

**CITY OF NORTHFIELD WORK SESSION MEETING  
JANUARY 16, 2007**

This meeting was called to order by Carol A. Raph, Municipal Clerk. It was properly advertised under Public Law 75, Chapter 231.

The flag salute was led by Mayor Frank Perri, Jr., and following the flag salute, he called for a moment of silence to recognize those fighting at home and abroad for our liberties, as well as those who serve the community, that they may return safely to their families.

**ROLL CALL:** Present: Carew, Martinez, Mazzeo, Notaro, Turon, Vain, and Kern

City Solicitor Keith Bonchi, Engineer Ed Stinson of Doran Engineering, CFO Marilyn Dolcy, City Administrator Jeffrey Bruckler, and Deputy City Clerk Kim Hodsdon were present.

Council President Kern reviewed the agenda. Mayor Perri asked if the two new hires for Public Works were both replacements. Administrator Bruckler responded in the affirmative.

Councilman Carew acknowledged the large public presence and suggested that Ordinance 2-2007 be opened for Public comment. Mayor Perri stated that the Ordinance is an amendment to Chapter 35 of the City Code. Explaining that the elimination of the Captain's position in the Police Department is a bold move that is supported by the City Administrator, Police Chief and himself, Perri noted that the Ordinance passed the first reading with a unanimous vote by Council and with very little comment. He further explained that the proposed changes were recommendations from the professional consultant's report and the City is financially challenged to maintain services with less resources. Council President Kern opened this matter for Public comment.

Michael Bardello, President of the Policeman's Benevolent Association (PBA) - Mainland Local No. 77, came forward to address Council. For the record, he stated that the Union is opposed to the reduction in rank because it removes a promotional opportunity and hinders the department's ability to serve the public. Considering the growth in the Northfield community, Bardello stated that the command structure of the Police Department is critical. While an administrative position may be needed for clerical duties, the Captain's position is still necessary. On behalf of the PBA, he respectfully requests that Council refrain from making a decision until the Union has an opportunity to meet with City Administration and discuss the matter.

Scott Pollack, an officer of the Northfield Police Department and Union shop steward, came forward and presented the Mayor and Council with a petition signed by his fellow officers reflecting their opposition to Ordinance 2-2007.

Albert Dallas of 1001 Fuae Avenue, Northfield, came forward and commented that, with crime and the threat of terrorists increasing, having a strong work force in the

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Police Department is imperative. While the population of Northfield is increasing, the staffing in the Police Department is decreasing. He feels that eliminating the Captain's position is a mistake.

Mayor Perri made a point to clarify that the proposed changes do not remove officers from the street; the Ordinance would add an administrative position and a Traffic Officer. He stated that the Union had been approached regarding the matter at various times in the past. Officer Pollack stepped forward and stated, as the shop steward, that he was not approached to discuss the matter and that the proposed changes are not putting any more officers on the street.

Ray Seyler of 506 West Vernon Avenue came forward and commented on his past experience as a Police Chief. His command staff had consisted of many leadership positions and financial concerns were not a factor. Seyler stated that to change the structure now, as the department is rebuilding, would be a mistake that would lessen motivation in the ranks.

Pat McGowan of 2005 Shore Road, Northfield, came forward and expressed concern about morale within the department, stating that there needs to be a check and balance system.

Donna Champion of 402 Second Avenue, Northfield, came forward and expressed her support of the Ordinance on behalf of the taxpayers. While she appreciates the Union's attempt to save a job, she believes it is time to start looking at dollars and cents. This change does not take any officers off the street and it saves money.

Robert Webb of 218 West Revere Avenue, Northfield, came forward and commented that promotions should not be politically motivated; they should be earned.

Officer George Clark of the Northfield Police Department came forward and stated that all officers, regardless of rank, are called upon to serve the community and that the proposed changes would hurt morale within the department.

Acting Lieutenant, Arthur Faden of the Northfield Police Department came forward and reiterated that all leadership positions are called upon to serve the community and every officer is needed.

Councilman Carew voiced his support for the new Police Chief, stating that he believes Chief James will do a fine job for the City. He believes that a meeting between the PBA and City Administration is needed in order to further discuss the matter.

