

*Sycamore Fire and Police Commission
Minutes*

January 23, 2006

The meeting was called to order at 11:02 a.m. In attendance were Chairman Richard Ubl, Commissioner Samantha Dailey, Fire Chief Bill Riddle, City Attorney Keith Foster, Attorney Tim Conklin, and Firefighters Jack Spartz, Dan Marcinkowski, Duane Prather, and Kurt Mathey. Commissioner Andrew Larson and Police Chief Don Thomas were absent.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Dailey and was seconded by Chairman Ubl.

Vote

Ayes: 2
Nays: 0
Abstain: 0

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Motion

A motion to approve the minutes from the open session of the November 8, 2005 meeting, as written, was made by Commissioner Dailey and seconded by Chairman Ubl.

Vote

Ayes: 2
Nays: 0
Abstain: 0

COMMUNICATIONS

A. Approval of Bills

Recording Secretary Tritle reported that the Commission received the following bills for payment:

\$500.00 - Marv Fogel, psychological testing of Police Officer Candidate

Motion

A motion to approve the payment of the bills totaling \$500.00 was made by Chairman Ubl and was seconded by Commissioner Dailey.

Vote

Ayes: 2
Nays: 0
Abstain: 0

B. Letter from Police Chief Thomas Announcing the End of Probationary Period for Police Officers Dan Hoffman And Ryan Goodman

Recording Secretary Tritle stated that Chief Thomas was supposed to bring the letter with him to this meeting. Both Officers completed their probationary period on December 29, 2005. Chairman Ubl instructed Ms. Tritle to send a congratulatory letter from the Commissioners to the two Officers after she receives Chief Thomas' letter.

C. Correspondences From Police Candidate Daniel Mesch Asking to Have His Name Removed From the Current Eligibility List

Chairman Ubl recommended that Recording Secretary Tritle send Mr. Mesch a letter on behalf of the Commissioners that acknowledges their receipt and acceptance of his withdrawal letter. He asked that the letter express the Commissioners' gratitude for letting them know that he has another position and for taking parting in our interview process.

Recording Secretary Tritle asked if, once Candidate Mesch's name is stricken from the list, he will definitely no longer be considered for a position in the Sycamore Police Department. Chairman Ubl answered that is correct; he instructed her to mention this in the letter to Mr. Mesch as well.

Motion

A motion to remove Dan Mesch from the current Police Officer candidates' Eligibility List was made by Chairman Ubl and was seconded by Commissioner Dailey.

Vote

Ayes: 2
Nays: 0
Abstain: 0

D. Letter of Resignation from Police Officer Patrick Lozeau

Chairman Ubl reported that the Commissioners had received a letter of resignation from Officer Lozeau. Chairman Ubl asked Recording Secretary Tritle to send Officer Lozeau a letter on behalf of the Commissioners to thank him for his service to the Sycamore Police Department.

Motion

A motion to accept the resignation submitted by Police Officer Patrick Lozeau was made by Chairman Ubl and seconded by Commissioner Dailey.

Vote

Ayes: 2
Nays: 0
Abstain: 0

E. Letters from City Manager Bill Nicklas Authorizing the Commission to Hire two New Police Officers

The first letter from City Manager Nicklas, dated December 20, 2005, authorized the Commissioners to hire a Police Officer to replace Officer Lozeau. Chairman Ubl reported that Ann Carlson was hired this month to fill this vacancy.

The second letter, dated January 17, 2006, authorizes the Commissioners to hire a Police Officer to replace Officer Rob Rosenberg, who will be retiring on May 1, 2006. Until that time, Officer Rosenberg is performing limited administrative duties; therefore, the City Council has authorized the next candidate to be hired prior to May 1. Chairman Ubl reported that the next candidate on the current list is Rudi Ziegler. Recording Secretary Tritle reported that Mr. Ziegler is scheduled to start his employment with the Sycamore Police Department in March, so he can be trained prior to May 1. Commissioner Dailey asked why Officer Rosenberg is on restricted duty. Recording Secretary Tritle explained that Officer Rosenberg cannot perform the functions of a Police Officer at this time, so he has been placed on office duty. Bringing Police Officer candidate Ziegler in prior

to

May 1 will help to fill the hole in the Patrol schedule that Officer Rosenberg's restriction has made.

