

BOARD OF FIRE AND POLICE COMMISSION
February 5, 2025
8:30 a.m.
City Hall, 419 Fulton Street, Room 404, Peoria, Illinois

ROLL CALL

The Board of Fire & Police Commission meeting was called to order by Chairperson Thomas Burke
Commissioner's present: Thomas Burke, William Spears, Kelly Petersen, Mickeisha Armstrong, Pastor Marvin Hightower, Barry Anderson and Terry Cooper
Others present: Affirmative Employment Specialist Debra Bush, Police Captain John Briggs, Police Officer Christopher Collins, Police Officer Ciara Barker, Police Sergeant Brian Richards, Fire Chief Shawn Sollberger, Assistant Fire Chief Tony Cummings, Attorney Masum Perkins and Criminal Justice Reporter Zach Roth, Journal Star

Commission Chairman Thomas Burke called the meeting to order.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Burke asked for the approval of the minutes.

Terry Cooper motioned to approve the minutes of the regular meetings of December 4, 2024 and January 7, 2025, meeting; seconded by Barry Anderson; all approved 7-0.

COMMUNICATIONS

Chairman Burke read the communications and asked for the approval of the communications.

- A. **Letter of Commendation** – Police Officer Amanda Chalus
- B. **Promotion** – Permanent Promotion of Police Officer Aaron Watkins to Police Sergeant effective January 19, 2025 due to the retirement of Matt Mocilan

Kelly Petersen motioned to receive and file the communications as presented; seconded by Mickeisha Armstrong; all approved 7-0.

OLD BUSINESS

A. Timeline and Recruiting Efforts

Fire Chief Shawn Sollberger passed out information from the City of Peoria Fire Department Recruitment Committee.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that they will be hiring four applicants off of the current hiring list to fill current vacancies for the February class.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that Assistant Fire Chief Tony Cummings was working with Debra Bush to get a lease signed at the old Marshalls building to conduct the CPAT testing that will start in April and end in June.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated that the written examination would be in July with the pool completed by August.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings said the company should be done with the lease in the next few weeks and then the information could be sent out regarding the upcoming testing process.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that they implemented a Fitness Team with the Recruitment Committee in January 2025. The first training session was Tuesday, February 4, 2025, with eight participants attending.

The training session will continue every Tuesday and Thursday from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. through the spring and summer at the Fire Station 16 across the street from the Training Tower.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that the communication and outreach Debra Bush does for the Fire and Police departments to get them into the high schools and various job and career fairs throughout the region is very much appreciated.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that they are currently signed up to attend career fairs at University of Illinois, Limestone High School, Illinois Central College and the Air Guard.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated that on the Interview Now platform, they have 119 candidates that they reach out to on a regular basis.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that the new Recruitment Committee is very diverse and focused with high energy on the recruitment process.

Police Officer Chris Collins passed out the Recruitment Team December 2024 and January 2025 report.

Sergeant Richards stated that there are currently 11 Police Recruits at PTI, seven Recruits in Rookie School and eight Recruits in the field training program.

Sergeant Richards stated that the written and POWER test was completed in January and out of the 64 candidates eligible; 46 applicants went through the interview process with the department and commission.

Police Officer Ciara Barker went over the following information on the report that was handed out:

Community Engagement

- Holidays with Heroes
- PAAPL Bike Giveaway
- Birthday Buddies

Networking / Job Fairs

- UIC Winter Internship Fair
- Open House / Hiring Expo
- “Recruiting & Retention for the Next Generation” Conference – Wheaton, IL

Mentoring & Peer Support

- Intern Olivia Hank – WIU Spring 2025
- Intern Tahra Davis – Alabama A&M Spring 2025
- Intern Taylor Abatangelo – Bradley University Spring 2025
- Intern Jalexis Barrett – SIU Carbondale Summer 2025

Applicant Engagement

- Physical Fitness Team – 3X per week – There has been a very good turnout for these practices.
- New Hire Orientation – January 8 and January 11
- Mock Interviews – January 27 and January 28 – Many candidates took advantage of these interviews.

Officer Collins stated that their fitness team is family friendly which means the candidates can bring their family members and friends to the workouts. This gives others the opportunity to see what is actually involved in becoming a Police Officer.

Commissioner Mickeisha Armstrong commended the department for allowing it to be family friendly and reach the generational opportunity for the candidates.

Vice Chairman Bill Spears also commended the department because he saw such a diverse group attending the orientation, which was the most he has seen.

B. Fire and Police Commission Rules Discussion

Chairman Burke stated they would be talking specifically about the polygraph process in the Fire and Police Commission Rules.

Chairman Burke stated that they were open to ideas on how to move forward with the polygraph process making it a tool.

Debra Bush passed out copies of the Fire and Police Commission Rules.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that he felt the polygraph examination should be used as a tool and reference on a case-by-case basis.

Police Captain John Briggs stated that the Police Department has done some research on comparable cities that do still use polygraphs and Normal, Bloomington and Peoria.

Police Captain John Briggs stated the agencies that don't use polygraphs are Decatur, Rockford, Springfield, Urbana, Rock Island and Moline.

Debra Bush reviewed the results on the percentages of applicants that passed the polygraph examinations from 2021 to 2024, and the information was as follows:

2021 – Police (25 tests) – 1 failed – 96% passed
Fire (4 tests) – 0 failed – 100% passed

2022 – Police (45 tests) – 6 failed – 87% passed
Fire (24 tests) – 3 failed – 88% passed

2023 - Police (54 tests) – 6 failed – 89% passed
Fire (25 tests) – 1 failed – 96% passed

2024 - Police (71 tests) – 14 failed – 81% passed
Fire (12 tests) – 1 failed – 92% passed

Commissioner Kelly Petersen stated that he felt they should get rid of the polygraph examination all together instead of using it as a tool.

