

Council Meeting Summary: May 10, 2016

To all of our neighbors and residents,

The regularly scheduled Borough Council meeting on May 10, 2016 drew a large crowd of passionate and concerned citizens eager to discuss recent developments concerning our local police department, how it works, and what it might mean for Borough residents going forward. This unusually large turnout provided a welcome opportunity for all to engage in open, frank, and occasionally heated discussions to share concerns and to clarify positions regarding our police department. Due to the importance of the issues discussed, and because not everyone could attend the meeting, we thought it appropriate to post a brief, transparent, and fact-based summary for all to access in the Mayor and Council Blog section of the Borough website. This summary will describe the police issue only; please refer to the published meeting minutes or audio recording for information regarding other agenda items discussed.

Much discussion surrounded the recent publication of a study entitled 'Peapack-Gladstone Police Department: Staffing Analysis and Utilization of Current Manpower Study', prepared by Richard Lynch and commissioned by the Council in January of this year. This study, henceforth referred to as the Lynch Report, was received by the head of our Police Committee Councilman Mark Corigliano from Mr. Lynch on April 26, 2016 and subsequently distributed to the police department and governing body members on April 27 and 28 for review and posted to this website on April 29 for all to review.

Background

The background for the commissioning of this study was two-fold:

1) Budget concerns

Many recent months of rigorous budget analysis and scrutiny revealed to our governing body that if current and projected levels of revenue and borough spending continue, our operating budget could become perilously constrained in the year 2020. Absent new sources of tax revenue, services would have to be cut to balance the budget. Effective immediately, this budget reality coupled with our fiduciary responsibility compels the Council to thoroughly examine all Borough expenses going forward, including our police department (currently our largest expense).

2) Request for additional manpower made by Chief Skinner to the Council in late 2015

Chief Skinner's request to hire additional manpower left the Council with two options: arbitrarily approve (or deny) the request, or secure an objective assessment regarding current police department staffing and operations through an outside subject matter expert to either support or revise the Chief's request. The Council, in agreement with Chief Skinner, thus opted to commission a study in order to make the responsible, data-driven decision regarding manpower.

Richard Lynch was selected to provide the study based on his years of qualified experience as both a police chief and a borough administrator, allowing a better understanding of both operational domains. His work received glowing recommendations from other clients, and his proposed fee was substantially lower than the provider considered. Most importantly, he was instructed to provide an unbiased evaluation of our police department staffing, manpower, and operations only. Irrespective of any report contents, he was not instructed to provide any specific recommendations or conclusions.

Outcome

While the contents of the Lynch Report had not yet been properly evaluated by the Council, some of the author's recommendations have proven to be very controversial in our community. Foremost among them is his recommendation that the Borough consider disbanding its current police department and contracting future police services to the neighboring Township of Bedminster. Clearly, such a significant departure from our town's history would require substantial debate and deliberation by any responsible governing body, and could not occur unless similar or better levels of public safety and service for all could be ensured. This is not currently the case, and thus the Council has not endorsed this recommendation. Regarding the balance of the Lynch report, please know that the study is not binding; the Council has not taken a position on any of its contents, will evaluate them judiciously, and keep our residents informed accordingly.

Notwithstanding, our police Chief has reviewed the Lynch report and made a few constructive suggestions regarding staffing and scheduling improvements to our Police Committee which could be implemented shortly. Because their proposed changes require acceptance by the Policeman's Benevolent Association (PBA) and subsequent acceptance by the full Council, the details of the arrangement cannot be disclosed at this time. However, the agreement provides for three likely outcomes:

- greater supervisory coverage;
- greater police officer presence during the hours of 6:30AM to 8:00AM and 1:00AM to 2:00AM each weekday; and
- Reduction in overtime costs, potentially amounting to \$10,000 or more.

Most importantly, these objectives are being met at no additional cost the Borough's taxpayers.

Important Note

We sincerely hope that this post helps those not able to attend to better understand the important matters discussed at the meeting. Public safety and the well-being of our residents is our top priority, and, in partnership with all of our residents, we remain unwavering in our support for the services our police department provides.

Finally, we encourage all of our neighbors to, whenever possible, attend the public meetings and monitor our borough website to get the most accurate, balanced information regarding both this and other important issues at hand. We will continue to update our residents with posts to this website, and remain otherwise available for open, respectful, and constructive discussion.

The Mayor and Council of the Borough of Peapack & Gladstone

12th of May, 2016