

White Plains Council of Neighborhood Associations
March Meeting

Tuesday, April 9, 2024

Location: Meeting Held on ZOOM

Time: 7pm

CNA Attendees: Michael Sanchez, Michael Dalton, Tom Osbeck, Ellen Berger, Anthony Fiorenza, Bob Friscia, Deborah Fontana, Leonard Gruenfeld, Frances Jones, Robert Kahn, Ken Kristal, Daniel Letizia, Michael Matarese, Chet Moss, Patrick Muhlane, Leah & Howard Waldman, Shawn Woodford, Debra Zipf,

1. The Meeting was called to order by President Sanchez. President Sanchez introduced the meeting's topic: Current/Future & Perceived state of Public Safety, Plan for Marijuana Dispensaries in White Plains. President Sanchez introduced the guest speakers:
 - a. Police Chief Joseph Castelli
 - b. Fire Chief (Temp) Claudio Petriccione
 - c. State Senator Shelly Mayer
 - d. Justin Brasch – White Plains Common Council
 - e. Jennifer Puja – White Plains Common Council
2. Chief Castelli addressed the question, "as our downtown population increases with new development.... are the Public Safety departments of the Police and Firefighters updating or re-allocating resources and training to meet this increase in population?" Chief Castelli explained that the Police Department is planning for the increase in downtown population. Chief Castelli recognizes that many residents would like to see more police presence in the downtown area...more officers "walking the beat" and visible. He went on to say.... that effectively policing the downtown area is a "balancing act" between police officers "on foot" and patrolmen in police cars.
3. Chief Castelli described the staffing challenges experienced by both the Police and Fire Department during and after the Covid years. Many police and fire personnel have reached a retirement age or have served enough years to qualify for their retirement...resulting in multiple officers and firefighters retiring in clusters at the same time. White Plains does not have difficulty attracting candidates to become police or firefighters. But the training of a police officer or firefighter requires months of training (10 month for police officers) and when several officers or firefighters retire at the same time...it can stretch the available manpower of both the Police and Fire departments until new recruits are able to join their respective departments.
4. Questions were asked about "homeless people" in White Plains.
 - a. Are homeless people consuming a great deal of public safety resources? Chief Castelli explained that the police department does "keep an eye" on the homeless...but, in general homeless people are not presenting a public safety problem and are not consuming law enforcement resources.
 - b. Are homeless people dropped off in the downtown of White Plains by the County? Answer: YES, the homeless do get brought to White Plains and are dropped off from shelter facilities run by Westchester County. Because homeless persons cannot remain in a shelter during the day.... they are required to spend the day "out of the shelter" ...the City of White Plains is a location where they will be safe and that does have services that can be of assistance to the Homeless. Bob Khan asked, "can't the homeless remain in a shelter during the day?" Councilman Brasch did not know the answer to why the homeless can not stay in a shelter during the day...but he suspected it was about "cost". Running a shelter for the homeless at night is an expensive operation. Running the same shelter during the daytime as well would only be that much more expensive.
 - c. Have homeless people been involved in any violent crimes in White Plains? Answer: NO.

Councilman Brasch stated that there has not been a violent crime involving the homeless in the past 10 years.

