

## HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES

May 9, 2022

**In Attendance:** **Vermilion City Council:** *Steve Herron, Council At Large; Teresa Mayle, Ward Two; Greg Drew, Ward Three; Barb Brady, Ward Four; Brian Holmes, Ward Five. Absent: Monica Stark, President of Council; Pat Stein, Ward One.*

**Administration:** *Jim Forthofer, Mayor; Chris Howard, City Engineer; Amy Hendricks, Finance Director; Scott Holmes, Sergeant Detective; Tony Valerius, Service Director*

**Call to Order:** Barb Brady, Chairwoman, RESOLVED THAT this Health & Safety Committee comprised of the committee of the whole does now come to order.

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### **TOPIC ONE: Police Chief's Report**

Detective Sergeant Scott Holmes reported the position of the Police Chief and the Police Department on the topic of the new state fireworks ordinance. He stated that the state changed the law, on July 1 they will allow fireworks to be ignited and used during certain holidays throughout the year, 10 holidays along with some weekends surrounding those holidays. There is the ability for municipalities and government entities to opt out of that law and keep their current laws in affect. For multiple reasons, the Police Department's position on the matter is to keep our current ordinance, banning the use of fireworks in the city. After weighing the pros and cons, for the public safety aspect of this law being enacted, there would be more pro's not to change the current ordinance outlawing the use of fireworks throughout the year. Currently it is a first-degree misdemeanor in the city. They understand it is a holiday and people want to celebrate, however there are a lot of dangers associated with fireworks as far as physical injuries, and in the tightknit communities like Valleyview or VOL, someone can light off fireworks and then the debris falls down and lands in the neighbors gutters, would create issues for example. Another aspect is our military veterans, especially combat veterans, it can be a trigger to them as far as PTSD in that situation. Nationwide, Fourth of July and these types of holidays are the number one day that dogs run away and end up missing.

B. Brady asked if the Police Department gives out many tickets. S. Holmes answered no, they try to be educational, they carry around a copy of the ordinance to educate people. Typically, on the Fourth of July they are going call to call. Usually someone calls in a legitimate complaint of fireworks being shot off, they respond to that house and shut it down, and then that house will point out another house setting off fireworks and it is a domino effect. There are some legitimate complaints and negative aspects to it. In doing his own research for it, he has the ordinance from Shaker Heights where they opted out of the State Law, and they are keeping their current law. Lorain and Aurora are also opting out of the State Law based on their individual communities.

B. Brady asked if they would need any action from Council, or just leave things the way they are. S. Holmes said he's not sure if they need something specific in writing. Mayor Forthofer said in

speaking with the Law Director, you do need to pass something, and she can council them on that if they opt out of the State Law. B. Brady asked if she would take care of it for them. Mayor Forthofer answered that she would set up what is necessary if that is what Council would like her to do.

S. Herron asked the administration if it is their position that they should opt out and permanently ban the use of fireworks, or do they think Vermilion could go with the State Legislator and allow them on some holidays. Mayor Forthofer stated that he supports the Police Department and their opinion, and it is also his personal opinion. He believes that even with the more restrictive ordinance that they have, people are still going to be shooting off fireworks. If we have it unrestrained, it's just going to be ridiculous. As it is right now, he believes people will read the paper and think they can shoot off fireworks anywhere they want, they won't know that Vermilion has passed an ordinance, so it will be tough on the Police Department to be going around counseling people. He believes they should start off more conservative and deal with it the best that the Police Department can.

S. Holmes stated for clarification that the Ohio Revised Code states fireworks are legal on the first day of January, Chinese New Year's Day, the 5<sup>th</sup> day of May, the last Monday in May and the Saturday and Sunday immediately preceding Memorial Day, June 19<sup>th</sup>, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>, the first Friday, Saturday and Sunday before and after the Fourth of July, the first Monday in September, and the Saturday and Sunday following that day, Diwali, and the 31<sup>st</sup> of December. That is a lot of fireworks.

B. Brady said they will have more discussion when they get the legislation. Mayor Forthofer said if Council wants him to, he will let the Law Director know to begin to prepare the legislation. B. Brady said that they need to do it sooner rather than later. S. Herron said he didn't know if they needed to change the ordinance, if it Councils decision to opt out, they specifically ban them now, but they should hear from the Law Director first. Mayor Forthofer said because it is a State Law, they need to say that they opt out of that.

## **TOPIC TWO: Fire Chiefs Report**

B. Brady asked if they received a grant for communication equipment for the Fire Department and asked where they are with that. Mayor Forthofer answered that there is a grant possibility that can help purchase one of two types of radio equipment, there has been a lot of debate about it. He and the Finance Director agree that they may want to wait until the new Fire Chief is in place to help decide on what the future of the department is going to be as far as communication. B. Brady asked if they have time in the grant to do that. Mayor Forthofer answered they do.

Mayor Forthofer introduced Vermilion's first full time Fire Chief: Bill Brown. Bill is currently the Assistant Chief in Wellington for 15 years and has been climbing up the ladder of the departments for 31 years. He is well certified, and he went through a pretty rigorous selection process both by the Ohio Fire Chief's Association and by our own five-person city committee, and it was unanimous. He will begin on June 13, and he is already hitting the ground running as far as meeting with the different department members by phone, and he will be meeting with

them in person. B. Brown thanked the Mayor and stated he has begun doing some of the groundwork ahead of time. Even though he does not start until June 13, he will certainly have some things in play. He has a plan to begin meeting in person with the department officers as well as the department members this week. His biggest stressor so far is that he is going to have to learn city streets very quickly and google maps will be his best friend. He appreciates the opportunity; he has been in Wellington for over 30 years so this is a nice transition. He didn't want to go to a big city, he wanted something he was more used to. He stated that Chief Stempowski has done a great job moving a department and he thinks that will help with his guidance as well.

S. Herron asked B. Brown how he felt about the fireworks issue. B. Brown answered that he likes the City's standpoint at this time, and he believes the biggest problem is enforcement.

B. Brady adjourned the meeting after no further discussion came before the committee.

*Next Meeting: June 27, 2022 @ 6:00 p.m. at the Vermilion Municipal Court Complex, 687 Decatur Street, Vermilion, Ohio.*

*Transcribed by: Melanie Wood, Building Clerk*