of any police department. And in the past, through federal grant monies, we have been able to keep our department equipped with current technology. However, we are now faced with the challenge of maintaining that same level of technological capacity, now that those federal funds are no longer available. Our technical infrastructure supports numerous critical systems, and we must have a maintenance and replacement schedule to continue to replace equipment as it becomes obsolete and unusable.

The Chief presented a conservative schedule of replacement and its related costs. He explained that the 10% replacement represented by this schedule was well below industry standards, but necessary to keep critical infrastructure functioning.

III. Conclusion

Chief Magnant turned the hearing back over to Chairman Jack Kelley, who thanked the Chief and asked if there were any questions from the audience.

There being no questions, Chairman Kelley asked for a motion to adjourn.

Action: Commissioner Howe moved the March 7th, 2006 public meeting to present the police department budget be adjourned.

Seconded by Commissioner Russo.

On a Roll Call Vote: The Board unanimously voted in favor of the motion at 6:30p.m.