5. Dan Letizia asked how many patrol cars were allocated to the “south end” of the City? Chief Castelli explained that there are 8 patrol car “sectors” in White Plains. 2 sector cars overlap the “south end” area. 1 patrol car is typically on duty full time patrolling the “south end” of the City.
6. The question was asked, “have undocumented migrants been a problem in White Plains?” Chief Castelli replied that there has been an increase in the number of undocumented migrants in White Plains...but there has been no increase in crime which can be attributed to undocumented migrants.
7. Councilwoman Puja said that in the last City budget monies were allocated for more “Bike and Foot” police to be deployed in the downtown. “Bike and Foot” police officers can build community and trust. Have more “Bike and Foot” police been deployed in the downtown? Chief Castelli explained that because of staffing retention issues and the fact that “Bike and Foot” police duty is physically demanding that it has been a challenge to deploy more “Bike and Foot” police officers in the downtown area.
8. Michael Sanchez noted that he has witnessed panhandling and the solicitation of money outside the Dunkin Donuts on Mamaroneck Ave and in the parking areas downtown. Chief Castelli stated, “that if you see something...panhandling, drug use, drug sales, thefts or other illegal activities...please call the police department and we will respond.”
9. Ellen Berger asked, “what is the ideal number of police officers?” Chief Castelli stated that there are between 193 -206 active staff on the White Plains Police force. “Is the right number 200? That is a good question”. A total of 12 new positions have been added in the past 5 years. Chief Castelli explained that White Plains police perform many services which would not be typically thought of as “law enforcement” in nature...like.... testifying in court or conducting home checks when Owners are out of town or directing traffic when a street is being repaired.
10. The question was asked, “is housing affordability a major issue for retaining police officers?” Chief Castelli replied, “NO.... I don’t think that is a major issue as far as police officer retention is concerned. There are many issues which have contributed to the “retention” problem. One of the important issues is the changes to public sector pensions at the State Level. The “Tier 6” pension plans for new public service employees has created a “first- and second-class separation between long serving public service employees and new employees. Under the Tier 6 pension plan...new employee will receive a lower level of pension compensation than older employees. Councilwoman Puja stated, “public service jobs are simply not as attractive for younger persons.”
11. Michael Sanchez reported that there had been a stabbing incident at a Mobil service station in the Rosedale neighborhood. He asked Chief Castelli what he could report at this time. Chief Castelli explained that the stabbing incident was still under investigation so he was constrained in what he could say...but the incident involved a fight among teenagers who had attended a party in the neighborhood. The stabbing incident was not a “gang” related incident.
12. Michael Sanchez asked Fire Chief (temp) Petriccione to comment on the manpower issues related to Ladder 34 and firefighter readiness for the south end of White Plains. Chief Petriccione explained that fire department staffing is a “balancing act” with staff retirements making full staffing of all firehouses and the equipment more and more challenging. Councilwoman Puja explained that the Common Council does not set the staffing levels for the Police and Fire departments. The Commissioners of departments propose their department budgets (which include the staffing levels) and the Common Council votes to approve, reject or alter the proposed budget. Councilman Brasch stated, “we all want the City to provide a full

range of services, but budgets and low taxes are always a struggle.” Councilman Brasch spoke out strongly in favor of supporting the Fire Department and the need to fund the fire department in order to preserve public safety.

13. State Senator Shelly Mayer explained that the NYS Budget is supposed to be completed and adopted on April 1st each year. This year’s budget was not completed and voted on by 4/1/24. Accordingly, the State will be operating by utilizing “extensions” of the existing budget until the new budget is finalized and voted on. Failure to adopt the State’s budget “on time” can affect the State bond rating and the cost of borrowing for the State.
14. Senator Mayer explained the State’s “Tier 6” revision to the pension plan for new public service employees is reducing the number of people interested in civil service jobs. The “Tier 6” pension plan applies to new civil service workers. The “Tier 6” plan provides lower overall pension benefits compared to prior civil service plans and is setting up 2 classes of civil service employees...older workers with good pensions and younger, newer workers with reduced pension plans. Senator Mayer is working with other legislators in the Assembly and Senate to reform the “Tier 6” pension plan and thereby attract more young candidates to civil service jobs.
15. Senator Mayer is the chairperson of the Education Committee in the NYS Senate. She is fighting proposed cuts to State Aid for education. She is fighting Governor Hochul’s proposed cuts to the formula which is used to calculate State Aid to school systems in NYS.
16. Senator Mayer recognizes that there is not enough Affordable Housing to meet the demand in Westchester and in New York State. The Governor’s proposed State-wide Affordable Housing Zoning change was rejected by the NYS Assembly. Senator Mayer is working to formulate incentives for Developers to build more Affordable Housing Units.
17. On the Public Safety front.... Senator Mayer is working to give local prosecutors the tools and leeway to effectively address petty larceny crimes. She is working to give law enforcement the tools to shut down illegal Cannabis Shops. She is working to expand State Aid to municipalities to support local Police and Fire Departments.
18. Senator Mayer has held hearings on the explosive increase in Utility Bills throughout the State. Michael Sanchez asked how it was possible for his parents to have their monthly utility bill rise from approximately \$400 a month to \$1000, then to \$1200 and then to \$1500? Senator Mayer explained that over 3 years ago, ConEd proposed and the Public Service Commission approved a dramatic increase in the “delivery/service” portion of its monthly bills to customers. The “phasing in” of the new delivery/service rates to customers would begin in the late fall of 2023. That is why the average ConEd customer has seen huge increases in their utility bills over the past 3 or 4 months. Bob Friscia asked if the closing of the ConEd nuclear plant at Indian Point was part of the reason for ConEd’s rate increase? Senator Mayer answered, “NO, the increase is related to the necessary electric and gas infrastructure repair, replacement and maintenance expenses that ConEd is required to execute. Senator Mayer is holding hearings in Albany to investigate ConEd’s justification for and the Public Service Commission’s decision to approve these rate increases. Senator Mayer is co-sponsoring a bill in the NYS Senate to change how utility rates will be set by Public Service Commission.
19. President Sanchez thanked the invited guests and attendees for their participation and then closed the meeting.