

Special Meeting
Board of Police Commissioners
July 30, 2014
7:30 P.M.

Chairman Paul D. Abercrombie Commission and Training Room
Police Headquarters 2nd flr.

Chairman D'Errico called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M.

Present: Chairman D'Errico, Vice Chairman David Monz, Secretary Larry Lazaroff, Commissioner's Marc Calafiore, and Walt Spader, Chief McLoughlin and Deputy Chief Mulhern.

Others Present; First Selectman Mike Freda, Town Attorney William Ryan, and several North Haven Police Officers representing various divisions and special assignments within the police department.

Chairman D'Errico read the following prepared statement:

“The purpose of this meeting is to join with the towns of North Branford, East Haven, Madison, Guilford and Branford to form the South Central Regional SWAT and Traffic teams. These two items will be the only items that will be discussed at tonight's meeting.”

Chairman D'Errico stated that North Branford and East Haven are already incorporated with the North Haven SWAT and Traffic Teams.

Chairman D'Errico explained that the Towns of Branford, Guilford, and Madison have reached out to the town of North Haven to join our SWAT and Traffic Teams, adding that North Haven will be the lead team for conducting training and on-site command.

Chairman D'Errico stated that he met with First Selectman Freda earlier in the day and he said that Mr. Freda had told him that he (Freda) is proud and happy that the CEOs of these towns are committed to joining the North Haven teams.

Chairman D'Errico said that approval of the Board of Police Commissioners is necessary because by state statute, the Police Commission is the policy making board of the North Haven Police Department and this plan will need the board's approval before going forward.

Chairman D'Errico said he would open the meeting up to the board members so that they may ask questions to the Chief and Deputy, or any further questions to SWAT Commander, Lt. Kevin Glenn or Officer Rienzo of the Traffic Team.

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At the direction of the Chairman, the Chief provided the commission members with copies of the current Traffic and SWAT legal agreements that were written by the three town attorneys representing the Towns of North Haven, North Branford and East Haven.

The Chief advised the commission that the newer agreements, the ones that include Branford, Guilford and Madison, are currently being signed by those towns, but the language of the newer agreements is the same as the existing agreement.

Chairman D'Errico said, being that none of the members of the board have seen the actual document that will be signed by the First Selectman; the board will take a five-minute recess to let the members get a copy and review it.

Chairman D'Errico called for a five-minute recess; the time was 7:34 p.m.

Chairman D'Errico called the meeting back to order at 7:44 p.m.

Chairman D'Errico's first question was under article 5 regarding on "scene command and control."

Mr. D'Errico explained that it was his understanding that SWAT Commander, Kevin Glenn, would be the exclusive person in "command" at each incident, in any of these six towns.

Chief McLoughlin explained that Lt. Glenn would be the exclusive person in charge for "operations and tactics." Chief McLoughlin stated that Chief Officers of their respective towns would continue to have a decision making position.

The Chief said that he believes the Chairman may have misspoke earlier when he said that North Haven would be taking the lead for training and on scene command. The Chief said to eliminate any potential misunderstanding, North Haven will take the lead for training and on scene command for SWAT operations. The Chief said it seems that we have lost sight of the traffic component. Chief McLoughlin explained that we do not command the Traffic Team; the East Haven Police Department is currently in charge of the Traffic Team.

Chairman D'Errico asked the Chief, if Lt. Glenn does not concur with the Chief of another town, what would happen?

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Chief McLoughlin explained that Lt. Kevin Glenn is the on scene commander for “tactical operations”. The Chief stated that Lt. Kevin Glenn would be able to override the Chief regarding tactics. The Chief acknowledged that Lieutenant Glenn is currently in charge of all six communities, and said if there is any town that does not like the way we operate then they do not have to sign the agreement.

Commissioner Lazaroff asked to make a comment stating;

“I am a little taken aback by that fact that the legal agreement was not given out ahead of time. I think it is a lot to digest in less than five minutes, quite frankly, and to expect us to digest ten pages and pick it apart and ask questions, actually it is so insulting. This is insulting and unfortunate and I want to put it on record. This should not happen again, especially since most of the people in the room know more about the proposal than the board members do and I feel insulted. Lieutenant Glenn has read it, Mike Freda has read it, and I feel that we are under the gun here. Anyway, we are going to make the right decision, hopefully. I feel we were insulted, just for the record.”

Commissioner Monz asked for an explanation of how the team is composed right now, based on officers from various municipalities. He also asked how the team is deployed and asked if all team members are deployed for every incident.

Chief McLoughlin directed those questions to Lt. Glenn.

