

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
January 22, 2024

The January 22, 2024 City Council work session was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 20600 City Center Blvd. Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois.

The following Council members were present: Mayor Raymond Soliman, City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall, City Treasurer Glen Conklin, Alderman Scott Dyke, Alderman John Vershay, Alderman Darrell Jefferson, Alderwoman Claudia Gazal, Alderperson Tina Oberlin, Alderman Mark Cipiti, Alderman Nate Albert, Alderman Joe Kubal.

Also present were: Police Chief Ed Clark, City Engineer Ron Wiedeman, Public Works Director Blaine Kline, Interim Planner Maura Rigoni, Community Development Director Ron Mentzer, Building Commissioner Don Seeman, City Attorney Mike Stiff.

Absent were: Finance Director Lisa Banovetz.

TOPIC: LTFD Training/Maintenance Facility

Mayor Raymond Soliman announced that we have several guests from the Lockport Fire Protection District in the audience tonight to discuss the Lockport Fire District Training Center. Mayor Soliman introduced Lockport Fire Chief John O'Connor, Division Chief of Training Dave Izquierdo, and Deputy Fire Chief Frank Blaskey.

Fire Chief O'Connor approached the podium and gave a presentation on the concept for the training center on Division Street. This is a project that they have been dreaming of for the past twenty years so that they can have a dedicated training facility for the fire fighters. He stated that the presentation is based off their mission and vision and is why they need a training facility of this size. He then read off their Mission and Vision: To effectively provide professional, caring emergency service to those in need with courage, honor, and commitment and to continually improve our services through community interaction, progressive training, and utilizing latest technologies. We will be ready, able, and qualified to respond to all public safety needs. He explained public safety needs have expanded in the last twenty years. It used to be fire and Emergency Management Services and now it has expanded to technical rescue, water rescue, search and rescue, hazardous materials, fire investigation and all these matters they need to be subject experts. These calls are high risk low frequency type of emergencies and the only way to be proficient is with training.

He explained that they have conducted a SWOT analysis which is strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This analysis has identified some weaknesses within the fire district and some of the weaknesses were: lack of dedicated training facility, lack of live fire training, not enough training on basic firefighting of auto extraction, hands on physical training, standalone vehicle maintenance facility, and vehicle maintenance department for outstanding repairs. They currently do their practical training at the old convent in Lockport owned by St. Joe's Church which was an abandon building that they use for training now.

The property was attained through the State of Illinois and is on Stateville property and is thirteen acres. The property is centrally located to the fire department since they will still be on duty while doing the training.

There will be a training maintenance facility building with parking for over one hundred vehicles, there will be a driver's course, fuel depot, and extra emergency vehicle storage. There will also be a classroom for about one hundred people, locker rooms, office space, storage, and six drive through bays with twelve bays for vehicle maintenance. They currently take on vehicle maintenance for Homer Fire, and Channahon Fire, would like to take on Wilmington Fire but with the current situation there is no space but with more bays they can expand their vehicle maintenance program.

It was stated that the training center needs to be four stories. The two top stories on the four-story center will be empty in case the police would like to come in and do room cleaning. (Short video was shown on the training center and explanation of the building was given with the video).

Chief O'Connor commented that they wanted to focus on the training of their fire personnel and have room to grow for the next fifty years. He explained that the public safety departments are on many calls together and work together and that it would be ideal if they could train together and be able to provide better services to the community.

Chief O'Connor also explained that there is concern about a gun range in Crest Hill but there are four arson investigators who have side arm pieces and are sworn officers and have arresting powers. These officers need to be qualified every year and they had thought of a later phase to have a small gun range since there is room to do so and fulfill all the training needs. It was then discussed that why not have Romeville Police, Lockport Police, and Crest Hill Police utilize this as well.

He also commented that Lockport Police had desire to have a gun range but that had fallen through. It was then suggested to work together where Fire Protection has the land, and they had the funding. Chief O'Connor commented that they want all their public safety partners to be able to utilize the facility and not just the gun range and work together with other police departments for a safe gun range.

Chief O'Connor commented that another partnership could be with Tri-River Police Training Region and the Director Brad Hertzmann was there to explain what Tri River is responsible for. It was commented that Tri River Police Training Region is responsible for all the continuing education for police in a three-county area and is currently held out of the Plainfield Police Department. It was stated that is a nice partnership with the Plainfield Police Department but there are challenges. Some of the challenges are gaining access to the building, space, and they must share the training classroom with the police. Chief O'Connor commented that if they can build their new facility, they could accommodate Tri River and they could have a classroom for thirty-five students, four offices, kitchen type facility, I.T. Room, and a dedicated entrance for Tri River. Tri River would provide lease payments to the fire department, and they would run all the continued education out of the new facility in Crest Hill.

