

SELECT BOARD MINUTES - January 19, 2011

Present: Select board – Dave DeHerdt, Doug Field, Norm Russell
Assistant Administrator – Mary Fitz-Gibbon

Meeting called to order at 7:08 PM

Purpose of meeting: Interview Police Chief Candidate – Patrick Droney

Chairman DeHerdt began the meeting by stating that he wanted to acknowledge the efforts of the search committee to find good candidates. He wanted to thank Nina Coler, Alan Taylor, Paul Lacinsky, Suzanne Corbett, and Bev LaBelle. The candidates submitted by the committee were very good. There had been three candidates, however one had declined, choosing to accept another opportunity, so there would be only two individuals interviewed. Other members who needed to be thanked are Lynn Dole, Paul Monahan, and Lenny Roberts.

Patrick Droney, introduced himself as a retired officer with 28 ½ years of experience on the Enfield, CT police department. He is married with four children, the youngest a junior in high school. He has served as a Sgt. on that department and was promoted to Lt. in 2005. The Enfield department is considerably larger than Ashfield's, responding to more than 50,000 calls per year. He is an EMT and has advanced training in accident reconstruction. His experience while a police officer includes community policing, largely in the Thompsonville section of Enfield. There he has also served as SRO (School Resource Officer) at the high school level and also at a k-6 school. He has been involved in coaching. He has held elected positions in Town, serving on the budget advisory committee and the school committee.

Mr. Droney said he retired in 2008 and almost immediately realized he'd made a mistake. He accepted a position as director of campus safety at Loomis-Chaffee, a private high school with both boarding and day students. It was a big change going from a busy department to a smaller isolated school. Since being there he has worked on designing a uniform for security personnel and has revamped the policy and procedures for the security of that school. He serves as co-chair of an emergency training program. To keep himself intellectually engaged he is currently enrolled in a master's program at Westfield State University.

Having provided this introduction of himself, he then entertained questions from the Board. Field asked him about projects in the schools. He was familiar with the DARE program, which is currently "out of favor," and said a lot of what he does is to educate the parents who many times are nervous about having police in the schools. He feels it is important to develop good relationships with students early. In a small community, such as Ashfield, it is important to be proactive rather than reactive.

Russell asked about matters relating to traffic – speed traps, etc. Droney said while speed traps did have their place, generally, he was not in favor of them. Officers should be looking for people who are driving dangerously, texting, passing in bad places, etc. He thought a "trailer" that showed a vehicles speed was a more useful way to slow people down.

In light of the Town's recent history, he felt the first 90 days in town would be important. He understood that the Town has lost trust in the police and transparency would be key. He thought opening the office up to the public would be a start. People would need to be aware of the policies and procedures that

are in place. Possibly opportunities for ride-a-longs could be offered. He has several friends, including one who is president of the Mass Police Chief's Association, who can advise him.

Field asked why after going from public service to private business, he would want to get back into public service. Droney explained that he had left the department partly because he saw no opportunity to become chief in Enfield, the current chief being the same age as him and having been hired at the same time. He now regrets the choice and is looking forward to getting back into police work.

Russell said in a small town the police are usually the first persons to respond to medical emergencies. He wondered if Droney had qualifications other than first responders. Droney is an EMT and has EMD training. He has a lot of experience with the ambulance, as the police ran the ambulance in Enfield.

Domestic calls are the most dangerous for police officers. Droney said it used to be that you had to have permission from the victim to make an arrest. That has since changed; arrests can be made permission or not. Sometimes force had to be used; the guidelines are to use just the proper amount to affect an arrest. This requires training, as it is easy to use excessive force unintentionally. It gets a lot of departments in trouble. Officers should receive counseling after being involved in a traumatic situation. Droney has had some training in this area. He gave an example of a time when the counseling was done.

DeHerdt questioned Droney about intimidation. Droney said it could be subtle, as simple as the flat top haircut. He felt 20-21 year olds are not mature enough to know how to talk to people. A lot of use of force complaints came from the activities of those younger individuals. Time and experience are needed for an officer to know how to talk and how to look. A hand on a gun could be perceived as threatening. The key is "People Skills."

As to the small size of the department and lack of activity, compared to what he was accustomed, how would he deal with the change? Droney felt he could find things to do. Some thoughts: Citizen's academy, security audits of homes (trimming bushes, checking windows, etc).

Russell talked about the hockey event that's going to be happening in Town. He asked what sort of problems should be expected. Droney responded that parking was the first item, along with traffic, impact on Town infrastructure, possibility of ice breaking, and EMS service.

How would he handle a complaint against an officer? Droney said he would first listen; he wouldn't just dismiss it. Then he'd do some fact finding. He would then report back – in a timely fashion.

The matter of the distance from Enfield to Ashfield was raised. Droney said he had bought his house just before the value in real estate dropped. Enfield is about an hour away. He felt it was important to either live in Ashfield or close by. If he were offered the position he would definitely wish to work out some arrangements.

At 8:05 the formal portion of the interview was concluded so that persons could speak with Mr. Droney and he could have a tour of the station with Officer Wilder.

A motion was made to suspend the open meeting and reconvene in executive session to discuss negotiations with non-union personnel. A roll call vote was taken, with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Priscilla Phelps