

BOARD OF FIRE AND POLICE COMMISSION
March 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, Mickeisha Armstrong, Pastor Marvin Hightower, Barry Anderson and Terry Cooper

Commissioner's Absent: Kelly Petersen

Others present: Affirmative Employment Specialist Debra Bush, Human Resources Director Ed Hopkins, Police Chief Eric Echevarria, Police Captain John Briggs, Police Sergeant Brian Richards, Fire Chief Shawn Sollberger, Assistant Fire Chief Tony Cummings, Firefighter William Boudreau, Firefighter Justyn Parker, Firefighter Marcus Simmons, Attorney Masum Perkins, Attorney Isabella France, Polygraph Examiner Steve Woody, All Purpose Polygraph, 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.

Pastor Marvin Hightower motioned to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of February 5, 2025; seconded by Terry Cooper; all approved 6-0.

Chairman Burke introduced Steve Woody, Polygraph Examiner from All Purpose Polygraph to the Commission and asked him to speak to the Commission regarding the polygraph examination process.

Mr. Woody asked the Commission if there were any specific questions they had regarding the process, which there were none at that time.

Mr. Woody stated that he has a comfortable chair that the applicants sit in due to them being very nervous when they come for the examination.

Mr. Woody stated that there were specific areas that all polygraphs cover, which were theft, falsification of documents, drug use and crime use.

Mr. Woody stated that he wants to provide the City with the best possible questions to make sure we get the information we are looking for from the candidates.

Mr. Woody stated that he does ask basic standardized questions to agencies but feels there are other areas he could be covering if needed.

Police Chief Eric Echevarria stated that he felt that without the polygraph examination, the extensive background would bring out the things normally found in the polygraph in the background investigation.

Police Chief Echevarria stated that he was always looking for what we should do to lower the barriers of entry into the field of law enforcement.

Police Chief Echevarria stated that there are so many steps to get an officer hired. So, we need to look at what we are doing that makes sense in the hiring process and change what we can to make the process move more quickly.

Police Chief Echevarria stated that he was thinking about the following:

1. Can we take this out of the process,
2. Does this cause more work for Debra Bush to schedule the examinations

Police Chief Echevarria stated that we are not losing a large percentage due to not passing the polygraph examination.

Pastor Hightower asked how accurate the polygraph examination was and the equipment he uses.

Mr. Woody stated that the polygraph is accurate somewhere between 88% to 92% and his equipment was very accurate plus it is calibrated every day.

Mr. Woody stated that the EPA originally developed the questions to be used for the polygraph due to them doing the surveys from Police departments to see what they needed.

Mr. Woody stated that the questions don't have to be used, but any questions that are created must not cause any concerns in the areas of ADA, etc.

Mr. Woody spoke more regarding the polygraph examination process and the Commission thanked him for coming to give them more information.

COMMUNICATIONS

There were no communications received.

OLD BUSINESS

A. Timeline and Recruiting Efforts

Sergeant Brian Richards passed out the Peoria Police Department May 2025 Applicant Data report.

Sergeant Richards stated that they will have 11 Police Recruit candidates graduate from the Police Training Institute in April.

Sergeant Richards stated that they will have a new group of candidates that will be starting in May.

Sergeant Richards stated that there was a total of 98 applicants for May 2025 and that 41 are currently still in the hiring/testing process after passing the written and POWER test.

Sergeant Richards stated that the testing process is currently in the polygraph, psychological and background phase, but there are 38 left in the process and one lateral candidate.

Assistant Fire Chief Tony Cummings passed out the February 2025 Fire Department Recruitment Report.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated that they have hired five off the current list of which four were EMT-B's and one paramedic.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated that they will be conducting it testing process earlier in 2025 and the actual dates and times will be coming out soon.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated that they will be using the old Marshalls building to conduct the CPAT testing.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated the Fire department was excited about expanding the apprenticeship program from three Apprentices to six.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated that they currently have three Fire Apprentices and will be interviewing in March and hope to onboard three new Apprentices between April to June.

Police Sergeant Richards asked what do the Fire Apprentices learn in their position.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated that they participate in the Academy and learn 3 Modules, A (Riding out on the machines.), B (Get them in gear.), and C (Haz Mat) and then they are put in the EMT-B class.

