

**City of New Haven**  
**Meeting Minutes (Short)**  
**Public Safety Committee**

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Wednesday, May 6, 2009

6:30 PM

Aldermanic Chambers

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ALDERMANIC NOTICE - NEW HAVEN

The Public Safety Committee of the New Haven Board of Aldermen will hold a public hearing at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 6 in the Aldermanic Chamber of City Hall, 165 Church St., re:

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEW HAVEN TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO THE US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE, 2009 BYRNE COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM, TO HIRE ADDITIONAL CIVILIAN SUPPORT STAFF AS PART OF THE AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT AND TO EXECUTE ALL DOCUMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS APPLICATION.

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE APPLICATION TO AND ACCEPTANCE OF \$411,098.00 FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE, RECOVERY ACT 2009 BYRNE JUSTICE ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM, TO SUPPORT LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS AND PROGRAMS.

AN ORDINANCE AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 4 ½, OF THE NEW HAVEN CODE OF ORDINANCES PERTAINING TO BURGLAR ALARM SYSTEMS.

-- The committee will also hold a workshop to receive a report from the police department on Taser usage in 2008.

These items are on file and available for public inspection in the Office of the City Clerk, Room 202, 200 Orange Street, New Haven. Per order: Alexander Rhodeen, Chairman; attest: Ronald Smith, City Clerk.

For a disability-related accommodation, please call 946-6483 (V) or 946-8582 (TTY) at least one business day prior to the meeting.

## MEETING MINUTES

## MINUTES

Public Safety Committee

May 6, 2009

Vice Chair Gregory Morehead called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber. Present were Alderpersons DePino, Antunes, Lehtonen, Paolillo, and Silverman.

(1) From the Chief of Police submitting a resolution authorizing the application for a grant from the U. S. Department of Justice, 2009 Byrne Memorial Competitive Grant Program, to hire additional civilian support staff as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. (Submitted 4/20/09)

Appearing on behalf were Carolyn Bove, police grants planner, and Police Chief James Lewis. Bove explained that this stimulus funding for civilian employees will pay for three new positions. A new block watch specialist will help to reinvigorate the block watch program. Two information technology positions will help upgrade computer systems and connect various locations such as substations, as well as provide training and tech support. This funding will pay for the positions for two years. Chief Lewis said this grant will benefit the entire community. In response to Ald. Antunes, she said the positions would be unionized and that laid-off employees would have a chance to apply for the jobs.

(Earlier, Bove told staff that she now has a final number of about \$500,000 for this grant. The application was due at the end of April and has been filed. The resolution only authorizes application, so acceptance of the funds will have to come back to the Board of Aldermen.)

(2) From the Assistant Chief of Police submitting a resolution authorizing the application to and acceptance of \$411,098 from the U. S. Department of Justice, 2009 Byrne Justice Assistance Recovery Act Grant Program, to support local law enforcement operations and programs. (Submitted 4/20/09)

Bove said that the city receives this grant every year, but it has been greatly increased by stimulus funds this year. It will provide training, gang-intelligence software, funding for the new police Explorers programs, the TASCA computer system, and new equipment purchases. Chief Lewis discussed the new Explorers program. Two students will be hired to staff it.

(3) From the Chief of Police submitting an ordinance amendment to Chapter 4½ of the New Haven Code of Ordinances pertaining to burglar alarm systems. (Submitted 4/20/09; also referred to City Plan).

Not taken up at administration's request because ordinance authors Sgt. Joseph Avery and Assistant Chief Stephanie Redding were not available to testify.

Workshop to receive Taser report from police Department:

Vice Chair Morehead read a letter from Chair Alex Rhodeen (absent due to military obligations) demanding that the chief only purchase tasers with cameras, as the Board of Aldermen and Deadly Force Task Force were assured would be the

policy at previous meetings.

Chief James Lewis came to the table and passed out the Taser report (which is in the meeting file). It covered calendar year 2008, and 2009 up to the present. There were 29 Taser incidents in 2008 and 25 in 2009 to date.

The chief said he did not mean to go around the board's wishes on the Tasers. He did not know of prior assurances that all Tasers purchased would have onboard video cameras. The 50 Tasers purchased recently do not have cameras.

He said, "You have been sold a bill of goods" concerning the videos. He said the videos are of poor quality and nearly impossible to see, almost like an infrared night-vision image. He said another issue is that the video doesn't switch on until the Taser is drawn, so the viewer doesn't see the events leading up to the drawing of the taser. One usually sees only a video of the officer's feet and the perpetrator dropping.

He said the cameras double the cost of the Tasers and are not worth it, in his opinion.

The chief said he has come to believe that the Tasers are effective at reducing fights and confrontations. They also reduce on-the-job injuries for officers. He wants all uniformed officers to have one.

He said all models of the Tasers capture data of how long it was turned on, and how many times it was fired. He feels this data is more important than the videos.

In response to Ald. Lehtonen, he said the audio is equally ineffective, usually just providing a soundtrack of what happens after the fact.

Assistant Chief Roy Brown said that he often hears radio calls of officers asking for another officer to come to their assistance with a Taser. It reduces police injuries because they are not fighting as much. He said training is more important than the video. It is most important not to shock the victim for too long, and the basic models capture that data.

In response to Ald. Antunes, the chief said only officers issued Tasers receive the training. He agreed to poll other area departments on how they use the Tasers.

In response to Ald. Paolillo, Brown said that after a tasing incident a supervisor currently downloads the video and data before the end of a shift and reviews it. The Tasers are checked at the beginning of each shift to make sure they are working.

Lewis said all uniformed officers should be equipped with Tasers. Currently about 150 officers have them.

In response to Paolillo, they said there have been no citizen complaints since the Tasers have been in use.

Several members expressed interest in viewing the Taser videos. The chief agreed to screen them. Ald. Silverman suggested that no more Tasers be ordered until the Aldermen can review the videos.

In response to Ald. Antunes the chief said he believes the durability of the Tasers

is adequate.

**Committee Action**

On a motion by Paolillo, seconded by Antunes, the committee voted by voice to issue favorable reports on the two grants (Items 1 and 2).

There was a discussion of the committee viewing the Taser videos. The chief had offered to bring them to the next committee meeting on a laptop computer. Staff was asked to check with Corporation Counsel on whether the videos are public information or have some form of privilege such as pending adjudication. Some of the cases have been finished being adjudicated, but newer ones may not.

Adjourn: 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Mercier  
Legislative Aide