

SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING

December 3, 2024

The Safety Committee of Chardon City Council met on Tuesday, December 3, 2024 at 3:00 p.m. in Conference Room A of the Chardon Municipal Center.

Andrew Blackley, Chairman of Safety Committee presiding.

Members of Safety Committee present: Andrew Blackley, Deborah Chuha.

Others present: Police Chief Scott Niehus, Lt. Matt Delisa, City Manager Randy Sharpe, Clerk of Council Amy Day, Fire Chief Justin Geiss, Finance Director Mark Iacofano, Mayor Christopher Grau, David Lelko, Richard Gahr.

Mr. Blackley called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mrs. Chuha moved and Mr. Blackley seconded to approve the minutes of the Safety Committee from April 24, 2024. Upon voice vote the motion passed unanimously.

Regarding traffic safety concerns, Mr. Blackley introduced Richard Gahr of 329 Chardon Avenue, who had written a letter to Council regarding various traffic safety concerns he has encountered.

Mr. Gahr addressed the Committee and recounted experiences he has had at the Center Street/Fifth Avenue intersection with vehicles running red lights and asked about the possibility of a red light camera at that intersection. Mr. Gahr also expressed his concern with the intersection of Chardon Avenue/Basquin Drive, where he resides. He stated that vehicles are failing to come to a stop from each direction. He added that he understands the difficulty in the police seeing the traffic violations, because drivers will not make a violation if they see police in the area.

Chief Niehus stated that the Center Street/Fifth Avenue intersection is a high-traffic area. Tickets are written there and the accidents are mostly assured clear distance incidents. He can do some research and find out how many crashes are at the area. Figures for the annual report will be run in the upcoming weeks. He suggested that drivers should approach this intersection defensively.

Mr. Blackley stated that he sees drivers that are not paying attention in general.

Chief Niehus stated that in recent years, drivers have become more aggressive and are distracted.

Mr. Blackley asked about the legality of red light cameras as he thought that red light cameras had to be monitored by an officer at all times and asked how the cameras in Gates Mills are permitted.

Chief Niehus stated that Gates Mills has a photo enforcement device that is run through a third party, and he does not know about the legalities of this device. They are civil citations. For red light cameras as well, he would have to do research. In the City, to write most violations, the act has to be observed.

Mr. Blackley asked how many patrol vehicles are on each shift.

Chief Niehus stated that they are currently at two but are trying to get to three (one sergeant and two officers).

Mr. Blackley asked if officers are stationary or are they on the move.

Chief Niehus stated that in between calls for service, the officers are completing reports for the calls and are spending more time with mental health-related instances.

Lt. Delisa stated that officers are also spending time interacting with elderly residents.

Mr. Blackley asked if the future Meijer will require additional police personnel.

Chief Niehus stated that the City's growth will require additional police at some point.

Mr. Blackley asked what the City can do to address Mr. Gahr's complaints.

Chief Niehus stated that the department can provide some additional attention at the Center Street/Fifth Avenue intersection to see if makes a difference. He noted that what happens there however, happens at many intersections.

Chief Niehus also explained what can be done at Basquin and Chardon Ave., noting that the officers have made some stops in the area in recent weeks. He stated that since many of the offenders are students, the department can contact the school to make an announcement. They can monitor the area during school day and afternoons, but noted that can be challenging to monitor the area when it is residents making the traffic violations.

Mr. Gahr stated that the attitude of residents is that if they don't see anyone at the intersection, they do not stop.

Mr. Gahr then reviewed his displeasure with vehicles parked on the front lawn or streets but aren't ticketed. He explained a situation where someone has employees parking on their lawn in a residential area and a car has been for sale in a yard for over a month. He noted when he complained about it to the police, he was told that the City's existing legislation is vague and not enforceable.

Chief Niehus stated that the parking on the lawn was made a violation because of the unsightliness. He added that the violations are complaint-driven, noting that the legislation is enforceable.

Mr. Blackley stated that the violations should be reported to the police department and some coordination should take place between the police and zoning to report business activity in residential areas.

Discussion occurred regarding when the legislation for parking on lawns was initially presented to Council, it was not complaint-driven.

