**Public Safety Committee**

Monday, February 26, 2024

Video of meeting can be found at <https://youtu.be/xQz7w82Sc4g?feature=shared>

Members present: Chair Jenny Rivera, Vice Chair Israel Rivera, Patti Devine

Other councilors present: Tessa Murphy-Romboletti, Kocayne Givner, Meg Magrath-Smith

Chair J. Rivera called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

Councilor Devine made a motion to remove item 1 from the table. Councilor I. Rivera seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Item 1: Minutes of November 29, 2023 meeting.

--->Approved 3-0.

DISCUSSION:

Councilor Devine made a motion to approve item 1. Councilor I. Rivera seconded the motion. Motion passed.

(1:05)

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion to remove item 2 from the table. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Item 2: 2-6-24 MAGRATH-SMITH - Ordered that members of the Fire Commission come into Public Safety to discuss the recent issue concerning firefighters obtaining their EMT certifications.

--->Complied with 3-0.

DISCUSSION:

Chair J. Rivera introduced Fire Commission Chair, Jeff Trask, as well as Fire Department Chief, John Kadlewicz.

J. Trask stated that he spoke with Councilor Magrath-Smith regarding her concern about several individuals that had recently resigned from the Fire Department due to lack of EMT certification. He then explained that there were challenges related to rules and regulations of the certification.

Chief Kadlewicz stated that the department began mandating EMT certification as a condition of employment as a preparatory tool to acquire an ambulance, with a 1 year requirement set at that time to acquire EMT certification. He further explained that it evolved over the years to requiring that they attend fire academy within 2 years of being hired to give them more time to obtain it. He then stated that the department currently had 90 EMT's and expected to soon have 96. He then suggested that it was not a large group, noting that there were 3 who recently had to resign, but would be able to try to obtain employment again once they obtain their EMT certification. He also explained that the state used a national registry that was the governing body for all EMS in the country. He then explained that receiving certification required them to take an EMT class, take a practical board to have their practical skills tested, and then take a written board to have their academic knowledge tested. He added that they get a specific number of chances before they can no longer take them, would then have to take a refresher, and then they can retake the tests 4 more times. He also added that they would then have to retake the class before being able to take the exams again. He then explained that with diagnosed learning disabilities, accommodations for the exams could be made.

Councilor Devine recalled that when she was a fire commissioner, she found it to be a great and important thing that those with learnings disabilities could take the test with accommodations such as taking it alone with only the instructor in the room.

Councilor I. Rivera stated that it made sense to require an educational piece to ensure they were equipped with the necessary training to save lives. He noted that some of his concerns were alleviated after a recent discussion with Mr. Trask. He then questioned what was in place to help support people throughout the process and protect the investment of hiring and paying people to keep them with the department. He then encouraged them to seek help from the Council if an order needed to be filed to get support in place.

Chair J. Rivera emphasized the importance of this requirement, noting that the Fire Department often arrives at situations before the Police Department or an ambulance.

Councilor Devine made a motion that item 2 was complied with. Councilor I. Rivera seconded the motion. Motion passed.

(9:50)

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion to suspend the necessary rules to remove item 3 and 4 from the table as a package. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Item 3: 1-2-24 RIVERA\_I — Order that honorable city council request the chief of police come into public safety to discuss the potential development of a traffic division solely focused on mitigating traffic issues throughout the city of Holyoke.

--->Complied with 3-0

Item 4: 12-5-23 RIVERA\_I — Order that the police department present an update on the goals or steps taken to address some of the concerns raised out of the MRI audit.

--->Complied with 3-0.

DISCUSSION:

Chief Pratt stated that a report was sent earlier that day, available [here](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UndO3tSALWb45wZwuQ0J_VYXrnkhxCgl/view?usp=drive_link), which included information for both items 3 and 4. He then explained that in the year since the audit came out, he was working with the mayor to develop a report showing their progress in achieving outcomes from the audit, with items labeled as green, yellow, or red, indicating progress in accomplishing the items. He added that the report also included brief explanations as well as detailing funding sources used to complete the items. He also noted there were graphs provided which illustrated each area and the costs. He then stated that in regard to the traffic division, that was labeled as a red item as they were not there yet. He then noted that while they were doing traffic through grants and when they had extra bodies, but had a goal of getting the staffing levels that would allow him to assign someone every day, three shifts a day.

Councilor I. Rivera expressed his understanding that green indicated completed items, which included station security, less lethal technology, among several others. He then noted that the report didn't necessarily reference items in the MRI audit so it may not be clear the specific things being corrected. He then noted that the field training program appeared to still be in the works.