Jim Moyer of 9 Henry Drive, Northfield, came forward and asked the Mayor to explain the positive reasons behind Ordinance 2-2007. Mayor Perri explained how the Police Department was evaluated by an outside consulting firm. The consultant's report revealed that for every officer, there were 1.3 supervisors and it suggested a

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restructuring. With increased costs in the areas of salaries and benefits, the City needs to consider all possible areas for savings. The proposed changes have been under consideration for two years. Perri stated that it was a difficult and unpopular decision to make, but with the state of property taxes as they are, he hoped that people would be open-minded. The Mayor stated that this is not a reflection on anyone's performance and that he has the utmost respect for the Police Department. Responding to Moyer's question if the Police Department was given any advanced notice of the changes, Perri commented on the various times when the Union was approached and told that promotional procedures would be modified.

Robert Grist of 2312 Merrit Drive, Northfield, came forward and expressed the need for a professional Police Department with a solid chain of command. The news reflects the rise in crime rates and now is not the time to regress.

Bill Ward, Acting VP of the Mainland PBA, came forward and stated that the Union believes the changes would result in an insignificant savings to the taxpayers of \$0.72 per week. He hopes that the citizens of Northfield will support the Police Department on this matter. Refuting the Mayor's statement, Ward said that the Union was not asked to discuss the matter.

Councilman Mazzeo, Chair of the Finance Committee, explained that two million dollars of the City's budget is for the Police Department. The Captain's salary is approximately eighty-five thousand per year and the proposed administrative position would be approximately thirty thousand per year; this change would result in an estimated one percent reduction in the tax rate. He stated that he supports the Chief's position on the matter and does not believe it will sacrifice safety. Councilman Carew voiced his support for the Police Chief, but did not believe the proposed changes were driven by budgetary concerns.

Richard Levitt of 2204 Bay Avenue, Northfield, came forward and suggested that Council consider a compromise that would keep both positions.

William O'Donnell, retired Lieutenant of the Northfield Police Department, came forward and expressed concern over the cutbacks in public safety.

Mike Erskine, resident of 202 East Steelman Avenue, Northfield, and former officer in the Atlantic City Police Department, came forward to voice his opposition to Ordinance 2-2007. He commented on the importance of having a clear chain of command that includes a second-in-command and noted that, without the opportunity for advancement, the City may lose good officers to other municipalities.

Detective Steve Steinecke of the Northfield Police Department came forward and questioned how the proposed changes would save money. Administrator Bruckler offered to discuss it following the meeting.

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John Frederick's of 18 Forrest Drive, Northfield, came forward to voice his opposition.

John Brenner of 2316 Merritt Drive, Northfield, came forward to voice his opposition to Ordinance 2-2007, commenting that the City has excellent Police and Fire Departments and he doesn't understand the downsizing.

Mark Doherty of 405 Chestnut Avenue, Northfield, came forward and commented that he wants his taxes reduced but that he also wants a quality emergency response system and urged both parties to come to an equitable solution.

Seeing no one from the public wishing to speak, Council President Kern closed the public session on this matter.

Councilman Vain stated that he struggled with this decision and vowed that he would listen to the people. He applauded and thanked the public for coming to the meeting. Mayor Perri expressed concern that some Council members had been endorsed by the PBA during the last election and suggested there be changes made to the Police Committee. Council President Kern will take it into consideration.

Administrator Bruckler made a point to clarify that it is a position that may be cut, not a person and thus the number of officers will remain the same. He supports the Police Chief on the matter and will meet with the PBA if directed to do so by Council.

Police Chief Robert James came forward and explained that due to budget cuts and the loss of federal funding, the department is down from a staff of twenty-five to twenty-three. He stated that it was not an easy decision to cut the Captain's position, but that the department stands to gain a Traffic Safety Officer. James expressed that he is doing his best with the budget he's been given and it is up to Council to grant anything outside of those parameters. He is willing to meet with all parties involved for further discussions. Mayor Perri explained there was a formula used to determine appropriate staffing levels and that he believes them to be sufficient.

Committee reports were waived during this work session. On motions properly made and seconded, this meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol A. Raph, RMC/CMC