Mr. Sharpe stated that cars parked on the lawn for sale are handled by the zoning inspector. Derelict cars are addressed through coordinated efforts of the zoning and police departments and parking violations are a police department issue. He noted that there is no parking on City streets at any time.

Chief Niehus stated that the department tries to be reasonable in residential areas depending on the situation.

Mr. Gahr complained about school drop-off and pickup at Maple Elementary School.

Mr. Blackley stated that given the City's resources, staff is doing the best they can, but will try to address Mr. Gahr's concerns.

Regarding crosswalk safety, Mr. Blackley reported that a resident had attended a Council meeting and asked Council to look into crosswalk safety, especially around the Square and suggested a flag system be considered. He noted that crossing guards are no longer used as they once were.

Mrs. Day stated that the resident has not provided any information about the flags, and was invited to attend the Committee meeting to provide more information.

Mr. Blackley stated that he did not support children using this system to cross the street to get to Park Elementary.

Chief Niehus stated that this issue was initiated because of parents who dropped off students near the Square and had their students walk to Park Elementary.

Mr. Blackley asked that the Law Director be consulted to inquire about the City's liability in the case of injury if someone was put at the crosswalk to assist with pedestrian crossing, and asked if the City or school have a responsibility to have crossing guards.

Mr. Sharpe reported that a rapid rectangular flashing beacon that the City purchased was recently installed by the school district to connect the student parking lot to the high school. He noted that a school board member had inquired about adding more at E. Park Street/Short Court and Chardon Ave/North Street. He stated that the City's traffic engineer had explained that there are not standards for their installation. It is up to each community. He stated that they can be looked into and added to the City's CIP if Council feels they are warranted. He noted that if they are put everywhere, they could lose their effectiveness.

Mayor Grau asked what the Committee wanted to do with the crosswalk flag request.

Mr. Blackley stated that he considers the topic to be open to be looked at once more information is received. He would like the Law Director to address the legality of these sort of devices and if the City is interested in pursuing them from a liability standpoint.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - none.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Chief Geiss reported on the passage of the Fire Levy.

Mr. Blackley inquired about the status of the update of the Emergency Operations Plan.

Chief Niehus stated that there are a few areas of the plan that need updated.

Mayor Grau and Mr. Blackley offered to assist with this task when Chief Niehus is ready.

Chief Niehus reported on the City's award of the AAA 2024 Platinum award for traffic safety.

Lt. Delisa further described the extensive amount of work that went into the submission for the award.

Chief Niehus reported on an initiative petition on the Ohio ballot to eliminate qualified immunity for public officials. He explained that this is concerning and would be detrimental to the department if it is passed because it opens the door for lawsuits against the City and/or officers for instances that are not clearly established.

Chief Geiss reported that the Department is in the process of applying for an additional grant for a replacement ladder truck.

Chief Geiss reported that the Fire Department was approached by Geauga Co. Catholic Pro-life Coalition who has offered to donate a Safe Haven Baby Box installed in the fire station. Safe Haven Boxes are a place for mothers to anonymously relinquish their babies. The boxes are alarmed and when opened, a call is placed to 9-1-1. The Coalition has offered to cover the cost for installation and monitoring for the first 5 years, at a cost of \$1,200 per year. He stated that the boxes are installed in an exterior wall and he feels that the best location is the exterior wall of the fire station that faces the alley. The Fire Department is willing to cover the monitoring fee after the five-year period. There is no other agency in the area that offers this service, and he is supportive of the idea. He has asked for City approval since the Fire Station is owned by the City. He noted that there is an option for a camera on the box.

Mr. Blackley stated that he is in favor of it, but asked that the Law Director provide input on whether a camera should be added to the box, and what issues there may be for use of City property.

Chief Geiss stated that before proceeding, the City's Law Director should also approve the agreement and Council would have to authorize the alteration of the building.

The Fire Chief stated that he would provide information to the Law Director, and would discuss who would enter into the contract since the City owns the building but the Fire Department would eventually take over the monitoring.

Mayor Grau stated that if the information is not ready for December, it can go to Council in January.

Mr. Blackley concurred.

ADJOURN

Mrs. Chuha moved and Mr. Blackley seconded to adjourn. Upon voice vote the motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 4:44 p.m.

Attest:

Amy Day
Clerk of Council