Chief Pratt noted that it was a yellow item because while it was in place, they were still improving on it with each class. He added that the ultimate goal was to have it be an accredited field training program.

Councilor I. Rivera asked if it was the same as what they had before or a totally different curriculum.

Chief Pratt stated that before the audit, they didn't have field training when they got out of the academy but when they were serving as reserve officers. He then explained that the audit came right around the same time as the transition away from reserve officers due to the police reform law, leading to the auditors not seeing a field training program because they had not yet a class graduate from the academy to put through a program.

Councilor I. Rivera stated that he was also looking for an organizational chart that showed their work toward defining roles that could be done by civilians, including mechanics and administrative employees, which would allow them to have more police on the streets to mitigate some of the overtime costs.

Chief Pratt stated that they could add that to their red labeled items. He noted that one of the barriers to getting civilians hired was the funding. He also suggested that some of the roles the audit recommended civilians do were not feasible. He also suggested that the report could be maintained as a model to keep track of as progress gets made. He then emphasized that the report was not meant as a full overview of the audit but the items they could focus on and start making progress.

Councilor I. Rivera expressed appreciation for the work that went into the report, noting that it helped things make sense and provided an opportunity for review. He stated that he would plan to file another order for an update the following year. He then asked if this report could be used to set benchmarks for progress in the future.

Chief Pratt stated that his goal was to update it as progress is accomplished. He noted that one big thing in the yellow items was the work to have citywide cameras, adding that he expected it to be done in the next month as well as the radio repeater room. He then expressed his intent to keep updating the document and add things as new suggestions come up. He also suggested that councilors could reach out to him for updates anytime or they could be provided to the administrative assistant to circulate.

Councilor I. Rivera stated while he could call, he would file orders to keep the public informed. He then stated that he would hold onto this document and compare it to future reports to look at the progress.

Councilor Devine commended Chief Pratt and his department for the report, noting that it was easy to understand. She agreed that it made sense compare to updates months later. She also noted that it was on the website.

Chief Pratt stated that this was not yet on the website, but the MRI audit was. He added that he could make sure it became available.

Councilor Devine made a motion that items 3 and 4 were complied with. Councilor I. Rivera seconded the motion. Motion passed.

(26:15)

Councilor Devine made a motion to remove item 5 from the table. Councilor I. Rivera seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Item 5: 9-5-23 RIVERA\_J, ANDERSON-BURGOS, GIVNER, MALDONADO-VELEZ, MURPHY-ROMBOLETTI, RIVERA\_I — Ordered that the city council work with the mayor and school superintendent to address the reinstatement of bus services for Lyman Terrace as soon as possible, as a matter of public safety. This has been a service they have received for the past 20 years.

--->Complied with 3-0

DISCUSSION:

Chair J. Rivera stated that was part of the Joint City Council and School Committee during the last term when this was discussed with the mayor and the superintendent. She then explained that they were told that they needed to determine if additional buses were something the city could afford within the budget. She added that if the buses were provided to Lyman Terrace, they would also have to be provided cityside with all schools in the city.

Councilor I. Rivera stated that while it was covered, the issue had not gone away. He added that there were more things to unravel if the city was to move to providing transportation to Lyman Terrace. He noted that conversations were continuing to work on mitigating issues at times such as during the winter. He then explained that a walking school bus had been implemented where teachers walk a route and pick up kids and walk to the school together. He added that ongoing discussing included the cost of not just providing buses to Lyman Terrace but also for students going to other schools.

Councilor Devine asked if it was a state law that determined the distance from the school before buses were provided. She then suggested that the order could be tabled, or referred to the current Joint Committee.

Councilor I. Rivera stated that when the order was filed, it was understood that it would be discussed in either Public Safety or the Joint Committee, whichever met first, adding that the Joint Committee ended up meeting first. He then suggested that it could be sent to the Joint Committee but they would likely say they had already discussed it. He suggested that it could be complied with. He then expressed his understanding from a conversation with the superintendent that this was a policy created by the School Committee years earlier. He then made a motion to suspend the necessary rules to allow Atty Bissonnette to address the Council. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Atty Bissonnette expressed his understanding that a state law related to transportation reimbursements provided a limitation based on mileage. He added that anything deviating from the state standard was required to be paid by the district.