Lt. Kevin Glenn explained that a matrix is used to determine the need for deployment when an incident is reported. Once he is advised of the incident, via phone, or through a supervisor, the incident is assessed numerically, and depending on the point value of the matrix, a decision on deployment is made.

Lt. Glenn said that currently North Haven has eight members on the team, North Branford has two team members, with one administrative member, and East Haven has five assigned members.

Lt. Glenn said the increase in the number of personnel on the team would allow the opportunity to have two squads, where one squad could be used for an incident rather than deploying the whole team if it was not needed.

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Commissioner Monz asked Lt. Glenn, assuming the board goes forward, how will the composition of the team change?

Lt. Glenn said that the number of members is yet to be determined, as the officers will have to meet the qualifications to be a SWAT operator. Lt. Glenn stated the team has an evaluation process, therefore, the size and number cannot yet be determined. Each candidate must be able to meet the team's standards.

Commissioner Monz asked Lt. Glenn, would regionalizing have a negative impact as far as the speed of deployment or protection of human health and safety?

Lt. Glenn stated that there will be no negative impact with the expansion, and the way the geographical boundaries are set up, the response time will not change whether the incident is in Madison or North Haven.

Commissioner Lazaroff asked Lt. Glenn if the Police Union is on board with this proposal. Lt. Glenn said that it is his understanding that this is the direction the whole department wants to go.

Commissioner Lazaroff then asked Lt. Glenn about the effects of morale.

Lt. Glenn stated that when he took over as SWAT Commander roughly two years ago, he concentrated mainly on the administrative side; national standards, liability aspects, and training. But noting the importance of morale, he recently reached out to the team and said they are completely in support and on board with this. He added that even officers that are not assigned to either the Traffic or SWAT teams are very supportive. Lt. Glenn stated that the officers recognize the benefits of this regionalization to our agency and to the community.

Commissioner Calafiore asked Lt. Glenn how many deployments has the team had in the last year. Lt. Glenn said there has been four deployments this year and four consultations, or requests for the SWAT Team that were declined by use of the matrix system.

Commissioner Calafiore commented that he believes this will be great for the department, morale and advancement.

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Commissioner Spader asked Lt. Glenn how long he thought it would take to get the team up and running. Commissioner Spader also questioned if there would be any delay in response for the outlying towns while the team is still being trained.

Lt. Glenn explained that there are so many moving parts, but the officers of Madison, Guilford and Branford have already been trained at the basic level of SWAT, with certification for the 40-hour class, so they just need to be trained to our team standards. Lt Glenn said he sees no delaying in responding to outlying towns.

Commissioner Spader stated that he thinks the regional teams will provide great opportunities for the Officers and the Department.

Chairman D'Errico asked whether or not there are existing SWAT teams in Branford, Madison and Guilford.

Deputy Chief Mulhern stated that the SWAT teams in those towns are not currently operational.

The Chief explained that any law enforcement agency could simply say they have a SWAT team, without having the right personnel, training and equipment. Such teams are really not operational and the Chief said this best describes a few of the teams that want to regionalize with us.

Chairman D'Errico asked Lt. Glenn how many members are going to be picked from the other towns.

Lt. Glenn stated that this number is yet to be determined as each individual has to pass an evaluation.

Commissioner Calafiore commented that police officers today are trained to aggressively pursue an active shooter incident and not wait for SWAT.

Lt. Glenn said that an active shooter incident is initially a patrol response. Lt. Glenn said that the entire department has been trained in active shooter incidents.

Commissioner D'Errico asked Lt. Glenn if the extra paperwork and records would interfere with his duties as head of the Detective Bureau.

Lt. Glenn explained that he has several skilled trainers who take care of the paperwork and training records, and that takes a lot of the burden off him.

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Commissioner Lazaroff asked Lt. Glenn how long the process would take, until the team is completely up and running. He asked Lt. Glenn, what would happen if two weeks from now, another town has an emergency?

Lt. Glenn said once the agreement is signed the team would officially be comprised of the six municipalities and training and evaluation will begin immediately. Lt. Glenn added that the team will respond to any of the six towns, and if the other members are not completely trained yet, he stated that they would not be allowed to participate until their training is completed.

Deputy Chief Mulhern said, We may be missing one important element here and explained, SWAT is an acronym and very popular, but we may be missing one integral piece of this and that is the Traffic Unit.

Deputy Chief Mulhern said we were the recipient of that situation when we were forming the traffic squad. Due to retirements, we had at one point, no accident reconstructionists. We identified this area of weakness when it came to those investigations.

East Haven Police Department has some of the best accident reconstructionists in the state. They teach statewide and are sought after by DOT for training. We recognize that East Haven Deputy Chief Ed Lennon is an expert in the area of accidents.

