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TOWN OF LUDLOW

The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, August 4, 2020 began at 6:08 p.m. Remote participation due to COVID-19.

Members Present: Derek DeBarge, Antonio Goncalves, and William Rosenblum

Absent: Manuel Silva

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

Visitation:

Police Lieutenant Interviews:

6:00 p.m. – Sgt. Irwin

Sgt. Irwin: Good evening.

Mr. Rosenblum: Good evening. How are you?

Sgt. Irwin: I wish I could shake your hands, but I know the rules are in place for a reason.

Mr. Rosenblum: Alright so congratulations and thank you for coming in this evening. Just to go over the ground rules a little bit as to obviously how the procedure will go. You will introduce yourself. You will be allowed to make an opening statement. The Board will then go ahead and ask you a variety of questions. At which point then once the questions are done, we will give Chief Valadas an opportunity to make a statement of any kind if he would like and then you will be able to make a closing statement. Okay. So, why don't you go ahead and introduce yourself and give us a little history about yourself.

Sgt. Irwin: Sure. Thank you for inviting me to be here tonight. My name is Dave Irwin. I have been a Sergeant for approximately over four years now. I'm very excited to be here tonight. Really excited to have yet another chance to show Ludlow the residents of Ludlow and the Police Department how committed I am to them. How much I love them and how passionate I am about this town and how I just can't imagine being anywhere else right now. I was town resident for 23 years, starting in 1990 and after a four-month hiatus of being out of town and working for a different department, I came back to this department where I always wanted to be. I just love it. It was great, Chief Valadas was instrumental in helping me come over. To make the decision to give up you know my seniority, my pay and my benefits but in the end, it was an easy decision because this is where I always wanted to be. People ask me where I am from, I say Ludlow. I always have, and I always will. But, I am really excited to be here tonight, like I said because in reviewing the duties and responsibilities of a Lieutenant and speaking with Chief Valadas about his expectations I believe I have a very firm grasp on what is going to be expected right out of the gate and I believe I am the best candidate to do this job going forward. You know the job is basically subject to the Chief and the Chief's orders. You know to administer the day to day running of the department and you are responsible for the men and women under your command and if you take all of the duties and responsibilities of organizing duty assignments, maintaining quarters, communicating with the Chief on a day to day basis about what is happening in the department, making sure that you are aware of what your authority is and what the authority is under your command and you know every other little thing that is not in here that goes with it and to be honest this is probably the shortest summary of the duties and responsibilities by rank as a Lieutenant, everything else is at least 3 or 4 pages and this one is 2. So, there is a lot more that goes in it but if I had to sum it up in one word, what is the mandate, what is the directive of a Lieutenant, it is to be in one word supportive to everyone. You are supporting the Chief by putting forward his agenda, his mission and making sure that everyone is moving in the same direction. It's important to realize that every single person in this department is trying to do the right thing, has good intentions. Sometimes though, you might attack a problem or try and craft a solution from a different perspective, a different point of view, a different angle and while that might create friction initially as long as you know that everyone is trying to do the right thing, you can communicate through those barriers, work through it and ultimately deliver fantastic police service to the residents of Ludlow. I think you know being supportive of everyone is easy for me to do because that is what I have tried to do for my entire career, since I started. For my coworkers you know of equal rank, when I started as an officer and my superiors, it was about ensuring

that they were successful in whatever they were trying to do, whatever they were tasked to do and asked me to help out with or just being on the same shift with them and for the last four years being a Supervisor, I have tried to take it a step further and I want to make sure that every single person under my command, ends up more successful than I am in the long run. I look forward to your questions tonight and thank you.

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Mr. Rosenblum: Thank you. Which gentlemen would like to go first? I was actually going to go first because I know that you are going to steal all of my questions.

Mr. Goncalves: Too late. Derek.

Mr. Rosenblum: Derek, Mr. Goncalves has deferred.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay. I will go first. Good evening Sgt. Irwin, pleasure to have you back.

Sgt. Irwin: Good evening. Thank you.