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion that item 5 was complied with. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

(32:50)

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion to remove item 5 from the table. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Item 6: 4-18-23 GIVNER -- Ordered, In the interest of public safety, that a traffic safety pledge be created, in good faith, and that this pledge be taken by all city employees and officials. All city employees and officials should be expected to model righteous behavior by adhering to speed limits and following all traffic laws, ESPECIALLY when using CITY VEHICLES. How can we expect our community to respect its laws if city employees are blatantly disregarding them.  
\*Tabled 9-27-23

--->Complied with 3-0.

DISCUSSION:

Councilor Givner stated that she put the order in following a series of events in the city, including pedestrians being hit while crossing at crosswalks, lights, as well as on the side of the streets. She added that people in wheelchairs have been hit. She emphasized that some had been fatal. She then stated that while there needed to be more enforcement in the form of a traffic unit which was required by ordinance, community members could also do a lot. She then explained that the order was about creating a communitywide effort, beginning with local officials, to take a safe driving pledge.

Kelly Curran, Personnel Director, presented the pledge, available [here](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nB0m_5unYze9d6o3xIdS695THcmiFdGP/view?usp=drive_link).

Councilor Givner stated that the point was to allow people to email their picture and then the graphic could be posted on the city website or elsewhere showing city officials leading by example. She added that the pledge included a list of traffic laws that people would ledge to adhere to, including adhering to the 25 mph speed limit, fully stopping at stop signs, obeying school safety speed limits. She emphasized that passing stopped school buses was against the law but, more importantly, put kids in danger.

Councilor Devine asked if this was something that could go on Facebook. She also suggested that while it may be difficult to expect all city employees to take the pledge, putting it somewhere such as the city website or Facebook where people could do it voluntarily would be a good idea.

Councilor Givner stated that contact info would be provided so that people could send in a picture and then a graphic would be sent back that could be shared anywhere someone wanted to. She also emphasized that it wouldn't be a requirement but was just about getting people to be more mindful as they drive around the city. She noted that Ms. Curran has some ideas about putting things up on the city website.

K. Curran suggested that it could also be a citywide thing where city leaders and business owners could also participate. She added that it could be shared on the website and posted in other areas in addition to social media.

Councilor I. Rivera commended Councilor Givner for the idea. He then stated that a policy wasn't needed but was more of a feel good campaign. He then asked who would take on the responsibility of managing it and sharing it. He suggested that lawn signs encouraging people to take the pledge would also be good, but funding for that would need to be found. He added that this could also help combat negative narratives about the city.

Councilor Givner stated that while it was starting small with people just sending her their pictures and getting the graphic in response, she could see it becoming a larger campaign.

Councilor Devine suggested that it would help to make it a fun thing. She suggested a different email so that people can't claim it's a pollical thing.

Givern stated that she could create a generic email for the pledge.

Chair J. Rivera stated that this was important to focus on, especially with two elderly people losing their lives within the past week.

Councilor Devine suggested to Ms. Curran that she send it out to city departments.

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion that item 6 was complied with. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

(50:30)

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion to remove item 7 from the table. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Item 7: 10-4-22 MALDONADO-VELEZ — Ordered, that the city provide an update on any antiracism and diversity training already in place for employees, and update on how it can be improved.  
\*Tabled 11-21-22

--->Complied with 3-0.

DISCUSSION:

Chair J. Rivera expressed her understanding that Ms. Curran had updates on this.

K. Curran stated that a lot of the work she did while in the School Department had to do with antiracism efforts and increasing diversity. She then noted highlighted points from a letter provided on this topic, available [here](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VNt-t6tHAivgoCbxOTj0OhVJnH8rdt-s/view?usp=drive_link). She explained that department heads or leaders from departments took a recent training that focused on leading through the lens of equity and inclusiveness. She noted that it got good reviews. She added that there was anti-harassment training, including bias and sexual harassment led by KP law. She noted 309 employees participating and they were planning to train the rest soon. She also stated that they worked with Mass in Motion for a training on Building an Equitable Holyoke. She then explained that they had since paused training to assess what they could improve upon going forward. She also stated that a survey had just been sent out to employees on their impression of the climate and culture in the city, which would later lead to focus groups and future trainings after the data gets analyzed.

Councilor I. Rivera asked to clarify if the training that department heads or leaders were sent to was a diversity and equity training. He then asked if that was the same policy for anti-sexual harassment training.

K. Curran stated that the training was specifically for department heads or supervisors. She then explained hat everyone was expected to participate in the anti-harassment training.

