

M I N U T E S
SHALER TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 2019

The meeting was called to order at approximately 6:40 p.m. by Commissioner Bill Cross. He announced that the meeting was being taped and asked the Secretary to call the roll as follows:

PRESENT: Cross, Fisher, McElhone
ALSO PRESENT: David Shutter, Board Chairman; Commissioners Mizgorski, Skelley and Boyle; Timothy J. Rogers, Manager; Judith Kording, Assistant Manager; Chief Kelly; Harlan Stone, Solicitor; Sherry Martin, Admin. Assistant

New Business:
Police Officer Body Cameras

The first item of business was a discussion on Police Officer Body Cameras. Chief Kelly explained that they have been reviewing police officer body cameras and some of the issues. The Pennsylvania Legislature has corrected some of the issues with the passage of ACT 22 in 2017 on the use of body cameras which resolved the wiretap statute and the right to know law. One of the issues that remain is, what your eyes see is not the same as what the camera sees as the camera has a wider range. He introduced Mr. John Sicilia from Northern Regional Police Department to speak on the topic and answer questions from the Committee. **Mr. Sicilia** initially had hesitation on the use of the body cameras. His opinion and hesitation quickly changed. Management at Northern Regional Police Department met with the Police Officer Association on the Body Camera Policy and it was accepted. The department has not received many complaints compared to the call volume received. On the few complaints received, once the video is viewed by the complainant, the officer has been exonerated.

Northern Regional Police Department implemented the use of the body cameras with Axon in 2017 with free equipment for a year, normal camera cost is \$800 – 1,000 per camera. The greatest cost was paying for storage and Axon owns the data that is stored in the cloud, storage was between \$15,000 and \$20,000 per year. They chose to partner it with the vehicle cameras which are from Watchguard. The body cameras automatically sync with the vehicle cameras. Upon inquiry by Mr. Rogers, Mr. Sicilia stated that he is comfortable with the level of technology but the camera is a little bulky. The new cameras out are smaller. The camera is always passively recording and once turned on the camera vibrates approximately every 30 seconds to make the officer aware that it is recording. The body camera syncs with the vehicle and turns on once the emergency lights are activated. Once activated, the video goes back 30 seconds without sound, sound starts after the 30 seconds. Upon inquiry by Mr. Rogers, Mr. Sicilia stated that the officer does not have to advise the public that they are being recorded, but they request their officers to advise individuals that they are being recorded. This is not a requirement. In many cases it de-escalates the situation. Upon inquiry by Mr. Cross, Mr. Sicilia stated that it would be a disciplinary issue if an officer forgets to turn on the body camera. There are situations when the officer may not have time to turn on the camera. He also explained that they were able to adjust the setting of the light on the camera as it was causing reflection in the car and may give the officer's position away in some situations. The recording is only viewable once the camera is in the docking station and downloaded. The vehicle camera automatically downloads when brought back to the station. Officers are then able to view and categorize if needed. There is real-time access to the video through a smart phone but Northern Regional

Police Department does not utilize this feature. **Mr. Rogers** expressed concern that a resident could access the video. **Mr. Cross** stated that the cell phone would be password protected and unable to access by other individuals. Upon inquiry by Mr. Cross, Mr. Sicilia stated that they have 35 officers and the younger officers were all for the body cameras and the older officers were a little more hesitant. It did not take long for all of the officers to be on board with the use of the cameras.

Mr. Sicilia explained that they follow the District Attorney's policy which was reviewed by their Solicitor and the Police Association. The policy recommended storing the data for a 60 day minimum time period and they decided to store the data for 75 days. They have a set schedule fee for right to know requests. The video is stored on site on their server. Upon inquiry, Chief Kelly explained that the Memorandum of Understanding from the District Attorney's office is for any evidentiary data. The District Attorney's office would take control of the information if an officer were involved in a shooting. Mr. Sicilia explained that the only time they would withhold information from a right to know is if it was an on-going investigation or to withhold the identify of a confidential informant. They have not received any right to know requests from the media. Upon inquiry by Mr. Cross, Mr. Sicilia explained that they have a criteria set for who may obtain video through a right to know. Typically, the right to know request would be limited to information pertaining to their complaint. He explained that the new body cameras are the size of a half dollar coin. One of the issues with Watchguard is that they need to come up with a better mounting for the camera. The camera software is automatically updated. They have not had any major issues with the system. If a camera were lost, the video could not be accessed without a docking station.

Chief Kelly explained that the current camera system in the Township's police vehicles are through Digital Ally and it would automatically sync with the body cameras once it was docked in the vehicle. Mr. Sicilia commented that their officers are permitted to view the video footage before writing their reports with the exception of an officer involved in a shooting.

Mr. Cross thanked Mr. Sicilia for his presentation. Upon inquiry by Mr. Skelley, Mr. Sicilia stated that the video footage is not viewable by the officer until the camera is docked. There was further inquiry and discussion. The body camera must be docked in the vehicle in order to sync and then attached to the body. The resolution is able to be adjusted from high to lower quality definition and the batteries longevity depends on the setting. The docking station is also able to charge the camera battery. The body camera automatically adjusts from daytime to nighttime for visibility of the video. Northern Regional Police Department purchased enough body cameras for each individual officer. The cameras are assigned at roll call. There are standard body camera designs and it may also be customized. Northern Regional Police Department requires the body camera be turned on with all calls including EMS and domestic abuse. **Chief Kelly** explained that the police department is not subject to HIPAA law. Mr. Sicilia explained that Northern Regional requires the body camera to stay on even if an individual requests it be turned off. They request their officers to be sympathetic to the request but that the camera remain on. They do have certain rules spelled out in their policy of when the camera may be turned off. There was further discussion on the policy for when the camera may be turned off.

Mr. Sicilia stated that the younger officers in their department were able to adjust to the body cameras faster than the older officers. The school districts have not had any issues with the police officers having their body cameras on when at the schools. Northern Regional Police Department has also used some of the video for positive training purposes.

There was discussion on officer discretion. Mr. Sicilia stated that statistically he has not seen any significant changes in arrests or citations issued and they rely on officers using their discretion. Northern Regional does not use the video from the cameras for disciplinary action. If there is a complaint, the video is reviewed and would be escalated to Police Department management.

Mr. Rogers stated that the police department will continue researching the body cameras as well as overall cost. Chief Kelly has spoken to the Township Information Technology personnel and the current police server would be able to store the video. Upon inquiry by Mr. McElhone, Mr. Rogers stated that he would not think that there would be any additional cost or reduce the cost to the Township insurance from the use of body cameras.

Mr. Cross requested Chief Kelly come back with a recommendation to the Board.

Public Comment: No comment

There being no further business, the Chairman asked for a motion to adjourn. **Mrs. Fisher moved, seconded by Mr. McElhone that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was carried.** The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:32 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Timothy J. Rogers
Manager

TJR:sm