Motion

A motion to begin the hiring process of Police Officer Candidate Rudi Ziegler for a March 6, 2006 appointment to the Department was made by Chairman Ubl and seconded by Commissioner Dailey.

Vote

Ayes: 2
Nays: 0
Abstain: 0

OLD BUSINESS

A. Status on the Hiring of New Police Officers

As was just reported Ann Carlson, the first candidate on the current eligibility list, was hired on January 16, 2006 to fill the vacancy left by Officer Lozeau's resignation. Chairman Ubl reported that Officer Carlson performed very well in the testing process and in her interviews. The hiring process will begin on candidate Rudi Ziegler, with an anticipated start date of March 6, 2006.

B. Review of the Current Fire Eligibility List

Chief Riddle reported that he believes there are six names left on the current eligibility list, which expires on September 10, 2006. He also stated that the next candidate on the list will turn 36 this year. He did not think he could still be hired, since once a candidate turns 35 he or she is no longer eligible. Recording Secretary Tritle said she thought a candidate could be age 35, but once he or she passed that age, the candidate can only be hired if he or she is already a certified Firefighter in another municipality. City Attorney Foster said that he would check on this. Chief Riddle said that he does not believe this

candidate has ever worked as a full-time Firefighter, and added that he is not one that we would want to consider. However, the candidate after him would be a good choice. Recording Secretary Tritle said that, at the last meeting of the Commission, it was suggested that a letter of interest be sent to the remaining candidates on the list. She asked if they still wished to do this. Chairman Ubl wondered if the remaining candidates should be called instead of sending them a letter and asked Chief Riddle what he thought would be best. Chief Riddle answered that a letter would be fine. Chairman Ubl asked when a new Firefighter is scheduled to be hired. Chief Riddle answered this is scheduled to happen on May 1, 2006, pending approval of the budget. Another Firefighter is scheduled to be hired on December 1, 2006. He is also anticipating that a Firefighter will be retiring this summer, necessitating the hiring of a replacement, though they may consider postponing this hire until the new eligibility list is established in September. Chairman Ubl suggested that a letter be sent to all of the remaining candidates to determine their interest in remaining on the list. He said that we could then follow this up by beginning the psychological examination of those candidates who state they are still interested. Recording Secretary Tritle reminded Chairman Ubl that this exam, as well as the medical, can only be done after a job is offered; however, they could start the fingerprinting and background check. Chief Riddle stated the fingerprinting process takes a while to complete, since it takes so long to receive the results back, so that would be a good thing to get started. He suggested waiting on the background checks, since they can send up bells to the candidate's current employer. Recording Secretary Tritle stated that she would wait to hear from City Attorney Foster about the age issue before she sends the letters out. Chairman Ubl said if we find out the 35 year old candidate no longer qualifies, we will need to send him a letter to that effect.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Selection of the Date for the May Meeting of the Commission

Recording Secretary Tritle said she did not know if they could set this date without knowing Commissioner Larson's work schedule. Chairman Ubl suggested setting a date, but not posting it until they confirmed it with Commissioner Larson. He suggested the first week of May; Commissioner Dailey suggested the first Monday in May at 11:00 a.m. Chairman Ubl reminded everyone that they needed to complete the Annual Report for the City Council at their May meeting. Recording Secretary Tritle stated that the Council will meet on May 1st and May 15th; if the Commissioners meet on May 1st or May 8th, their Annual Report can be presented to the City Council on May 15th. Chairman Ubl suggested May 1st, with May 8th as an alternate date depending on Commissioner Larson's schedule.

B. Request from Firefighter Jack Spartz to Address the Commission Regarding the Process of Hiring POC Interns as Full-time Firefighters

Firefighter Spartz explained that the Sycamore Fire Department instituted an intern program three years ago. He said that he participated in the oral interviewing process the last time an eligibility list was established. One of the candidates, John Pink, was trained in the intern program. Firefighter Spartz reminded the Commissioners that he had approached them at that time to see if there was anything that could be done to give the interns a better chance of being hired, especially since the City of Sycamore is paying for their education and training. One way that this could possibly be done would be to change the percentages applied to the oral and written exams, so that the oral exam

counted more toward a candidates composite score. Commissioner Dailey asked if the POC interns tended not to do as well on the written exam. Firefighter Spartz said he did not believe that this was the case; however, in looking at John Pink, he would have placed higher on the list if his oral exam score counted more than his written score, since he did so well in his interview.