Chairman Burke asked if the cities that don't use the polygraph examination, it is attracting more candidates due to the fact that they don't have a polygraph examination.

Captain Briggs stated that they did not get into that much detail when they talked with the different cities, but they can do that research if needed.

Police Captain stated that he felt that the Chief would want to either get rid of the polygraph examination or keep it as is and not use it as a tool.

Human Resources Director Ed Hopkins stated that in some examples over the years, people admit to some crazy stuff in their polygraph, but was never caught or convicted of it and it shows up as an admission I their polygraph and it would not have been caught in a background investigation.

Captain Briggs gave an example of a Police candidate that played football, went to college and had a good financial background, but failed the polygraph twice in the area of “have you committed a serious crime.”

Captain Briggs stated that if we hired this candidate we would not have known about the crime since he was not arrested, and it would have not come out in the background.

Commissioner Marvin Hightower stated that most people have done some things in their past when they were younger, and it shouldn't be held against them later in life, so he was in favor of getting rid of the polygraph examination.

Mr. Hopkins stated that during the polygraph, they are given a timeline of in the past five years have you done something and you would be telling the truth especially if you had done something about 10 years ago, which would not be counted against the person.

Mr. Hopkins stated that from a time and distance, what would be satisfactory for the Commission and departments.

Commissioner Mickeisha Armstrong stated that the culture norms have been reset and is culturally acceptable to smoke weed and acceptable to be a different level of coolness.

Commissioner Armstrong stated that it is not culturally acceptable for the Commission to compromise on the characteristics on who we want to hire for Police and Fire.

Commissioner Armstrong stated we need to make sure that the integrity is still maintained which is why they sit on this commission.

Commissioner Armstrong stated that it is the duty of the Commission, as citizens, to make sure they are putting that best people on the street that has good character, honesty, trustworthy, integrity, etc.

Commissioner Armstrong stated that the reason they were having this conversation was not because there have been normalized issues but talking about exceptions and not situations where the polygraph is a problem.

Commissioner Armstrong stated that she does not see the Commission making a modification to policy that has been in place for decades because they are trying to solve a problem and modify the rules for some exceptions.

Commissioner Armstrong stated that by implementing these changes or modifications, it could look as though they are showing favoritism, impartiality and being inconsistent and she does not see how she could support a modification to the policy.

Vice Chairperson Spears felt as though the polygraph examiner should come to the meeting to discuss the polygraph and see what changes he could make.

Commissioner Terry Cooper stated that he would be interested in knowing when and why the departments stopped using the polygraph examinations.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that he would check with the other departments and find out when they stopped using them and why and give the report to the Commission at the next meeting.

Debra Bush stated that she would talk with Steve Woody the polygraph examiner and have him come and talk with the Commission.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that he would like for Debra Bush to contact Tom Campion regarding meeting with the Fire and Police Departments to do an analysis on the Police Recruit and Firefighter positions.

Debra Bush stated that she would also contact Dr. Campion to see about getting the meetings scheduled.

Commissioner Petersen stated that he would like to know the financial cost of the polygraph examinations.

Commissioner Petersen stated that even after hearing what others had to say about the polygraph examination, he was still in favor of getting rid of the polygraph examination.

Vice Chairperson Spears stated that the polygraph could still be done, but is would only be seen by the Police Department to use, which would be the tool to help with the background.

Captain Briggs stated that he didn't think that moving the polygraph to the department to review with the background would be any different than the process we have right now.

Captain Briggs stated that if a candidate wasn't truthful, it would be an instant disqualifier for the candidate, and they would be removed from the process.

Vice Chairperson Spears motioned to table the discussion of the polygraph examination until the polygraph examiner talks to the Commission; seconded Barry Anderson; all approved 7-0.

Attorney Perkins stated that she would be against providing the cost spent to take the polygraph examinations because they would be paid no matter the cost and that the cost should not be a factor in making the decision to keep or get rid of the doing the polygraph examinations.

Commissioner Petersen stated that he would take that request off the table.

ADJOURN TO EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mikeisha Armstrong moved to adjourn to Executive Session under 2c (1) of the Open Meetings Acts, seconded by Terry Cooper; all approved 7-0.

RECONVENE TO REGULAR SESSION

NEW BUSINESS

Chairperson Burke stated that while in Executive Session they reviewed the minutes from the Regular Meetings November 6, 2024, and December 4, 2024, and the minutes from November 6, 2024, meeting are okay to be released and the minutes from the December 4, 2024, meeting are not to be released per Attorney Perkins.

Bill Spears moved to approve the Executive Session minutes from the Regular Meeting November 6, 2024, and they are okay to be released and from the Regular Meeting December 4, 2024, not to be released per the Attorney Masum Perkins; seconded by Mikeshia Armstrong; all approved 7-0.

Chairperson Burke stated that while in Executive Session they reviewed the Police Recruit May 2025 Eligibility Pool, and it will be approved as presented.

Mikeisha Armstrong moved to approve the Police Recruit May 2025 Eligibility Pool as presented; seconded by Pastor Marvin Hightower; all approved 7-0.

ADJOURN MEETING

There being no further business, Terry Cooper moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Barry Anderson; all approved 7-0.

Submitted by: Debra D. Bush
Affirmative Employment Specialist

APPROVED:

Thomas Burke, Chairperson

William Spears, Vice Chairperson

Mickeisha Armstrong, Secretary

Kelly Petersen, Member

Barry Anderson, Member

Terry Cooper, Member

Pastor Marvin Hightower, Member