

## **SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES FEBRUARY 21, 2023**

The Safety Committee meeting was held on February 21, 2023 at North Royalton City Hall, 14600 State Road. The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Committee Members: Chair Mike Wos, Vice Chair Jeremy Dietrich; Council: Paul Marnecheck, Linda Barath, Joanne Krejci, John Nickell; Administration: Mayor Larry Antoskiewicz, Fire Chief Robert Chegan, Police Chief Keith Tarase, Finance Director Jenny Esarey, Law Director Thomas Kelly; Other: Ken Krejci, Jessica Fenos, Joel Spatz, Vince Weimer, Heidi Michalske, Ray Michalske, Marilyn Borzy, John Higgins, Cathy Miller, Lexie Jezior, John Higgins.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Approval of January 17, 2023 Safety Committee minutes. Moved by Mr. Wos, seconded by Mr. Dietrich. Vote: Yeas: 2 Nays: 0. **Motion carried.**

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

#### **1. Police & Safety Report**

See report.

Chief Tarase reported that the January stats were emailed. He advised that Spencer Lowe was sworn in on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and he began working on February 6<sup>th</sup>. Our Elementary School SRO (School Resource Officer) began on the January 13<sup>th</sup>, which puts us down to one officer. We have extended the acceptance of lateral applications until March 13<sup>th</sup>.

Chief Tarase provided an update on Flock cameras, whereas Flock is working to find a licensed contractor that is able to do the work and secure the bond for the City requirements. He hopes to have an update by next week. The Police Department is currently seeking donations of water for residents of East Palestine, which we will be taking until 8:00 p.m. on Sunday in the lobby of the Police Station. Those would be delivered at the beginning of next week.

Mr. Marnecheck asked whether the changes previously made to the deer situation seemed to be a success; pertaining to the number of bucks and does. Chief Tarase indicated that it was too early to tell. Unfortunately, we had a number of deer accidents in the last couple of weeks during deer season.

#### **2. Safety Town**

Chief Chegan advised that tomorrow, he and the Mayor would be meeting with the Superintendent Laub to review the architect's notes that they put together for the proposal. We will be reviewing that and then moving forward.

#### **3. Fire Report**

Chief Chegan reported that January numbers were slightly down compared to last year. This was our first small setback in a long while. We will be comparing last year with this year. He referred to the report that he submitted to Council last January, which included the staffing, manpower, and the station location. He demonstrated that the chart of run numbers slowly increases yearly. Perhaps once every five years, there will be a dip. January was just a slow month, which occasionally happens. For the most part, at the end of the year, from 2021-2022, the numbers were roughly 100 more. You are not going to see dramatic increases, nor dramatic decreases in our run numbers; but a slow gradual increase. For this month, we were down slightly; which was good.

We had a significant incident since our last Safety Committee meeting, which was a large fire on Albion Road; a large barn back in a setting. The men did a great job on that, with regular mutual aid partners helping assist. It was very time consuming and required 1300 feet of large fire hose.

Chief Chegan spoke of the Oakwood Manufacturing Plant fire that happened yesterday. He was curious as to how an incident such as this, would relate to our community. He felt that we would be just as prepared. He referred to the video, in which he expressed that they did a great job. This was an incident in a small community and Oakwood is smaller than North Royalton. There was a lot of preparedness that came together. That is what we do on our large incidents. When we have something, even the barn fire for example, we had Strongsville and Parma helping us. If Strongsville has a fire on their side of town, we would be going to help them; which is the same with all of our surrounding communities. We do a lot of this preparedness in our down time. All of our mutual aid is in writing; it is in our CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch). They had as many ambulances as they needed yesterday, which could have been a lot worse. There could have been hundreds of people working at that facility, resulting in a massive casualty incident.

Chief Chegan reiterated that we have prepared for this type of thing as a County. We have our mass notification, therefore if we were to have a large fire, we would have been able to put that out. We had a fire at a gas station, which did not pose danger to our residents; therefore, we are not going to put that on our mass communication. However, this is an example of utilizing the systems we have in place and appropriately putting out the messages that are needed. Our communications in the County may not be the best; we are not all on the same radio systems. However, we have a Communication Committee that we are all on the same 800 system; which we can be patched in. We have their channels. We were unfortunate to go to a Brooklyn Heights fire, which was as big as the fire at Oakwood Manufacturing, and it lasted seven days. We had an East Cleveland fire that lasted for two weeks; in a land fill. Chief Chegan stated that he actually was able to participate in the incident command, whereas the County Fire Chiefs were rotated. We have a lot of process and preparedness in place for anything that comes our way.

We will be swearing in three new members to our department on Friday. These are additional members that himself, along with the Mayor, had presented to Council last year. Based on our numbers and what the future will hold, he expressed gratitude that we are actually getting to that part of things. The hiring process does take some time and we try to find the right people. We will be interviewing for the fourth position due to a retirement of one of our Lieutenants in April. He expressed his gratitude for the levy, and to the Mayor for his support on, which was the reason we had the additional funds. Ms. Krejci inquired about the time on Friday for the Swearing in Ceremony. Chief Chegan indicated that it would be at 11:30 a.m.

Chief Chegan spoke about the new medic unit that Council passed through legislation last month, which was replaced. This was ordered and the delivery time is two years, which was what he expected. We plan our vehicles out as mentioned before. Mr. Dietrich inquired about an update on the fire engine. Chief Chegan explained that it is out and running, which is engine 2. Mr. Dietrich asked what was done with the old one, whether it was still here in the City. Chief Chegan agreed; that is a reserve engine, which we did not have. All of our apparatus were front line units. Now we have in reserve status, which is what we call station 3; the old Rec Building at York Road. There is a lot of our equipment, including a trailer, spare engine, spare equipment, etc. It has been a good storage unit for our department. Mr. Dietrich asked how long it was projected to be able to use it as a spare. Chief Chegan stated that we actually have a bunch of spare generators for our emergency preparedness in case things go wrong; we have a lot of generators down there. We go down and run all of that equipment twice a week. Mr. Dietrich inquired whether we have had to pull the spare out for any of the fires mentioned. Chief Chegan explained they had not yet; it has only been a couple of months since the new one has been in service.

#### **4. Tasers**

Mr. Wos wanted to know if we had any luck in finding any type of grants or funding. Chief Tarase indicated those grants have not come out yet. Mr. Wos felt that he would rather see grant money pay for this. He

suggested to take this off of the agenda, and when that becomes available, we could always bring it back and address it at that point.

Mr. Wos moved to remove Tasers from the Safety Committee Agenda, seconded by Mr. Dietrich. Yeas: 2 Nays: 0. **Motion carried.**

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. K9 Support Dog**

Lexie Jezior, the SRO at North Royalton High School brought her idea before Council.

See report.

Ms. Barath asked about the fundraising aspect. Ms. Jezior explained that she had actually spoken to the Blue Monkey Brewing Company, as well as Mama Romitos, in which they have already agreed to host fundraisers. She is speaking to others also and expressed her passion for this. She believed it would make a huge impact for the children. Ms. Barath pointed out that we could set up fundraising and put it out there, such as on the Facebook page.

Mr. Nickell raised question pertaining to days off during the school year. Ms. Jezior has spoken to the Superintendent of North Royalton City Schools and he has agreed to split that cost with her. Because of the memorandum of understanding with the SROs, now there are two of them, plus the dog. They pay half of their salary, and he has agreed to pay half of the additional costs toward the dog. She explained that it would have to go into her compensatory bank; it is an additional cost on her salary. Mr. Nickell spoke of situations where kids may not be able to calm down. He felt that the dog would have the ability to help distract in those scenarios. He liked the fundraising idea, however, not about the SRO putting in any costs personally; he would not like that part of it. He expressed that he supports the idea. He felt that fundraising would be a successful option. Ms. Jezior hoped so; for offsetting of vet costs, etc. Mr. Nickell wanted to make sure that the SRO would not be putting in funds of their own, other than what is in the agreement with the K9 dog. Chief Tarase clarified that his budget would support it.

Mr. Dietrich commended the SRO for bringing this forward to Council. He expressed that he loves the idea. He felt that there is more depression and things with children than ever before. He spoke of the recent, sad story of a middle schooler taking her life; this is a serious thing. He felt it was worth it and wanted to be proactive rather than reactive. Bringing in the dog is being proactive, especially a dog that is trained a certain way. He understood Mr. Nickell's point and wanted to ensure that it is covered financially as well. He is aware of the extra pay that goes into it and it is not a lot. He continued that he heard about this program before, however it is not going to cost an insane amount of money. It is a service to our community, our children, and our City. He was 100% on board with this idea.

Mr. Kelly brought up that we already have existing MOU's (Memorandum of Understandings) with the school, with regard to a variety of things; including the SRO. If the Mayor and Council supported this, he felt the proper thing to do would be to contact Mr. Laub, the Superintendent, to try and work out some type of an amendment to the MOU, or a new MOU, as a proposal; then for adoption, both by the Board of Education and by Council. Mr. Marnecheck asked who all would want to be listed as a sponsor. Mr. Wos requested a vote for all who wanted to be a sponsor, whereas all Council members agreed.

Mr. Marnecheck brought up pet K9 insurance and wanted to know if Ms. Jezior was inquiring about it. Ms. Jezior explained there would be liability insurance, like our K9 has; she spoke with the Chief about that. When she discussed things with other K9 handlers, therapy dogs went on the same insurance that their actual K9 is under. Mr. Marnecheck asked if she has looked at health insurance for the dog. Chief Tarase indicated that they have not yet. Mr. Marnecheck shared that there may be some type of program where they pick up the premium etc., for police dogs perhaps. He mentioned the company Embrace Pet Insurance.

Mr. Nickell raised question about the summer months. Ms. Jezior indicated that she has Safety Town, which she would bring the dog with her; the kids would love it. She already attends the community events and would bring the dog with her. She offered to be available for any events in the community. Mr. Nickell asked Ms. Esarey if there would be a separate fund. Ms. Esarey indicated there were no special funds. Currently, Bear is already on our insurance for property and casualty. She went on to say if we were to get another K9, that would be on there. She spoke of the 2015 Police Levy, in which we already had part of the Chief's budget for funds for professional services or any type of vet training; that is already part of this budget anyhow. Mr. Nickell asked where donations would go if we receive any. Ms. Esarey explained that we could put it in the fund that these would be paid out of. Mr. Dietrich wanted to clarify that we could accept donations toward for this fund for the dog. Ms. Esarey agreed and she felt it is a great program. Ms. Jezior expressed her appreciation.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Mr. Wos, seconded by Mr. Dietrich **to adjourn the February 21, 2023 Safety Committee meeting.** Yeas: 2 Nays: 0. **Motion carried.**

**Meeting adjourned at 7:43 p.m.**

# North Royalton Police Department

Incident	# of for January 2023
MVA FATAL	0
MVA DEER	7
MVA HIT SKIP	3
MVA INJURY	0
MVA NON INJURY	41
MVA PRIVATE PROPERTY	6
PHYSICAL ARRESTS	59
SPEEDING CITATIONS	26
THEFTS (Includes Attempts)	14

Good morning,

Please find below my presentation to City Council yesterday regarding the K9.

I am formally requesting to institute a K9 therapy program through the North Royalton Police Department, to be utilized primarily at North Royalton City Schools (including St. Albert's and Royal Redeemer). The K9 may also be utilized to aid victims of crime and for community engagement as deemed appropriate by the North Royalton Police Department and the City of North Royalton.

Unlike the typical police K9, this dog would serve a therapeutic purpose. Therapy dogs, also known as comfort dogs, act to support a person's mental health and emotional well-being. According to various sources and studies, therapy dogs can improve mental health in those who suffer with a variety of mental health and behavioral issues, such as depression, anxiety, autism, ADHD, and PTSD. Therapy dogs have been utilized by medical professionals as a therapeutic resource for several decades and have more recently been moving into school districts, including our neighboring schools of Brunswick and Brecksville-Broadview Heights. Also, there are police departments that have been utilizing K9's in their community outreach efforts and for aiding victims of crime.

In my role as a school resource officer (SRO), I have worked with numerous children who suffer from significant mental health issues. There children in the schools who have been victims of crime (domestic abuse, sexual assault, neglect, etc.) and are thus struggling mentally, emotionally, physically, and academically. Many students have been diagnosed with depression and/or anxiety. Some are emotionally disturbed or have other diagnoses. Additionally, it appears as though mental illness is becoming more prevalent, perhaps as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, changes in society, the influence of social media, increased use of nicotine and THC, or a variety of other causes. However, whatever the reason behind it, this uptick in mental illness in our children is causing significant problems for the students, staff, families, and the community as a whole.

It is my assertion that by implementing a K9 therapy program at North Royalton City Schools, we may begin to see some of the improvements in the overall mental health of our students that have been documented in hospital patients that have visits with the therapy K9's. Students who are having panic attacks or emotional outbursts may be comforted by the K9 more than they would by a staff member. This could potentially reduce the number of times students become hostile with staff, causing staff members to restrain students, or spend time following them through the building. By reducing those instances, we would be increasing overall student and staff safety. Also, there have been numerous occasions where students have been in such an emotional state to where they could not return to class. The hope is that the K9 could provide more comfort and support that will allow the student to calm down faster, respond more quickly, and be able to resume the school day in a significantly better emotional state.

I have spoken with Lt. Denise DeBiase from the Richmond Heights Police Department, who was instrumental in the implementation of a community policing K9 for her department. She stated that her K9, Angel, has been a tremendous resource at the schools, for the community, and for the road officers. Per Lt. DeBiase, Angel has actually helped improve morale at roll call for the road officers who get the chance to interact with her. It has also been an excellent tool for interacting with the public and in assisting community members who are experiencing some kind of crisis.

In regards to the funding of the K9, a therapy K9 requires significantly less equipment and costs much less than a traditional police K9. I have spoken with Sgt. Jason Ratcliff of the Franklin County Sheriff's Office. FSCO has multiple therapy K9's and they have a partnership with the Franklin County Animal Shelter. The shelter will provide the dog, a rescue, to the department at no cost. The dog would be matched to me, as I would be the handler. Once given approval, I would contact FSCO and the shelter. After the shelter has selected a few dogs as a potential match, I would go to the shelter for a meet and greet. The dog with the best temperament that matches with me would be selected. If none of the dogs at that time are a good match, we would just wait until more dogs come available. There is no breed requirement or specific breed recommended for a therapy K9, unlike with the traditional police K9.

After the K9 has been selected, it will reside with me. Per Ottawa County Sheriff's Deputy Chad Millner, who has therapy K9 Finn, I would need to take the dog with me almost everywhere I go, even before it goes through the official training sessions, to get it used to different environments and large groups of people. Deputy Millner, Deputy Ratcliff, and Lt. DeBiase all stated that the vehicle the K9 is transported in does not need to be adapted in any special way, unlike with other police K9's. The only possible accommodation would be for a clip that can attach the dog's harness to the seatbelt. Since I will be transitioning into a vehicle with plastic seats in the back, I will not need a seat cover.

After obtaining the K9, he or she (and myself) will need initial training followed by regular training thereafter. The training and accreditations would also be through the FCSO. They offer free training for the K9's. These training sessions would be done during my normal duty hours and should not create any overtime. Per Sgt. Ratcliff, the training would include a certification through their therapy dog program and on-going training once a quarter. Also, the therapy K9 should be able to go on the same insurance as K9 Bear for liability purposes.

As for the maintenance of the K9, I spoke with Chris and Mark McCoy, owners of the Natural Pet Enrichment Center. They donate the food and treats to NRPD K9 Bear at no cost. The owners stated that they would donate to the therapy K9 the same items they provide to Bear at no cost every month. Without their generous donations however, the cost per month for a bag of food and additional items would be between \$100 and \$125 a month depending on the number and type of products (the therapy K9 may consume less/different products).

North Royalton Animal Hospital is the current veterinarian for K9 Bear. Dr. Hechko has agreed to provide the same care for the therapy K9 with free general care that includes a wellness examination, annual vaccines, and a year's supply of flea, heartworm, and tick prevention. They have also generously included a free week of boarding. This does not include emergency visits or other circumstances that cannot be predicted, which will hopefully be covered through fundraising efforts.

There are some additional items that will be needed for the care of the K9, including a crate for my residence, a harness, leashes, treats, etc. However, the greatest cost will be compensation for being a K9 handler as required by the Fair Labor Standards Act. Our current contract states that "in the event the Employer assigns an employee as a Dog Handler (K-9 Handler), such employee shall receive one day's pay (8-hours of pay) every pay period to transport the service dog to/from home, to care for, feed, groom and/or train the service dog while off duty (total of 3.5 hours per week at the overtime rate of pay)". It is my understanding that the current K-9 handler, Ptl. McClintic, had signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreeing to a "kennel care" day once a pay period. Due to my position as SRO, I do not find the kennel care day to be the most beneficial agreement as I do not wish to be away from the

school while it is in session. Instead, I would propose that I receive the compensation as set forth by the current contract so that I may be able to use the compensatory time when school is not in session (summer break, teacher in-service days, winter break, etc.).

In an effort to offset the costs to the city and police department, I am willing to donate my own funds to the care of the K9 as I believe this program will be extremely beneficial to the community. Aside from using the compensatory time for time off when school is not in session, I would also be willing to take some of it for pay and put it towards the care of the K9, which includes buying supplies and paying for the vet visits. Additionally, I have spoken with business owners in this city, including the Blue Monkey Brewing Company and Mama Romito's, and others who would be willing to hold fundraising events and donate to the K9. There are also numerous opportunities for fundraising through the school district with the assistance of the students and staff.

In conclusion, I truly believe that this program will have a tremendously positive impact on the children who attend a school within our city limits. I believe that it will benefit victims of crime, the morale of officers on the road, the citizens of North Royalton, and that it will be an excellent community policing tool. A therapy K9 can also bring a lot of positive publicity to the police department in a time when the police are being seen as "the enemy". I am of the opinion that all of the benefits greatly outweigh the financial costs and thus, I am asking for your approval and support of bringing this program to the North Royalton Police Department and North Royalton City Schools.

Respectfully Submitted,

SRO Alexandra Jezior #5433

Thank you.

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