Chief Riddle said that another change for the Commissioners to consider would be to lower the age requirement for taking the written exam. John Pink was the only intern who could take the test, since he was the only one over age 21 at the time the test was given. He added that any changes that the Commissioners would agree to make would need to be done now, so that they are in place before the next test is given this summer. Commissioner Dailey asked about the current age requirement. Chief Riddle answered that a candidate must be age 21 to take the test. If the Commissioners would lower the age to 20 or 20 ½, more of the interns in the program would qualify to take the exam. Chairman Ubl asked where John Pink ended up placing on the list. Chief Riddle answered that he placed third or fourth on the list. He said that the beautiful part of the intern program was that, when Mr. Pink was hired as a full-time Firefighter, he could start on the schedule from day one; he had all of his training completed and he knew the Department and how it works. He said that some of the current POC interns have worked in the Department for five years. There are no unknowns here; the interns have basically passed a five-year job interview. If they do not perform to expectations and standards, they do not make it through the program. Chairman Ubl asked if interns are booted out if they cannot get along with others in the Department. Chief Riddle said they would, and they would also be terminated if they were not meeting academic standards. Commissioner Dailey asked if any interns had been let go to date. Chief Riddle answered that they had to let one go because he did not pass his EMT exam. Firefighter Spartz explained that, when the program was initially setup, some of the older Firefighters were worried about how the younger interns would get along with them. They wanted assurances that an intern who could not get along with the staff would be asked to leave the program. Chairman Ubl agreed, stating that, in addition to fire experience, sociability is very important. Chief Riddle agreed, stating that they already know the interns can get along with their fellow employees.

Chief Riddle explained that they have uncovered a few things in the law that they wish to explore in order to change the Department's hiring requirements. The first is in Section F of the Police and Fire Commission Act. It states that applicants who are 18 years of age and have successfully completed two years of study in Fire Techniques (4 high school credits) within the cadet program of a municipality may be considered for appointment to active duty with the Fire Department. This means that these cadets may be brought directly into the Department as new hires. He said that he knows the Fire Department in Peoria does this. He added that Sycamore is also Home Rule, so we do not have to follow State law exactly. City Attorney Foster agreed, adding that we do not have to follow State law unless the State law says that we have to. In this area, there are some directions that we have to follow. Chief Riddle said that they want to explore this possibility for the hiring process, as well as looking at lowering the age requirement for testing. Commissioner Dailey said it sounds as though all they would need to do would be to lower the testing age, as long as the interns met the other qualifications. Chief Riddle said they would like to be able to have them hired into the Department as a lateral entry, if this is legal and the City Council approves. City Attorney Foster asked, if it is legal, if it is the Department's goal to be able to hire the POC interns regardless of where they fall on the eligibility list. Chief Riddle clarified that they do not want the POC

interns to even be a part of the process to establish the list; they would just be considered a lateral hire, adding that he believes that this can be done under Section F of the Police and Fire Commission Act. He said that they would still need to test and have a parallel list in place as well, as they may not have enough applicants out of the POC intern program to fill the available jobs. City Attorney Foster said that, while the idea is good, he does not have the same interpretation of Section F. He said as he reads it, someone who has the qualifications outlined in this section can be considered, but he does not think it means that they do not have to go through the testing process and place on the list. He would like to do some more research so that they can find a way to implement this, since it makes such good sense. He asked Chief Riddle if he had found any other statutes to support this. Chief Riddle answered that he had not.

Firefighter Spartz reiterated that, even if we find a way to make this work, we would need a list as a backup. Also, he said some of the Firefighters feel there should be stringent rules for the interns; just because they make into the program does not mean that they are guaranteed a job in the Department. Chairman Ubl commented that he agrees with the reasoning for this change, but reminded them that it also has a downside. He quoted the adage “you should always be careful of what you wish for”; if we change the rules so that only interns can become full-time Firefighters, we are eliminating a whole world of qualified candidates who might make excellent Firefighters.