Brad Hertzmann approached the podium and stated that this would be the first fire and police training facility in the State of Illinois. He commented that this facility will give

them an opportunity to offer several types of training that is a major part of what the officers go through. This would give us the opportunity to purchase the simulator and have departments from Will, Grundy, and Kankakee Counties to utilize that simulator.

Alderman Cipiti thanked the Chief O'Connor and the rest of the department for coming tonight and presenting the information. He also stated that all the City Council have the upmost respect and support of the fire departments, police department, and all first responders and thanked them for all they did. Alderman Cipiti asked at what point did you reach out to the City of Crest Hill with the ideas and plans to build this facility. Chief O'Connor commented that after he received approval from the fire board in August of 2023, but did not have any plans or designs just a study to know what this might cost. It was October of 2023 when we reached out to the mayor and asked what the next step would be, and it was mentioned to bring this in front of the Plan Commission and City Council. He also stated that the mayor informed him that until the fire department has plans there is nothing to do and then when there is, it will go before the planning commission. Alderman Cipiti commented that the Council did not learn anything about this until December after a sign was placed for the residents about what would be built there and now, we are playing catch up.

Fire Chief O'Connor stated that he placed his business card on the dais for all Council members and please feel free to contact him with any questions or concerns.

Alderwoman Gazal thanked them for coming out today and she commented that they are so professional. She also wanted to thank our Lobbyist, Josh Hassert, for bringing this to the Council. She also commented that she thinks this is a beautiful building and it is an asset to the City of Crest Hill but there is an issue with the gun range, and it is her job to represent her residents. She stated that as she learned tonight there will be municipalities utilizing this facility and this would create more traffic by extending this out to other agencies. She commented that people will not like this in their backyard and that will affect many pets in the area. Chief O'Connor commented that he can certainly understand her concern but if you are weighing that verses your community and your police officers being proficient, this will out way the gun shots in the area where there is already two gun ranges in the area. Chief O'Connor commented that this gun range will be one hundred yards and it can be designed with berms that will help reduce the sounds. Alderwoman Gazal also commented that this will be a health hazard and pollution for the air quality from the lead being left in the dirt/ground. Chief O'Connor stated that he could not speak to that since he is not aware of any studies of lead leaking in water or dirt and causing ground or air pollution and if she were aware of a study, he would be happy to look into it.

Alderman Cipiti asked if they had looked into other locations that are further away from residential areas. Chief O'Connor commented that they originally looked at the property by Wilco but because of it being close to Lewis University and close to planes that would not be good and would be a challenge. He commented that they also talked to the Park District and Forest Preserve but the area they were providing would not be large enough and could not construct a building because of water drainage.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that she talked to one of the trustees on Saturday and was told that the amount of dirt that will be left over from building the facility would be cheaper to use it to build the gun range than haul the dirt away. Chief O'Connor said that that is not

the reason for the gun range and there will be dirt and the advantage will be to use the dirt to put a berm around the entire property.

Alderman Gazal also asked why the City of Lockport Police Department does not build their own gun range and everyone goes there. Chief O'Connor commented that they did originally have land and funding, but he does not know why this did not get followed through. Alderman Gazal also commented that Romeoville has a gun range and does not need this range. Chief O'Connor commented that that is not necessarily true, and they have a small range already but can only qualify for small handguns. Alderman Gazal commented that they have been managing with that. Chief O'Connor asked her if managing is the bar and she commented that when there are residents affected than it is.

Chief O'Connor commented that you cannot train enough for a situation that they may come against that could kill you, and this would be a great opportunity. Alderman Gazal suggested that they do an indoor gun range. Chief O'Connor commented that the cost for an outdoor gun range versus an indoor gun range is a lot. He also commented that the fire department is going out for the funding without putting a referendum on the ballot and making the taxpayers pay more or asking Crest Hill.

Alderman Jefferson asked if anyone asked about polling the residents for this facility and it was stated that residents were not polled. Chief O'Connor commented that they have looked at every other option in our community and this is the best location that is centrally located. Alderman Jefferson commented that he went to a facility in East Dundee and was able to walk around and he questioned the acoustics, so the sound does not travel outside. He also commented that he is 100% for public safety, fire fighters, and police but he cannot come back to the residents and say he will vote for another gun range.

