

TOWN OF MELBOURNE VILLAGE

MINUTES

Special Commission Meeting

Tuesday August 16, 2022 at 6:30 pm

AHF Hall

- I. **Call to Order** 6:30 by Mayor Niemann
- II. **Pledge of Allegiance** led by Mayor Niemann
- III. **Roll Call** Present: Commissioners Anderson, Ditty, Ingram, Jones, Murphy, Vice Mayor Calenda and Mayor Niemann. Absent: None
- IV. **INFORMATIONAL DISCUSSION REGARDING POLICE DEPARTMENT AND ADDRESSING OF PUBLIC CONCERNS**

MAYORS' INTRODUCTION

- Mayor Niemann opened by stating that Chief Loos submitted his resignations (he's retiring) along with those of the rest of the Department on Monday, August 15, effective Friday August 19.
- She stated that the budget for FY 2023-24, already in process, included provisions for sustaining the Police Department for the coming Fiscal Year. The issue the Commission is dealing with is how we can sustain the department for future years.
- Mayor Niemann then gave the floor to the attendees to ask questions or voice concerns. The Commission would then take time to respond.

RESIDENTS' QUESTIONS and COMMENTS

Equipment /Transition

1. What happens to all equipment if we don't have a Police Department? What happens to it if we decide to reconstitute the department?
2. How will equipment, etc., be monitored as they exit?
3. Is the Chief willing to work with Sheriff during Transition?
4. If we work with the Sherriff office for 1 year, who will maintain/store equipment?

Coverage

5. Could the funds budgeted be used for Private Security and use the Brevard County Sheriff Office as backup?
6. Is there a consideration to "Rent" Melbourne or West Melbourne Police?
7. Have we talked to the Brevard County Sherriff's Department and do we know what kind of coverage they would provide going foreword?
8. What is the contingency plan for the next year? Is there an underlying reason as to the number of recent resignations and why the whole Police Department quit at the same time?
9. Can BCSO provide coverage for school kids walking on town streets to and from bus stops since most do not get pickup at their home?

Future Plans/Resident Comments

10. Don't fill the resigned positions until next year. This is a perfect time to wait and go to a referendum next year if we decide to continue with the Sheriff's department.
11. June Park has Brevard County Sheriff Office (BCSO) Coverage and they have not seen deputies in their neighborhood in years.
12. There were a couple of police officers that left prior to these recent resignations. Must we have a fully staffed police department?
13. We lost our Police department in 1980 and recovered. I haven't seen anyone patrolling for a while. I want a Police Department but think they shouldn't be telling the town what they're going to do. They are employees of the town.
14. Is the town committed to reconstituting a Police Department or to just using the Sheriffs or other Agency Services to fill in gap until a decision is made?
15. Let's not panic. People are gas lighting this issue on social media. We are not sinking. We've gone through this before and can do it again - probably better. We are a town of ~800 citizens who are well mannered and mindful, and concerned. Let's go from here.
16. Consider personal deterrents - Leave porch lights on - or off (opinions varied) for the near term, beware of dog sign, smile-you're on camera sign, etc.
17. Several residents commented that we haven't been getting what we've been paying for.
18. Thank you to the commission for your time and hard work on this and other decisions that must be made.

Cost/Taxes

19. If we don't bring back the Police Department would we see a 60% reduction in our budget? Would we see that reflected in our property taxes?
20. Are we going to use the BCSO as an interim solution? What would the cost be? Are our officers under some kind of a contract?

MAYOR AND COMMISSIONER RESPONSES

Mayor Niemann noted that there has been no decision or consensus by the Commission to eliminate the Police Department. We are here because Chief Loos submitted resignations from the entire Police Department, giving the Town a 5-day notice. A contract is being prepared with the Brevard County Sheriffs Office (BCSO) Attorney and our Attorney for immediate/interim coverage. There are many details to resolve throughout the process, including the potential of grant reimbursement for two recently acquired police cars. Our hope is that the Chief is cooperating with the BCSO. Equipment/Inventory retention is a main concern and we don't have all the answers yet. We hope to retain items should we rebuild the department. Keys to Police Department are not allowed by other than law enforcement personnel while inventory remains. The BCSO will use their own equipment, not ours.

Reasons given for resignations: Police Department - one cited health concerns; two cited a hostile commission and the others didn't give a reason. The Commission asked the Chief to schedule overlapping coverage during rush hour due to complaints about cut-through traffic. The Chief didn't feel his staff would like this and would not ask them. The Chief requested the Commission allow the department to keep all six police vehicles after we received two new vehicles - he was repeatedly told it was not an option and to release two of the older vehicles.