Upon the early inception of our Traffic Team anytime we had a fatal accident; East Haven would send us four officers, where we had only one or two.

They would guide our people until our officers were up to those levels of training.

Yes, it is expensive and time-consuming and the classes do not come along too often.

Deputy Chief said, for example, if we sign this document and next week Madison has an incident, we would deploy the SWAT team. Deputy Chief added, we will share an inordinate larger burden of overtime cost in the beginning, but we have also been on the receiving end. SWAT gets all the attention, yes, there were four deployments and though they were high-risk situations, we cannot forget that the Traffic Team has recently been called out twice in three days for fatal accidents.

Deputy Chief said we talk about the legal agreement, the opportunities, and the training, but I want to put it out there that the Traffic Team works hard and it is very successful and it gets a lot of attention from other agencies.

Yes, we can save lives and be heroes on the SWAT side, but to provide a family with a comprehensive investigation that we were not capable of doing before, for lack of a better word, speaks volumes.

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Deputy Chief stated he wanted to point out the commitment of Officer Rienzo and other members of the team. In addition, he stated the Traffic Unit seems to get overshadowed sometimes, which is too bad because they are working very hard.

Commissioner Calafiore asked about any added cost to the town for this regional expansion.

Chief McLoughlin explained that each town is responsible for their own training and equipment. Therefore, the cost, if any, would be minimal to the town of North Haven.

Commissioner Monz asked about the SWAT vehicle that the team currently uses. Chief McLoughlin stated that the vehicle belongs to Region 2, which encompasses 26 towns from Old Saybrook to Milford, to Shelton, Ansonia, and all the way up to Meriden.

Deputy Chief Mulhern explained that this vehicle (the Bearcat) is a Homeland Security Asset, which was acquired at not cost to any of us. Deputy Chief Mulhern said that we house the vehicle here because we are centrally located and have easy access to Route 15, I- 95 and I-91.

Commissioner Monz asked who bears the cost of repairs and maintenance of this particular vehicle.

Deputy Chief Mulhern said that DEMHS and Region 2 have shifted some funding to maintain equipment such as the BearCat. The Deputy Chief added that this vehicle is a \$250,000 asset with a 25-30 year life span, adding that it is not a patrol vehicle and it is not used on a daily basis, so wear and tear is minimal.

Chief McLoughlin explained that if the other towns need to use the Bearcat they must first have signed an agreement to use it. Of the twenty-six towns in Region 2, only eight have signed the agreement to have access to this vehicle. Special training is required to operate the vehicle, and it is only available to the towns, which have signed the agreement and have completed the training.

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Commissioner Lazaroff asked how long has the Traffic and SWAT team been in existence in North Branford.

Chief McLoughlin said the North Haven and North Branford team has been active since 1995, and the East Haven Team was added 3 years ago.

Commissioner Lazaroff stated he does not remember ever meeting like this to sign off on anything such as this.

Chief explained that this is a legal document written by the town attorneys and signed by the Mayors and First Selectman.

Commissioner Lazaroff also asked, if the board was to vote this down, would the agreement still go before First Selectman Freda for a signature?

Selectman Freda replied, "We shouldn't even think about that, lets leave it at that"

Commissioner Calafiore asked Officer Rienzo how long he has been a member of the police department and who represents North Haven on the traffic team.

Officer Rienzo said he has been with the department for six years and there are currently two members on the traffic unit, himself and Officer Chris Spose.

Commissioner Calafiore asked who does the initial investigation in town if there is a fatal accident. Officer Rienzo said that he or Officer Spose would lead the investigation, and should neither one of them be available, then an East Haven or North Branford officer on the traffic team would head the investigation.

Chairman D'Errico asked Officer Rienzo if he was a certified accident re-constructionist and Rienzo replied yes.

Commissioner Calafiore commended Officer Rienzo for stepping up to the plate and for his dedication to the traffic team.

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Selectman Freda said that he is one hundred percent behind the SWAT regionalization. Mr. Freda stated that he believes that this is a wonderful opportunity for advancement for this agency. He stated the North Haven Police Department is a successful agency, and no matter where he goes, be it with other public officials, judges, they all commend the agency for their outstanding performance, image and integrity.

Chairman D'Errico asked for a motion to move forward and vote on signing the contract with both the South Central Regional SWAT team, and the South Central Regional Traffic Team.

Commissioner Spader made motion to accept the legal agreements to extend the regional traffic and SWAT teams to include the towns of Branford, Guilford and Madison. The motion was second by Commissioner Monz and the vote to accept the motion was unanimous.

Commissioner D'Errico asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Lazaroff, second by Commissioner Calafiore. All were in favor.

The time was 8:14 p.m.

Minutes by M. Clafin