Mr. DeBarge: You have a very interesting history with us. From hire you came in as a Sergeant, for the Sergeant you came in top, as Lieutenant you came in 2nd for Chief and now top back as Lieutenant again. Impressive, impressive record.

Sgt. Irwin: Thank you.

Mr. DeBarge: And for your opening statement, you actually took one part of my first question, so my first question had two parts in it, A & B, you took A out so I am going to go right into B. A was kind of a description in your own words what the operation Lieutenant the basic job description was. I think you kind of described that well enough, at least in my opinion. For B, what in your background and/or training specifically will assist you in your transition from the responsibilities in the position that you have now into that operations Lieutenant position?

Sgt. Irwin: Well, I think that the main thing that is going to help is what I just said which is having that mind set of being supportive of everyone. Knowing that it is a team effort to get policing done in this day and age. Gone are the days you know to take a very micro example, gone are the days of one officer to an alarm call at night, even if it is a routine business, somewhere we always went, something like that. Now it's two officers are going because you know officer safety has definitely been put to the test in the last decade at least since I came on it's far different. Even so much as people recording you. I remember when I started if someone recorded you on a traffic stop at the time it was a little gray with a few of the cases out of Massachusetts with the *Commonwealth vs. Hyde* and whatnot. But at the very least it was a talking point then. This guy recording you, this one is doing this. You know it would seem they have right to do it on a public way at the time and whatnot, but it was still something of why are they doing this, what are they up to? They never used to do that. Now, obviously we have gone way past that and now unfortunately officers on the street every night across the country, have to deal with the civil unrest, have to deal with ambushes, things like that and that nature. So, in that nature, in that vein, this job is all about supporting each other and team work and whatnot. Some of the trainings that I have had, the one that comes to mind first is the firearms instructions course that I took. That was for me the catharsis going from an individual officer and then eventually to a Sergeant. To now going through that training process where you are going to now instruct people, you are going to impart knowledge on them and how do you do it. Especially in a setting with, let's face it, not everyone is comfortable with firearms. Chief Valadas and former Officer DeBarge excluded on that but you know you need to definitely be thinking about people's feelings, consider where they are coming from, their past backgrounds, their experiences and whatnot and that all rolls back into what I said before about everyone might approach something from a different angle and that might seem like friction or conflict or something at the time but when you really stop and think and especially when you consider what seems to almost be the most wrong and the most different point of view from what you have, you have the opportunity to learn the most about it. You know there is some crossover from my interview as Chief of Police here, I will dedicate myself to being a life-long learner both to improve myself, you know as far as knowing trends and patterns of Law Enforcement as well as trying to understand where my colleagues, you know both superiors and subordinates and equal rank alike are coming from so that we can get the mission done at the end of the day.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay, thank you for that. Okay, I see the title as Operations Lieutenant as kind of hands on. You kind of mentioned that as well. I would describe it more as Lieutenant position, Operations Lieutenant position kind of getting in the trenches with the troops so to speak, that's kind of my language. While there always must be that open respect and decorum for the rank, the position, patrol still needs to see that respect can be earned and not just simply given. Your job is to keep accountability for all staff that's under you while still leading them and hopefully still building trust and gaining their respect. How will you approach and attain this?