Chief Riddle said the Department feels that they owe it to these interns for their service to Sycamore to increase their chances of being hired. Firefighter Spartz stated that, speaking from experience, Firefighters they have hired who started out in their Department as POCs or interns seem to be a better fit with the current staff, since they know how things are done and what is expected of them. Firefighters who are hired from the outside who come from other Fire Departments have a harder time adjusting, since they are used to the way things were done by their former employer. This sometimes causes clashes with the current staff members. Commissioner Dailey said that this would be similar to promoting from within, and wondered if the interns would be ranked in some way. Firefighter Spartz restated that there would have to be stringent rules and guidelines put into place that the interns would need to follow. Chairman Ubl asked if decreasing the average age of the applicants would result in their needing more training. Chief Riddle said that it would not. Since they would have to be age 21 to be appointed, at this point they would have had at least three years of training plus any training they would have received through their high school program. Commissioner Dailey said that, if she understands the requested change correctly, a candidate would need to be age 21 to be appointed full-time, but age 20 to take the test. Chief Riddle confirmed that was correct, though he knows of Departments that have appointed candidates at age 18. He also knows of some Home Rule communities that allow candidates to test at age 18, and then appoint them at age 19 or 20 – it varies around the State. He added that a lot of these rules are created for minority hiring; they help to get candidates they might not otherwise attract. He suggested that a call be placed to the State Association of Police and Fire Commissions to see if they can give us some direction. City Attorney Foster said that he will look into this. Chairman Ubl said that, while he has no personal problem with making the change, he just wants to make sure that it is looked at closely so that an informed decision is made. Firefighter Spartz commented that the Sycamore Fire Department and the City are paying for the education and training of these interns; once they turn 21, they begin testing with other Departments. For this reason, it would be to the City’s benefit to have them stay in our Fire Department. Chief Riddle added that we changed our hiring requirements because the cost of training is so expensive; Firefighters

must now be certified paramedics and a Firefighter II to be employed by the Sycamore Fire Department. However, we have hired experience Firefighters from other Departments who have not fit in; hiring the interns, whose work habits are known, just makes good sense. Chairman Ubl reiterated that he agrees, but wants make sure that it is set up in a way that will ensure we get the best candidate possible for the Department. He especially wants to make sure that a program that continually hires from within does not evolve into a program of nepotism.

Commissioner Dailey asked if there are currently interns in the program that the Fire Department would not want to hire. Chief Riddle said that the answer to the question lies in the fact that they are all still in the program – all are meeting their expectations. He added that the intern program has been good for the Department as a whole; it has helped to “wake up the sleeping giants” who have been with the Department for awhile, as they put their best foot forward when working with the interns. Commissioner Dailey said that she can see the Firefighters’ reasoning for requesting this change. The interns have already shown their commitment to the Department and to the community. She asked if the fact that, besides Firefighter Spartz, several other Firefighters were also in attendance at this meeting shows they are all in support of this proposed change. They answered that they are. Chairman Ubl said that they hoped to be able to have enough information to make a decision at their May meeting. City Attorney Foster said he will research the parameters and report back to the Commissioners. Recording Secretary Tritle asked if this would just apply to the POCs as well as the interns. Chief Riddle answered that is a question that will need to be answered, since they do have several POCs who are under age 35 and are qualified. City Attorney Foster said he would look into both questions.

Firefighter Spartz said that, if the changes could not be made based upon Section F of the Statute, maybe a change in the point system could be made, since POC Firefighters only receive ½ point for each year they serve in that position, whereas 5 points are awarded for military service or education. Chairman Ubl pointed out that candidates who do not score well on the written exam will also have problems moving up in the rank. Firefighter Spartz asked if the written exam consisted of Fire Science questions. Recording Secretary Tritle answered that she believes the exam tests general knowledge, since there are applicants who take the exam who have never worked in or studied fire science. The main purpose of the written exam is to test reasoning and cognitive skills.

C. Fire Chief

No report.

D. Police Chief

Absent – no report.

CLOSED SESSION

Chairman Ubl reported that no issues had been reported to the Commissioners that required a closed session.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion

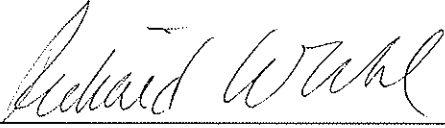
A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Dailey and was seconded by Chairman Ubl.

Vote

Ayes: 2
Nays: 0
Abstain: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Minutes accepted by:

 4/6/06

Richard Ubl, Chairman Date

Attest:

 4/6/06

Jean Frittle, Recording Secretary Date