Chief O'Connor explained the difference between indoor and outdoor gun ranges and the distance to qualify with a rifle which is what they need. Alderman Jefferson questioned about the control burns and that he supports anything that does not affect the residents, and the animals. Chief O'Connor commented that they are under regulation with the state on what they can burn and that it is clean smoke to make it realistic to an actual fire and there will be certain rooms that will be used to burn.

Alderman Dyke commented that the main concern is the gun range and feels the Council will support the training center but feels there should be another location for the gun range where it is not a residential area. He also commented that he has seen plenty of areas in Lockport that would not affect anyone.

Chief O'Connor commented that having the gun range would be ideal for fire and police to work together and the partnership would be ideal.

Alderman Vershay commented that the complex is about 30 years too late, and asked how close the range will be from the subdivision. Chief O'Connor commented that he will need to look into the distance. He also asked which direction they would be shooting. Chief O'Connor commented that they would be shooting in the opposite direction of the residential area. Alderman Vershay commented that he feels this is needed now more than ever to stay on top of the crime. He also commented that at 3:00a.m. he hears gun training at Stateville and he does not see a problem with the location where it is being built but he does not live by it, and he thinks it is a good idea.

Alderman Dyke asked if he is given permission to hunt geese on a farmer's property within city limits, would that be legal. Chief Clark commented that no he could not do that legally in city limits.

Alderperson Oberlin commented that she appreciates the firefighters and police officers, but she feels that the gun range was hidden from them, and it is unfortunate that having several people in that meeting, and no one thought about letting the Council know what was being planned.

Chief O'Connor commented that they did not get any approval from the Board until August and the first meeting was the with Crest Hill.

Mayor Soliman clarified that the meeting was not in September. He commented that the meeting with the fire department was on October 26th at 11:00a.m. and in attendance was Blaine Kline, Ed Clark, Ron Wiedeman, Maura Rigoni, Don Seeman and Steve Gulden. He also commented that the meeting was just informational on what is required.

Alderman Albert asked about the budget and the total cost of the facility. Chief O'Connor commented that the cost is approximately twelve million dollars. Alderman Albert commented that this is a phenomenal project, however we have been good partners with the fire department, and we should have more conversation with the Council, and that there needs to be a form of buffer between the project and the residents.

Mayor Soliman asked if anyone would like to make a public comment.

Julie Pearce, a resident, commented that if the wind blows west, they can hear the gun range on Route 53 like if it is the fourth of July all day and night. She also commented that it impacts the residents, pets, and veterans.

Erma Castro, a resident, commented that she is in support of the training facility and is appreciative of all the firefighters and what they do but it is not a win-win situation, the residents are baring a loss. The residents are losing property value and quiet enjoyment, and this is the straw that breaks the camels back. She also commented that the decision is going to keep her in Crest Hill living up to the commitment she made when buying her home or it will make her run for her money. As a resident she stated that she feels the dream they work so hard for will no longer be able to enjoy.

Shareese Stalato, a resident, commented that she owns three properties and when the wind blows right you can hear the gunshots inside or outside of their home. She stated she has no problem with the training center, but a gun range will make her move and sell all three properties.

Christina Pershey, a resident, commented that she supports a gun range but asks to rethink an indoor range or sound absorption so that the sound is contained.

Stuart Soifer, a resident, commented that the Council and most residents agree with the training center and not the gun range. He also commented that he feels if the Council were aware of this before December and architect had not gone through the design you would have had all this input. Chief O'Connor commented that nothing is out to bid and there is

nothing to put out to bid since there is no plans. He also commented that all they have done is a study to see if the land was able to be built on. Stuart commented that whomever you spoke to in the city would have sent out an executive memorandum and possibly pushed this in a different manner by sharing with the Council.

Linda Dyke, a resident, asked the mayor if this would go by Carillon Lakes Subdivision how would they feel. She also commented on how they screamed about lights from a hot dog stand. She stated that she is not against the training center. She also commented that she is no fool and that the meeting that was held was where Steve Gulden was at, but Steve Gulden works with Josh Hassert and Josh Hassert never heard about it. The residents elect the Council to know what is going on in the community and asked the mayor how he feels about this and stated the mayor can never answer a question. It was then said by someone that it is comments not questions. She then commented that she wished the mayor would resign.