The Chief and the Public Works employees, all full-time, refused to sign an agreement to work a full 8-hour shift. The Town Clerk who was here 1.5 years received an offer for twice his salary in March. The most recent Clerk, who was employed for six weeks, was asked to leave after creating office turmoil involving Public Works and the Chief.

Regarding Coverage, the BCSO is our only option – we can't contract with Melbourne or West Melbourne. Cost for BCSO Services would be \$250,000 a year, substantially less than what we currently pay for our police department. We would have two dedicated deputies (one at a time) to share patrolling on a 12-hour day shift, 7-days a week. Second shift would be much like we have had currently, with coverage from South Precinct.

When a call is made to 911, it will be handled as always – The Brevard County Sheriffs Office, as it always has, makes the appropriate dispatch. Our TMV officers have always assisted other departments when necessary and vice versa. The BCSO also provides this “Mutual Aid” to other communities.

The BCSO will provide additional resources we haven't had for special investigations, speed details, drug details and more. This is not the plan we were going for during the budgeting process, but circumstances require this as a stop-gap decision that will allow us to decide what we want to do going forward. Options will be explored over the coming year.

Our Police Department hasn't been fully staffed since two officers resigned a couple months ago and the staffing problem is likely to continue. Law enforcement agencies everywhere are having difficulty attracting employees. Pandemic, inflation, “the great resignation,” etc. has had an impact. With an understaffed department, we would have to rely on the BCSO to some degree to have full coverage. We need at least 4 full time officers to fully staff patrolling-only by the department (not including administration).

In developing the Town's budget for FY23 budget, the Commission and Finance Committee is concerned that we cannot meet the financial requests by the Police Department/Chief and still be fiscally responsible to our residents. The FY23 budget is slated at ~\$340,000 in payroll and ~\$410,000 for payroll including all benefits. The Commission has already been working on fact-finding for BCSO Services to be worked on for the next year with resident participation. Unfortunately this has to happen immediately. Several options, ranging from maintaining the status quo to working with the Sheriffs department in varying capacities, is available at the Town office and will be posted on website.

The Commission understands residents' interest in maintaining our Town's safety, security and protection that we've been accustomed to over the years. We will not see a 60% reduction in taxes. Some kind of law enforcement must be paid for, so taxes will not go down 60%. The decision should not only be about how to reduce taxes, but about long term sustainment of how to protect our town. The goal is to find an optimal budget that addresses safety, security, and protection along with reasonable taxes moving forward.

The commission is open to finding solutions for informing residents about meetings – Signage, social media, word of mouth, website, bulletin boards on Dayton and outside office, and

volunteers to help spread the word about meetings and information. A resident volunteered to set up communication database and/or email distribution list.

The NextDoor app is not an official Town Message Board, as it can become a giant rumor mill. Agendas and meeting information is posted here as a courtesy and can be posted by any resident. Please only post to Melbourne Village, not to any other locales. Rosa Bennett, a NextDoor lead, offered to help educate others on how to navigate the site – private message her.

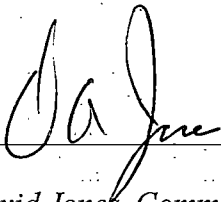
In conclusion, this is an opportunity to reset, to improve the Town and update policy and procedures. The Commission is dedicated to doing the work. Residents have also offered to volunteer. We can do better. The Commission's job is to keep us moving forward as a town. Contact any Town Commissioner at any time if you have questions, concerns or ideas. Commissioners don't have districts so you can talk to any or all of them.

V. Adjournment at 8:12 pm

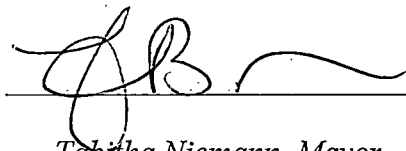
Next Special Commission meeting will be held on Thursday August 18 at 6:30

If an individual decides to appeal any decision made by the Town Commission with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, a record and transcript of the proceedings will be required and the individual will need to ensure that a verbatim record and transcript of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is based and will be acceptable in a court of law (FS286.0105). Such person must provide a method for recording and transcribing the proceedings verbatim as the Town does not provide such a record or transcript. In accordance with the Americans Disabilities Act and Section 286.26, Florida Statutes, persons needing special accommodations for this meeting shall, within a reasonable time prior to the meeting contact the Office of the Town Clerk (321) 723-8300.

ATTEST:



David Jones, Commissioner



Tabitha Niemann, Mayor