Fire Chief Shawn Sollberger stated that once they complete the modules and EMT-B class, they would not have to do these all over again when they hired as a Firefighter and go to the Academy.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated the Apprentices would be able to hit the ground running to become a Firefighter after their apprenticeship ends.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated that they currently have an Apprentice going through the hiring process right now and we hope that he would be their success story.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated that the Sound Off program was a huge success with the early education of all 3rd grade students in the City of Peoria on fire safety.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings stated that the Fitness Team implementation is going extremely well, and the numbers continue to grow.

Assistant Fire Chief Cummings introduced members of the Recruitment and Fitness Teams that attended the meeting, Firefighters Bill Boudreau, Justin Parker, and Mark Simmons.

Firefighter Justin Parker, Fitness Team Member, stated that have been doing the Fitness Team on Tuesday and Thursday evenings for the CPAT test with about 10 to 12 coming consistently.

Firefighter Parker stated they put the candidates through job related workouts for about an hour and they will continue this until the testing process begins.

Fire Chief Sollberger passed out the Peoria Fire Department Demographic Report for March 2025.

The statistics were as follows:

- 186 active suppression and 40-hour Fire personnel
- 172 amongst 3 shifts including Battalion Chiefs
- 14 20-hour personnel between Central and the Tower with 7.1% diversity
- 51 Captains across 3 shifts
- 51 Engineers across 3 shifts
- 66 Firefighter across 3 shifts
- 5 female suppression personnel and one Management – total of 6
- 27 minorities (15.4%)
- 27 minorities + 6 female Firefighters (17.7%)

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that Lori Baxter will be retiring soon, but she promises to come back and help after a little while of begin off.

Fire Chief Sollberger gave out 2025 Fire calendars that show various pictures taken by Dr. Clark, who always takes pictures of fire department fires, activities, etc., which he has done for over 15 years.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that they were excited about the 150 years (1875-2025) of service, which he gave out lapel pins to the Commission.

B. Review of Fire and Police Commission Rules – Polygraph Examinations

Fire Chief Sollberger passed out the data collected for polygraph usage from surrounding cities and after research and data provided from various fire departments throughout the State of Illinois, the information is shown below:

CITY	POLYGRAPH	REASON
1. EAST PEORIA	YES	Mirrored the Peoria process
2. JACKSONVILLE	NO	Never used it
3. QUINCY	YES	Always used it
4. SPRINGFIELD	NO	Never used it-ext background
5. DECATUR	NO	Not in 30 years
6. SULLIVAN	NO	Background and psych only
7. NORMAL	YES	Poly and psych
8. BLOOMINGTON	NO	Stopped 2023. Seamless
9. CHAMPAIGN	NO	Stopped 20 years ago
10. URBANA	NO	Stopped 20 years ago
11. EFFINGHAM	NO	Never used it.
12. GALESBURG	YES	Since 1999
13. ROCKFORD	NO	Stopped in 2001
14. JOLIET	NO	Stopped 10 years ago
15. NAPERVILLE	NO	Never used it.

11 out of 15 do NOT use the polygraph examination for preemployment or any onboarding process.
73%

Police Captain John Briggs also did some research and Champaign, Decatur, Rockford, Springfield, Urbana, Rock Island, Moline do not use polygraphs.

Police Captain John Briggs stated that Rockford uses an Impulse Test, which is an exam that predicts an applicant's impulsive behavior tendencies.

Chairperson Burke asked for thoughts from the Commissioners, which were as follows:

1. Pastor Hightower – When he listed to Mr. Woody, it left more gray areas than black and white, which was something to consider.
2. Commissioner Bill Spears – It is a tool, and we should continue to use the polygraph examination.
3. Commissioner Terry Cooper – I think that as far as streamlining, a quicker process would work.
4. Commissioner Barry Anderson – He felt that it was a tool to get further information.
5. Commissioner Mickeisha Armstrong – He liked the way the Police Chief explained his position, which is good for us to make sure the process we are using is working or needs to be changed occasionally. She didn't see that there was a problem that needed to be fixed, so the polygraph is a tool that is validated.

Attorney Masum Perkins asked Debra Bush how much time would it save to not use the polygraph examination.

Debra Bush stated that it wouldn't really change the time frame since she schedules the polygraph and psychological appointments at the same time; therefore, only one phone is made at that time to the applicant.

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Debra Bush stated that Mr. Woody has been able schedule any appointments I need very quickly and get the results back to me by the next day.