Aderman Cipiti asked the mayor what his opinion is about the gun range. Mayor Soliman commented that there are positive and negatives on the gun range. He also commented that he is not sure what the frequency of the usage of the firing range is. He also commented that the communities are not going to use it 24/7 and they will only have to qualify twice a year. He commented that when he lived on Clement Street, he could hear District 5 and Stateville, same living in Carillon Lakes as well. He does feel there could be improvements to the gun range, but he agrees with the fire chief that there is a great opportunity to train our firefighters. Mayor Soliman commented that he feels for the residents, but nothing will happen coming out of the meeting tonight. He commented that there is a process for the fire department to move forward and if they wish to move forward, they will follow the same rules and regulations with the city that everyone would have to follow.

Alderpersion Oberlin commented that she is in full support of the training facility but to say it is no cost to the city when you heard residents speaking about how they are already affected, and this is a cost to the city and residents. She also commented that as much as she loves the aspect of the facility and welcomes it to the city, the gun range is a big issue.

Chief O'Connor commented that when he referenced no cost to the city, he meant monetary. He also stated he will take away a lot from this meeting and asked for everyone to keep an open mind. He stated that the mayor is right this is early in the process, and he just wanted the opportunity to address the City Council and do something for public safety.

Alderwoman Gazal asked what happens if we change an ordinance to not allow a gun range within several miles of the city. Chief O'Connor commented that that is your prerogative, and the land did not cost them \$1.00 and that would be something they would have to think about.

Several Council members thanked Chief O'Connor and all the departments that came out tonight to discuss this issue with the gun range.

TOPIC: 1269 Caton Farm Road Permit Fee Reduction

Building Commissioner Don Seeman commented that he has a permit fee reduction for 1269 Caton Farm Road, a building that is being built by Mr. John Russ Jr. He commented that in December 2021, Mr. Russ came to the city and received a permit for a cost of \$4,520.00 but did not start the work due to some circumstances. In August of 2023, he

came to the city to get the permit to start the work, which cost him \$4,520.00 to extend the permit until the end of 2023. Commissioner Seeman commented that he has a couple of months left for completion and the way our ordinance states you can only have a permit for two years and after the two years you will need to go through the permit process from the beginning. With that being said, the building is 16,080 square feet and to start the permit process over again, as the ordinance states, it would cost Mr. Russ another \$16,080.00 for a couple of months of work that is left.

Commissioner Seeman recommends prorating two months of that fee which would be \$2,680.00.

Mr. John Russ Jr. approached the podium and explained this normally would take five to six months to conclude this including occupancy for tenants and when the city originally issued the permit in December of 2021 there was back logs in the electrical switch gear, which was 26 weeks, and is still not in their possession. There were several purchase orders that have been cancelled or delayed and they have lost two national tenants waiting for completion. Mr. Russ commented that he is asking for consideration of the cost.

Alderman Cipiti asked if the extension to April 30th will be sufficient to receive the equipment by then. Mr. Russ commented that they were told by ComEd that there are twenty transformers that are two weeks out. Commissioner Seeman commented that the construction would be completed by the end of April, which is why we extended the permit to April 30th.

Alderman Vershay commented that we should just wave the additional fee of \$2,680.00 since it is not his fault. Alderwoman Gazal commented that not only that issue, but we also changed the ordinance during this time.

Alderman Albert wanted clarification that we are asking to waive the \$2,680.00. Alderman Vershay commented that we should waive the fee. Several Council members were fine with waiving the fee in

Mayor Soliman asked for an informal vote for no additional fee to finish the building at 1269 Caton Farm Road.

Alderman Dyke commented that he hopes that other builders do not find out and request this as well and he is fine with the proposal of \$2,680.00. Many Council members were confused on the straw vote if it was a waiver of the fee or to charge the prorated fee. Mayor Soliman asked Mr. Russ if he was willing to pay the \$2,680.00. Mr. Russ commented that he will pay so he can get this building completed.

Mayor Soliman asked for a straw vote to take the recommendation of Commissioner Seeman and prorate the new permit fee of \$2,680.00.

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal.

NAYES: Ald. Vershay, Jefferson.

ABSENT: None.

TOPIC: Community Room Discussion

City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall commented that an email was received for rental use of the community room from a not-for-profit organization, and we have no guidelines for renting the community room. She asked what the requirements are for renting the community room, is there a charge, a rental agreement. Clerk Vershay-Hall commented that as of right now we only have homeowner's associations that have been approved by the Council renting the room. Clerk Vershay-Hall asked if the Council would want each rental request for the community room to come before the Council. Alderwoman Gazal stated that she wants them to come before the Council and have no rental fee.

