

**POLICE & FIRE COMMISSION
COUNCIL ROOM
118 W. FIFTH STREET
NEILLSVILLE, WI
MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2020
4:00 P.M.**

The Police and Fire commission met in the Council Room of City Hall, Mayor Murphy presiding. On roll call: Mayor Murphy, Allan Hoesly, Lowell Gesche, Robert Johnson and Jeremiah Bogdonovich present.

The minutes of the previous meetings (July 7 and August 17, 2020) were declared approved as filed with City Clerk

Mayor Murphy called for appearances.

Brad Lindner, Retired Chief of Police, stated that he is here on behalf of Chief Mankowski. Lindner stated that when Mankowski was hired he gave Mankowski a history of the Department and offered to help. They have met several times a week. He assisted in interviews looking for qualified candidates with small community values. He has not heard negative comments on Mankowski or the Department since Mankowski took over. He has discussed the issues and complaints received, there is no wrongdoing, there is no merit. Mankowski is doing the best he can with what he has. Also, Tim Voigt could not be here tonight, but he supports Mankowski.

Connie Opelt stated she lives outside the City, but Neillsville is her hometown. She doesn't know the allegations, she urged the Commission to not make any rash decision, investigate thoroughly. People want to be heard.

Frank Donahue, business owner, presented a petition with 96 signatures in support of Mankowski. Mankowski is doing an admirable job, he has brought the citizens and police department together, there is a wide division across the country. Mankowski comes into businesses, has a friendly discussion, he came here when most don't want to come to a small town. These 96 people don't want to lose him or end his career.

Jack Miller stated that he had dealt with the people who are complaining, if you complain, they had it in for you, the old chief did the same. Mankowski is the best thing the City ever done. Miller stated that someone on the Police and Fire Commission hangs out with the complainants, that person should excuse himself, walk out of the meeting.

Jerilyn St Amand stated she fully supports Mankowski, he is community minded and personable with people. The Commission has received these complaints, now they can

see how the citizens were treated by these two officers. She was personally involved in a complaint and felt intimidated, worried about repercussions, why should the Commission pacify these ex-officers.

Charles Glassbrenner, former Mayor, stated that he was Chair of the Commission when Mankowski was hired. Mankowski was told what we wanted done and to change the Police Department accordingly. Mankowski has done what we asked. Glassbrenner asked permission to stay for the closed session.

Daniel Clough, Council Member, stated Mankowski provides the Council with a monthly report, we hear from community members and the Council has budgetary oversight. Mankowski is doing a fine job. Clough understands there are complaints, take it seriously and investigate, the process needs to go through.

Diane Kren, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, stated that the Chamber does a lot with the Chief, our community businesses want to see our police involved. Mankowski is willing to help and has volunteered. Kren stated, put this to rest, stop the bullying, support the Chief.

Jon Counsell, retired Clark County Judge, stated that the City has had five different Chief of Police, some are better at their profession than others. Mankowski is one of the best – businesses, citizens and regular customers are happy being treated fairly, having things looked at and having things get done. Not everyone is happy, this is the process, bring it to an end sooner rather than later. Counsell stated that he had raised the bias issue, it is not going away. A Commission member served as a reference when someone was applying for a job – it should be addressed. For that person to participate in discussion and vote would affect the confidence in the outcome.

Andrea Krusche, local family business since 1952, born, raised and came back to Neillsville. The day she met a total stranger (Mankowski) he came into the business and asked questions about the community. That was the day he was interviewing for Chief. Mankowski has such a positive attitude, is friendly and outgoing. She teaches her children about bullying – it continues as adults. Mankowski is a positive asset to this community, don't let allegations drive him out, he has community support. Mankowski and his officers have talked with and reassured little children.

Jerilyn St Amand stated one officer discouraged his officer in public, they followed and intimidated people. Now the Commission knows what the citizens have been going through.

Frank Donahue stated that he had been badgered by a former officer, but had not done anything about it since it would have done no good at the time. Donahue requested to stay for the closed session.

Irving Schutte stated that we live in a scary world and officers need to de-escalate things. Mankowski and his officers walk a beat, they get to know people and people get to know the officers. It is frustrating, but Mankowski is doing a great job, the officers are involved in the community, the people look at the officers with respect. Schutte hoped the Commission makes the right decision.

Carl Noah stated that he supports the Chief, he lives alone and the Chief and officers look after him and a lot of senior citizens. Mankowski has done a good job rebuilding our community. Noah does not want to see him dismissed.

Julie Counsell, Council Member, stated she has received a lot of telephone calls and text messages in support of Mankowski. Mankowski has innovative ideas, new ways of looking at things. If he left, it would be a huge loss and we can't get another like him.

Barb Petkovsek stated that by looking at the agenda, complaints against the Police Chief is not enough specificity, she is not sure of the City's policy, who gets the complaint, is it a past employee, management has to be careful to not talk out of school, put the individuals under oath to tell the truth, if there is merit, investigate. The Commission wanted solid leadership, management, the Commission waited for someone to come along, someone to follow the law, yet provide mutual respect to people. Mankowski has met with business people, filled in overtime shifts. Petkovsek asked the Commission to seriously consider the complaints.

Mel Mueller stated that Mankowski deserves a round of applause for what he is doing.

Francis Phipps stated that she has only been in town a short time, but has only heard good things about Chief Mankowski. She has not heard anything good about the complaintants. You have a town who loves Chief Mankowski.

Mayor Murphy called three times for appearances. There being no further appearances, the meeting continued.

Mayor Murphy announced a closed session per Wis. Stats. 19.85(1)(b) for the purpose of considering the demotion, dismissal, licensing, discipline or tenure of a public employee or a person licensed by a board or commission in regard to complaints against the Police Chief and his probationary period, and may reconvene in open session.

Motion Johnson, second Gesche, to invite former Mayor Glassbrenner, City Attorney Wachsmuth, City Clerk-Treasurer Roehl, Chief of Police Mankowski, Attorney Josh Johanningmeier and Consultant Michael Gorham to remain for the closed session. All Aye.

Motion Gesche, second Johnson to go into closed session per Wis. Stats. 19.85(1)(b) for the purpose of considering the demotion, dismissal, licensing, discipline or tenure of a public employee or a person licensed by a board or commission in regard to complaints against the Police Chief and his probationary period, and may reconvene in open session. On roll call: Gesche – Aye, Johnson – Aye, Bogdonovich – Aye, Hoesly – Aye. 4 – Aye, 0 – Nay, Motion carried.

CLOSED SESSION

Motion Gesche, second Johnson, to adjourn in closed session. All Aye.

Diane L. Murphy, Mayor

Rex R. Roehl, Clerk