Attorney Perkins asked Debra Bush to get relevant questions Mr. Woody uses for the polygraph examination to take a deeper look at the questions that are currently being asked.

Debra Bush stated that she will make that request and put this topic on the agenda for the April meeting.

Fire Chief Sollberger stated that he thinks the process needs to be analyzed as to what we are doing with the polygraph.

Police Chief Echevarria stated that he was okay with the polygraph, but we need to look at the process, but if we are going to keep something, we can't change the way we use it.

Police Chief Echevarria stated that if we have it and use it as we have been, or we don't have it and not use it at all to avoid potential problems.

Police Chief Echevarria stated that we don't lose many due to the polygraph examination, but a majority due to the backgrounds.

Commissioner Armstrong stated that if there is a process, then there is a process because if you start making modifications it could possibly show favoritism over one candidate to another and liabilities, which was where we don't want to be.

Pastor Hightower stated that he agreed with the idea the Police Chief had to review the process from time to time, which would keep us aware on the changing times.

Attorney Perkins introduced the newest Attorney to the Legal Department who was Isabella France, who has been practicing for two years, and the Commission welcomed her to the meeting.

ADJOURN TO EXECUTIVE SESSION

Bill Spears moved to adjourn to Executive Session under 2c (1) of the Open Meetings Acts, seconded by Mikeisha Armstrong; all approved 6-0.

RECONVENE TO REGULAR SESSION

NEW BUSINESS

Chairperson Burke stated that while in Executive Session they reviewed the minutes from the Regular Meeting February 5, 2025, and are not to be released per Attorney Perkins.

Bill Spears moved to approve the Executive Session minutes from the Regular Meeting February 5, 2025, and are not to be released per the Attorney Masum Perkins; seconded by Terry Cooper; all approved 6-0.

Chairperson Burke stated that while in Executive Session they reviewed the Recommendation to hire Police Recruits, and it will be approved as presented.

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Mikeisha Armstrong moved to approve the Recommendation to hire Police Recruits as presented; seconded by Terry Cooper; all approved 6-0.

Chairperson Burke stated that while in Executive Session they reviewed the Recommendation to hire Lateral Police Recruits, and it will be approved as presented.

Bill Spears moved to approve the Recommendation to hire Lateral Police Recruits as presented; seconded by Terry Cooper; all approved 6-0.

Chairperson Burke stated that while in Executive Session they reviewed the Police Recruit polygraphs and candidates P25-008 and P25-026 will have their offers of employment withdrawn due to the examiner not being able to make an opinion, which means they will have the opportunity to retake a second polygraph at their own expense with the examiner of our choice.

Bill Spears moved to withdraw the offers of employment from Police Recruit candidates P25-008 and P25-026 due to no opinion found by the examiner with the opportunity to retake a second polygraph at their own expense with the examiner of our choice; seconded by Barry Anderson; all approved 6-0.

Chairperson Burke stated also Police Recruit candidate P25-035 will have their offer of employment withdrawn due to admissions and there is no appeal process.

Mickeisha Armstrong moved to withdraw the offer of employment from Police Recruit candidate P25-035 due to admissions with no appeal process; seconded by Bill Spears; all approved 6-0.

Chairperson Burke stated that Police Recruit candidates P25-001, P25-002, P25-003, P25-004, P25-005, P25-006, P25-007, P25-009, P25-010, P25-011, P25-012, P25-013, P25-014, P25-015, P25-016, P25-017, P25-018, P25-019, P25-020, P25-021, P25-022, P25-023, P25-024, P25-025, P25-027, P25-028, P25-029, P25-030, P25-031, P25-032, P25-033, P25-034, P25-035, P25-036, P25-037 and P25-038 will continue in the process.

Chairperson Burke stated that while in Executive Session they reviewed the lateral Police Recruit polygraph examination and PL25-001 will continue in the process.

Chairperson Burke stated that while in Executive Session they reviewed the Firefighter polygraph examinations and F25-001, F25-002, F25-003, and F25-004 will continue in the process.

ADJOURN MEETING

There being no further business, Mickeisha Armstrong moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Terry Cooper; all approved 6-0.

Submitted by: Debra D. Bush
Senior Human Resources Specialist

APPROVED:

Thomas Burke, Chairperson

William Spears, Vice Chairperson

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Mickeisha Armstrong, Secretary

Pastor Marvin Hightower, Member

Barry Anderson, Member

Terry Cooper, Member