Councilor I. Rivera suggested that diversity, equity, and inclusion training become as mandatory as the anti-harassment training in the future. He emphasized that the importance was as similar to ensure that the services the city was providing was not offending or hurting anyone. He also emphasized that he did not believe most people intentionally seek to offend but some people may do things if they don't know what they are doing could be offending someone.

K Curran stated that she agreed it should be mandatory and would likely be in the future. She then stated that she could provide an update once the data analysis gets done.

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion that item 7 was complied with. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

(57:25)

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion to remove item 8 from the table. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Item 8: 1-18-22 MALDONADO-VELEZ, ANDERSON-BURGOS — Order that we create a Food Economy Coalition to identify and propose innovative policies, programming, and/or project solutions to improve the Holyoke food system and food entrepreneurship. Recommendations will be made to aligned bodies, such as the Office of Planning & Economic Development, the City Council, and relevant city departments (eg. DPW, BOH, etc.)

--->Complied with 3-0.

DISCUSSION:

Councilor Devine noted that this order was filed in January of 2022 and referred to Public Service and coped to this committee. She then expressed an assumption that it was taken care of and should be given a leave to withdraw.

Councilor I. Rivera stated that most of that was correct but was unsure where it was left in Public Service. He then noted that he, as the former chair, left it in Public Safety because he understood there were still details being hashed out in the Office of Planning and Economic Development. He recalled being asked to hold off.

Admin Asst Anderson-Burgos stated that the order was refiled later, went through the Ordinance Committee, and the full Council has since adopted. He added that this was placed on the agenda in order to dispose of it.

Councilor Devine made a motion that item 8 had been complied with. Councilor I. Rivera seconded the motion. Motion passed.

(1:00:35)

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion to remove item 9 from the table. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Item 9: 1-18-22 RIVERA\_I — that the City council invite the Department of Public Works as well as the Parks & Recreation Department to a Public Safety committee meeting to address the upkeep and or improvement of Laurel St. Park.  
\*Tabled 1-24-22

--->Complied with 3-0.

DISCUSSION:

I. Rivers stated that improvements were being made at Laurel Street Park, including the fountain as it was planned to be dedicated to Helen Norris, former Ward 1 Councilor. He noted that one of the visitors to the park recently mentioned to him that the benches were removed, and learned from the Parks Department that the wooden slats on the benches were being replaced and would be returned to the park.

Admin Asst Anderson-Burgos clarified that in March of the same year this order was filed, two orders were filed for this park, one to address the lighting at the park and another to address the fountain, both having been complied with.

Councilor I. Rivera recalled those orders being handled. He noted that the fountain was fixed, got messed up, and then was fixed again.

Councilor Devine made a motion that item 9 had been complied with. Councilor I. Rivera seconded the motion. Motion passed.

(1:03:40)

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion to remove item 10 from the table. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Item 10: 6-21-22 ANDERSON-BURGOS — That the DPW seek an alternative solution for rock salt. Salt is corrosive to vehicles and roads, and can contaminate drinking water and be toxic to wildlife.  
\*Tabled 8-8-22, 11-21-22

--->Complied with 3-0.

DISCUSSION:

Councilor I. Rivera stated that the DPW spoke on this regarding cost on alternatives as well as the toxicity to wildlife and drinking water. He then asked the administrative assistant for any other details.

Admin Asst Anderson-Burgos stated that the order was put on the agenda to clear it out of the jacket. He then noted that former DPW Superintendents, Michael McManus and later Amie Chrzanowski, spoke on the prohibitive cost of seeking alternatives.

Councilor Devine asked what was cost prohibitive.

Admin Asst Anderson-Burgos stated that seeking alternatives to what the DPW was currently using.

Councilor Devine noted that they were currently using the correct thing. She recalled that former councilor, Jim Leahy, used to file an order annually to have the DPW come in. She added that they were adding a lot of water so they would come in and measure it because it would freeze. She then stated that she was unsure if they were still doing that. She noted that likely should already not be using rock salt.

Councilor I. Rivera recalled that the materials they were using was not described as something they shouldn't be using but that it was more about what would be better for the environment as well as what goes into the water table.

Councilor I. Rivera made a motion that item 10 had been complied with. Councilor Devine seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Councilor Devine asked Councilor Magrath-Smith if she was able to observe the earlier discussion in the meeting.

Marath-Smith stated that she was presenting to the School Committee.

Councilor Devine stated that the order on the EMTs was a good discussion where they explained things.

Councilor Magrath-Smith emphasized that had been the goal, just to create an opportunity to have the discussion. She then stated she would go back and watch the recording.

Meeting adjourned at 7:39 p.m.