Clerk Vershay-Hall commented that some rentals are after hours and Public Works and Police Department must set up, unlock, and lock doors for the meetings, and this costs the city. She also asked if they will be allowing food. Alderwoman Gazal commented that this is why we have the kitchenette.

An agreement was handed out that Director Kline had put together. City Attorney Mike Stiff commented that he has looked over this agreement and made some legal 'tweaks' but he stated that he already thought the green light was given by the Council for this.

Alderman Albert commented that he does not feel we should be charging since this was originally for community use but realistically, he understands there will be overtime costs and the fee we charge will not cover some of that but feels we need to charge a fee. He also commented that he did not look at the rentals as parties but more so meetings. Alderwoman Gazal commented that if we do not charge that will just open the door for more people to have gatherings here. Several Council members felt this room rental should not be for private parties.

Attorney Stiff commented that we need to establish a policy with rules and regulations for the use of the community room and it would be on a first come first serve basis with an application and a process in which you get your application approved, such as block parties, etc.

It was asked of Stuart in the audience when he holds meetings at the library how it is managed. Stuart commented that they give them a \$50.00 deposit on a credit card and if there is damage, they have the credit card to run through for damages. (Audio hard to transcribe since audience member did not approach podium).

Discussion was had regarding if the two chamber doors lock. It was stated that a special tool unlocks/locks the doors and there is no actual key to lock from inside. Mayor Soliman commented that he is sure Tony or Director Kline have a key.

Clerk Vershay-Hall asked if the Council is okay with renters bringing food. It was commented that a coffee cake or something of that nature but not actual food unless it is city function since this is more so for HOA meetings. Clerk Vershay-Hall asked if this is just for Crest Hill organizations or would you open this up to other municipality organizations. It was agreed that will just be for Crest Hill organizations.

Alderman Cipiti commented that he appreciated the Clerk mentioning this, but he would have preferred to have the document given prior to the meeting, instead of at the meeting, so he would have time to prepare and would be better use of their time. He also commented

that there were no documents attached to the agenda item. Clerk Vershay-Hall commented that she received this after the agenda was published. Alderman Cipiti commented that it should have been put on another agenda so he could have this prior to the meeting to have enough time to think about it and discuss it in an educated way.

Attorney Stiff offered to contact Village of Romeoville's attorney and see what kind of documents or policy they have drafted and see if we can use that as well.

Clerk Vershay-Hall commented that the fire department has come and evaluated the room's occupancy, and we are ordering signs to be posted. Clerk Vershay-Hall commented that the occupancy is:

- Chairs Only – 75 People
- Tables and Chairs - 45 People
- Standing Room only - 135 People

Alderman Cipiti asked if we should not be using the community room until the signs are placed. Clerk Vershay-Hall commented that the room can be used since the fire department has given us a paper with the occupancy.

Alderman Albert asked if there is anything we need to do regarding insurance since we are already allowing HOA to use the community room for their meetings. Attorney Stiff commented that should be asking for their insurance information and have the city named as an additional insured and provide documentation. Although HOA's may not have insurance we should be asking for some type of insurance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Stuart Soifer, a resident, asked Lobbyist Josh Hassert, if the Illinois State Police District 5 is building or redoing their own gun range. (Josh Hassert's response was inaudible and unable to transcribe). Stuart recommended that District 5 could expand their range. He also commented that the disturbing thing being a taxpayer in the City of Crest Hill is that the mayor misleads everyone when he did not tell the Council about the meeting with the Fire Department until December 11, 2023. It looked like the mayor was trying to push this through without the Council's notice. He then asked the mayor what else he was not telling the Council and they cannot decide without transparency. Stuart commented that he feels the mayor needs to step down.

MAYORS UPDATES:

There were no mayor updates.

COMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES:

There were no committee/liaison updates tonight.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that there is a need for an executive session for personnel 5 ILCS 201/2(c)(1).

Mayor Soliman asked for a motion to go into executive session on Personnel 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).

(#1) Motion by Alderperson Oberlin seconded by Alderman Cipiti, to go into an executive session on Personnel 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).

On roll call, the vote was:

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Vershay, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

There being eight (8) affirmative votes, the MOTION CARRIED.

Executive Session 9:33 p.m.

(#2) Motion by Alderperson Oberlin seconded by Alderman Jefferson to reconvene from the executive session on Personnel 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).

On roll call, the vote was:

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Vershay, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

There being eight (8) affirmative votes, the MOTION CARRIED.

Reconvened at 10:07 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:07 p.m.

Approved this _____ day of _____, 2024

As presented _____

As amended _____

CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR