

**MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE WORK SESSION
OF JUNE 23, 2015**

Mayor Strazdas called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. The following Councilmembers were present: Nasim Ansari, Richard Ford, Patricia Randall, Claudette Reid and Terry Urban, Mayor Pro Tem Pearson and Mayor Peter Strazdas. Also present were City Manager Larry Shaffer, Deputy City Manager Rob Boulis, Public Safety Director Richard White, Senior Deputy Fire Chief for Operations John Podgorski, Assistant Fire Chief Stacy French, City Attorney Randy Brown and Deputy City Clerk Adam Herringa.

Mayor Strazdas reviewed the agenda for the evening and indicated that he would like to take a few minutes during the meeting to discuss police body-worn cameras and future Committee of the Whole meeting topics.

Public Safety Director Richard White provided an overview of the current Fire Division accreditation process and how it will help identify departmental strengths and weaknesses. Director White asked Senior Deputy Fire Chief John Podgorski to provide additional information on the accreditation process and the overall performance of the Fire Division.

Mr. Podgorski thanked City Council for their support of the Fire Division and he and Assistant Fire Chief French provided a presentation on the Fire Accreditation process. Mr. Podgorski reviewed current programs of the Fire Division and Mr. French reviewed related performance indicators and how they matched up against performance goals. He also shared some rationale and reasoning behind the response statistics that were included in the presentation. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson inquired if a response at the scene of a structure fire is delayed until adequate staff arrives. Assistant Fire Chief French provided a review of incident management and assured City Council that life and safety are paramount in a response and that staff will not wait to initiate a rescue if a person's life or safety is in jeopardy. Chief White indicated that the same response is true for the police division.

Mr. Podgorski continued his overview and shared information related to Technical Rescue, Hazardous Material and Emergency Medical Services response times, goals and performance. Councilmember Randall inquired who tends to arrive on scene of a medical response first and Mr. French replied that Fire is usually first on scene. Mr. French then discussed the use of SUV's as rescue vehicles to enhance response times and conduct business inspections. He also highlighted the use of AED's and the "PUCK" system to assist and enhance CPR efforts. The SUV's, Mr. French indicated, have not only resulted in a more rapid response but have cut down on use and maintenance on the fire engines.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson inquired as to the rationale for using a rotating system to manage EMS response calls. Assistant Fire Chief French informed City Council that the Fire Division is in the process of assessing and evaluating this program. He continued by stating that they are planning to conduct a study, possibly managed by a third-party, to determine what is the best way to provide emergency medical response. Director White reviewed the current process for emergency medical response and shared that he is skeptical that either current ambulance company is presently capable of providing the desired service. He continued by sharing that one of largest sources of frustration and delays is the current bifurcated system in which a medical emergency call comes into dispatch first, details shared by the caller, and then the call is routed to the ambulance company. The caller must then share the details a second time. This process takes valuable time and Director White indicated that his department is exploring and implementing options to reduce or eliminate this delay.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson inquired if the City would be better served by going with a single vendor and raised the matter of dropped calls. Chief White discussed dropped calls and provided some reasons as to why a call may be dropped including a lack of resources, a lengthy response, inability to respond in the required eight minutes, etc. Director White continued by expressing his frustration with dropped calls and his desire to evaluate the current EMS program and evaluate changes based on data. Discussion followed and City Manager Shaffer shared his frustration with EMS response and indicated that quality public service is a balance of resources and how much a community is willing to pay to enhance performance. Mayor Strazdas shared that citizens consistently give public safety high marks on the Community Survey and inquired how Portage compares to other communities and if taxpayers are getting the best return on their investment. Mr. Podgorski shared that nobody else in Kalamazoo County is going through this process or has statistics like the Fire Division is getting. Director White stated that the Department of Public Safety is making all of the fixes that can be made without spending additional money. However, he continued by stating that at some point in the future a decision will have to be made on value – whether the community is willing to pay more for enhanced public safety.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson inquired as to the timeline of the EMS study. Chief White indicated that the Accreditation Evaluation Team will be finished this coming Thursday. He stated that he hopes to get some initial feedback. He also stated that he will continue looking at whether Portage dispatchers could handle medical dispatches. He then raised the matter of Consolidated Dispatch and what impact this may have. Director White concluded by stating that he believes he could be coming to City Council next budget year with a proposal on EMS.

Public Safety Director White next discussed the topic of body-worn cameras. Mr. White provided a history of the use and implementation of mobile video recorders in police vehicles and some of the limitations of this system. He also shared the policy for video recording and that, at a minimum, every interaction with a citizen is recorded. Director White explained the plan to roll out the body worn cameras and shared that several matters need to be taken into consideration including privacy issues, what to record, FOIA, retention requirements, computer space for recordings, how to proceed if somebody refuses to be recorded, etc. He continued by stating that the plan is to purchase ten cameras and, after a set period, evaluate the program. He continued by stating that the cameras should promote transparency and that Portage police officers are doing what they should be. He did caution that body cameras still offer a sanitized view of a situation and that videos can be subject to interpretation. Discussion followed on the topic of privacy and both Director White and Attorney Randy Brown shared that case law will help shape body camera programs across the state and nation.

Mayor Strazdas moved on to the topic of other matters that City Council might like to discuss at Committee of the Whole meetings. The consensus of City Council was to take some time to think about it and establish topics at another time.

There were no statements of citizens.

ADJOURN: Mayor Strazdas adjourned the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

Adam Herringa, Deputy City Clerk