

Cuyahoga Falls City Council
Minutes of the Public Affairs Committee Meeting
September 18, 2006

Members: Debbie Ritzinger, Chair
Diana Cola vecchio
Doug Flinn

Mrs. Ritzinger called the meeting to order at 8:06 p.m. All members were present.

The minutes of July 24, 2006 were approved as submitted.

Legislation Considered:

Temp. Ord. A-101

Discussion:

Temp. Ord. A-101

An ordinance amending the Codified Ordinances with the enactment of Chapter 907, titled "Use of Public Rights of Way", and declaring an emergency.

Mrs. Ritzinger said A-101 would be held per the request of the administration.

School Resource Officers

Mrs. Ritzinger said she had received several requests for a public discussion regarding the reduction of School Resource Officers.

Lori Thompson (1893 Issaquah St., Cuy. Falls) said she was disappointed to learn that the Police Department has reassigned the middle school resource officer to the high school. She believes the officer provides a positive role model and acts as a deterrent, and she would like the Police Chief to reconsider this decision. She is also curious as to why the canine unit has been eliminated.

Angie Bertka (1863 - 7th St., Cuy. Falls) said she would like to see a school resource officer at Bolich. While she understands the allocation of limited resources, she questions whether anyone has assessed the risks involved in pulling the SRO.

Kathy Moffet (2047 - 8th St., Cuy. Falls), a teacher at Bolich, said she believes the SRO is a vital component, promoting building safety and providing a role model for students.

Jenny Romano (1723 Dunlap Dr., Streetsboro), a teacher at Bolich, said she worked closely with officer Sim. She believes the SRO acts as a confidant for students, assists students with legal issues related to the choices they make, and provides safety information for the staff. The SRO is an integral and necessary part of the school system. She asked how one officer can meet the needs of 3,800 students in his care.

Matt Hiner (87 Washington Ave., Cuy. Falls) said he is the parent of an 8th grader at Bolich who is concerned about safety at the school. Removing the SRO does not promote a safe environment for students. Most school districts have SROs, and we should be no exception.

Rosalie Read (1941 - 12th St., Cuy. Falls) said she is a student at Bolich who feels safer with an SRO in the building.

Police Chief Conley said that every day, there are 8-12 officers patrolling the city who respond to calls from the schools very quickly. He is constantly assessing and re-evaluating the needs of the schools and the community. Fortunately, our schools do not have problems which require full-time police protection. He reviewed the policies of surrounding communities regarding SROs.

Jeff Graham (3459 Orchestra St., Cuy. Falls), Superintendent of Woodridge Schools, said he perceives two benefits to having an SRO. One is the improved relationship between the school administration and the Police Department. The other is the relationship between the students and Police Department. Safety does not appear to be an issue, since police response is excellent in our city. He understands the need for budget cuts and trusts Chief Conley's assessment of the situation.

Don Nelsch (2545 N. Haven Blvd., Cuy. Falls) said that four SROs cost the city about \$150,000 at the same time tying up four working cruisers. He questioned why the city should be responsible for providing "mentors" when the school district should have staff in place (e.g., guidance counselors) for that purpose.

Kathy Moffet said the SROs provide a level of prevention by their presence in the building that is invaluable. Students are citizens of the community who deserve to feel safe at school.

Mrs. Hummel said Council's primary job is to approve the budget. Council does not make administrative, personnel or policy decisions in City departments.

Mrs. Pyke thanked everyone for expressing their views.

Mrs. Ritzinger said she that while she sees great value in having an SRO on duty, she also understands the budgetary constraints facing the Police Department. She welcomes input from the public on this issue and thanked everyone for coming.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

