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June 9, 2008

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY

The Committee on Public Health and Public Safety convened on June 9, 2008, with Chairman William White presiding and Committee Members Aldermen John Connolly and Walter Pero also present and voting. Also present were Alderman Rebekah Gewirtz and Police Chief Anthony Holloway.

Chief Holloway informed the committee that crime in Somerville is controlled. There have been no homicides, rapes are down, motor vehicle theft is up and there has been a 2% increase in overall crime. Chief Holloway explained that community policing reflects an increase in the crime rate because more people become involved in reporting crimes. Over time, an eventual decrease in crime will be seen, due to more arrests being made. Alderman Pero expressed his concern over the veracity of crime statistics, explaining that he has heard of other communities reporting crimes in a way to make their departments look good despite actual increases in crime. Chief Holloway assured the members that he would only report the truth.

The Chief stated that on July 7, 2008 he would be choosing Community Police Officers as phase one of the department's reorganization. The city will be divided into 2 sections, East and West, for the purposes of police enforcement, with officers no longer being assigned to wards. Police Officers will be making themselves known in the neighborhoods and will be assigned 2 split shifts each. Officers will bid for their assignments and remain in those slots for one year. In addition, 4 rapid response teams will be available from 6:00 PM – 2:00 AM. The Chief explained that on an average Friday night, there would be 11 officers on duty as opposed to the current 7. The Sergeant in charge of community policing would have the flexibility to move the officers to the areas where they are needed. The planned transition period is from September 14th to December 31st.

Alderman Pero commented that communication between Community Police Officers and the ward Aldermen was lacking and Chief Holloway stated that he would address that issue, immediately. The Chief will also compile and provide the statistics on juvenile and gang crimes, as requested by Chairman White.

The Chief also informed the members that the summer's focus would be on gang and drug activity and that he will push to have illegal immigrant gang members and criminals deported.

The Committee also decided to make recommendations on snow removal policies of the City as a result of a request from the Commission for Persons with Disabilities. The Committee had held hearings in the winter and makes these recommendations:

1. That the DPW continue to plow bus stops

2. That the DPW make all reasonable efforts to request that snow plow operators not dump snow on sidewalk handicapped ramps
3. That the DPW shovel snow on handicapped ramps in the City's squares and
4. That 311 and the DPW implement a policy whereby handicapped residents can contact 311 to report unshoveled ramps that present safety hazards for such residents and prevent them from accessing services.

Chairman White's motion *that the City Solicitor respond, in writing, to the earlier requests of the Committee on Public Health and Public Safety regarding prohibiting bicycle riding on sidewalks outside of central business districts, (item 185127) and regarding restrictions of operating motorized vehicles on sidewalk, (item 185128)*, was approved.

The committee discussed matters before it and took action on the following item:

184935: Ordinance - By Ald. Desmond, Sullivan, White and Connolly, Regulating billboards and other forms of outdoor alcohol advertising.

RECOMMENDATION: Should be Placed on File

VOTE: Unanimous, 3 - 0 in favor

Alderman William A. White, Jr., Chairman
Committee on Public Health and Public Safety

COMMITTEE REPORT

Report of the Committee on Public Health and
Public Safety, June 9, 2008

In Board of Aldermen

Clerk