

## **PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE**

Date and Time: Monday, March 18, 2024, at 5:15 p.m., Council Chambers

Members Present: Lisa Rasmussen (C), Doug Diny (VC), Becky McElhaney, Lou Larson, Chad Henke

Others Present: Matt Barnes, Ben Graham, Jeremy Kopp, Justin Pluess, Tracy Rieger, Anne Jacobson, Tegan Troutner, Kaitlyn Bernarde, Kody Hart, Alder Kilian

Noting the presence of a quorum, Chairperson Rasmussen called the meeting to order at 5:15 p.m.

### **Approve minutes of previous meeting (02/19/2024).**

Motion by Larson, seconded by Diny, to approve the minutes. Motion carried 5-0.

### **Consider approval or denial of various license applications.**

Kenneth Lasiuk, applicant for New Operator/Bartender License, was referred back to committee by the Common Council after a recommendation to deny was made previously. Lasiuk appeared to appeal the denial recommendation and stated that a letter of recommendation would be provided and that requests for proof of a completed sentence were made to also be provided. It was stated that action would be held until the next meeting to provide the applicant the opportunity to provide documents for evidence of rehabilitation to be considered. John Wallin, applicant for New Operator/Bartender License, did not appear to appeal the denial recommendation.

Motion by Diny, seconded by Henke, to approve or deny license applications as recommended by staff with the exception of Kenneth Lasiuk. Motion carried 5-0.

### **Discussion and possible action on agreement for Urban Search and Rescue Emergency Response Services with the State of Wisconsin – Wausau Fire Department.**

Motion by McElhaney, seconded by Henke, to approve the agreement. Motion carried 5-0.

### **Discussion and possible action of Community Care Paramedic position for the Fire Department.**

Rasmussen stated that a pilot program for this was conducted previously and proved successful but lacked the financial resources to implement at that time. It was further stated that this is of significant value to the senior community and will take care of various issues from trip and fall prevention, medication management, nutrition, and living conditions. This would be proactive in mitigating EMS challenges.

Diny questioned the referral process meant to prevent an increase in 911 calls. It was stated that referrals to the position could come from any other community partners or stakeholders. The goal would be to cut down on 911 calls and emergency care needed.

Henke questioned if the county has been brought on as a partner for this program for funding. It was stated that the Fire Department had gone to the county but had been unsuccessful adding that future request for partnership could happen upon a demonstration of success.

Motion by Larson, seconded by Diny, to forward this item to the Finance Committee to look into the funding of the local share and the acceptance of the funding mechanisms. Motion carried 5-0.

### **Discussion and Possible Action Approving the Addition of Two Officers to Wausau Police Department Authorized Staffing Level.**

Rasmussen stated that the solutions to overcoming homelessness is a combination of accountability and help. It was stated that success will be setting people on a path to be housing ready. Rasmussen questioned if the funding mechanism would be funded through core staff allotment and be absorbed through attrition and a combination of resources to get the initial staffing level started.

Larson questioned if the Wausau Police Department was receiving assistance from the Marathon County Sheriff's Department. It was stated that mutual aid agreements help provide community protection when police are spread thin and that the real assistance from the county comes from the county jail which receives individuals who are taken into custody. Larson further questioned if this would lead into a further increase of officers to resolve this as homelessness rates increase. It was stated that success of the hiring of additional officers would be not coming back to request more officers while acknowledging that homelessness is increasing.

Diny questioned if this was a major shift in strategy and if it would be effective when mental health and addiction treatment was a more viable strategy. It was stated that this recommendation to increase officers is within the functions of the Police Department when the other strategies are within the function of other departments. Diny recommended a committee of the whole be convened to discuss partnerships with organizations and the county to provide these services.

*Without objection, public comment was taken on this agenda item.*

- 1) Vicki Harness, Marathon County Community Outreach Task Force – spoke on the current outreach work of the task force and stated that unhoused people often have no place to go as shelters become full or have turnaways.
- 2) Tom Kilian, 133 E. Thomas Street – spoke to question what was the strategy and approach and requested a committee of the whole meeting to talk about providing services to the unhoused.

Rasmussen stated concerns with a committee of the whole meeting as the issues with behaviors in this area is serious and immediate enough for the Police Department to bring this recommendation for additional officers forward.

Henke outlined that the number of unhoused individuals being housed in the county jail has increased in the time that the Community Outreach Coordinator has been in place. It was also questioned as to if the Marathon County Community Outreach Task Force is meeting to discuss this matter. It was stated that the task force will meet soon.

Rasmussen stated that the county has seemed unwilling to take on the matter of homelessness as it was viewed as a city issue that was beyond their purview and stated concerns with waiting to act. It was suggested that the city should continue engaging the county while continuing to allow this to move forward.

Larson requested communication with the county to ask why they are not addressing this issue as a partner with the city. It was stated that the Police Chief and the Mayor were meeting with the county Health and Human Services Committee to begin this discussion.

Henke requested that city staff, elected officials, and organizations should go to the Marathon County Board meetings and their standing committee meetings to raise awareness of this issue.

Motion by Henke, seconded by Larson, to amend the motion to sunset the date of these positions on 12/31/2025 absent a renewal and that a report be brought forward in for review by the Public Health & Safety Committee in September of 2025 on the ongoing efforts achieved by the additional officers. Motion carried 5-0.

Motion by Larson, seconded by Henke, to move this program to the Human Resources Committee for review. Motion carried 4-1, with Diny voting no.

#### **Discussion and Possible Action on committee duties and responsibilities.**

Rasmussen agreed with the City Attorney analysis that the committee is conducting its duties and responsibilities accordingly but that the city website needed to be updated to be in accordance as well. Rasmussen made the request of staff to update the website.

Larson stated that it was not the duty of the committee to facilitate and approve the purchase of equipment for the Fire and Police Department as that duty is for the Capital Improvement Program Committee and Finance Committee.

#### **Tavern Activities Report – February 1, 2024 through February 29, 2024.**

Larson requested that the Domino Bar receive extra patrols during the weekend to ensure that they are open during their limited regular hours.

*Report Placed on File.*

**Community Outreach Update.**

McElhane requested that the Community Outreach Coordinator should look into working with local hospitals to ensure that unhoused patients who are at their facilities for care from another community are discharged back to their own community.

*Report Placed on File.*

**Adjournment**

Motion by Henke, second by Larson, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

*For full meeting video on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZu99sxYJYE>*