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Sgt. Irwin: That one is easy. You have to lead by example first and foremost and everything that you have done in your career is going to affect your credibility with people. I was you know definitely from the beginning I was a hands-on officer trying to learn as much as I possibly can, as evidence by my training record, the additional duties and assignments I have volunteered to take on and whatnot. Also, as a Supervisor when I started, I was a very proactive street boss and in the last two to three years I would say Chief, we have been plagued with injuries unfortunately at the Supervisory ranks and at times for at least nine months that I remember we had two Supervisors out. So, that definitely limited the ability for everyone to get out on the street and do work but I love getting out on the street and do work and I am very fortunate that anytime I ask an officer if they will cover the station so that I can go out a little bit and drive around, they are game for it and I appreciate it. My proactiveness I will admit, has dropped off because of situation that we are in. I think it would be selfish to go out there and be as proactive as I want to be and risk further plaguing the department with injuries, requiring a replacement and taking away the backbone of the department which you say is the patrol function. But to further you know for the second part of your question you know a second part to it, is how do you gain that trust and how is it earned. We have a great lesson we can learn in the NASA Space Program in the 60's during the space age alright. Back then in Apollo I when the three astronauts died on the pad, afterwards Gene Kranz who was played by Ed Harris in Apollo 13 if you have seen the movie, he said that from now on going forward we are going to be tough and competent. Tough in that you are always accountable for what you do and competent in that you don't leave anything for chance, you get the best training, you practice, rehearse endlessly to get it right. That you know what you are doing no matter what comes up and you know translate that over to Policing now, tough as far as being accountable you know like you said that is part of the job description, that is what I am going to do. I hold guys, my Officers to a very high standard. It doesn't always make me the easiest boss to work for because I definitely have high levels of attention to detail, high expectations for them but it's because of what happens if I don't do my job and I put a friendship before supervision and it's all good, we leave and six months find out that all that hard work went down the drain, the case is dismissed or there you know maybe be subject to a law suit if I don't make sure the report is right. You know all of that hard work, if it looks sloppy on the report, it's going to be assumed they were sloppy on the street. So, I did a lot of researching on things you know outside of classes, the training we have gone to including the Executive Development Program at the Municipal Police Institute in Grafton, those are great starting points as far as how to move into that next step as Supervision and then the further research I came across that NASA example and it's just as relevant today as it was 50 years ago. Be tough and be competent and get everyone to that standard and we will have no problems going forward.

Mr. DeBarge: Alright. There has been an enormous amount of attention to Law Enforcement and it's use of force policies. We have politicians and civilians that think they know better as to how these policies should change though the vast majority have never dealt with violent offenders. How do you feel about this departments and our States use of force policy and training compared to the national narrative and where do you see it going forward?

Sgt. Irwin: Well I think that we are light years ahead of the rest of the country, in the Northeast specifically and Massachusetts even more specifically as far as to where we are for standards of use of force. Let me just jump quickly to the Ludlow Police Department, like I said before every single officer here comes to work trying to do the right thing, has a good heart and they are trying to leave the Town in better shape than they found it 8 hours before when they started shift alright. That's just an anecdote, that's my personal opinion but there it is. With some data to back that up for our department, I am not aware of a single excessive use of force case since we started tracking that and we talk, we read the log, we talk to each other, we debrief. Regardless of what might happen when the command staff does the investigations. I mean as a Supervisor, I do the initial investigation, I have training on use of force investigations and everything that I see lends itself to believe that everyone is

doing the right thing and actually probably using less force then maybe they should sometimes and that's the truth. As far as the State goes, they don't teach choke holds, they haven't taught choke holds for, even before I was an officer, I know that for sure. As far as duty to act or duty to intervene, excuse me, that's sort of innate to the job. You don't even need to be trained that way in my personal opinion but okay we could go that way but we are already taught to assume you are on camera 24/7 and not even from the time that you get to work and go out in the cruiser but the time that you walk out your front door and start going to work and then coming home, you have to assume that you are on camera and everyone here tries to do the right thing. So, you know I am not sure exactly where we are going here with use of force standards. I know there is definitely going to be change. I know it's definitely going to come out soon. I wish I had the crystal ball to see what politicians on Beacon Hill were going to decide with this, but I am confident, 100% that whatever comes our way we will like always, improvise, adapt and overcome the initial barrier to it. So, we can provide the best police service possible within all statutory guidelines.

2020 NOV 25 A 11:13
TOWN OF LUDLOW

Mr. DeBarge: Okay I have one more, there's only 2 candidates.... Alright, last one, I have a scenario for you. Now Chief Valadas is on vacation, you cannot contact him okay.

Sgt. Irwin: Okay.

Mr. DeBarge: He is unattainable.

Sgt. Irwin: That's not likely but okay.

Mr. DeBarge: He is in a different country, so you can't call him, okay. Alright on your regular shift, one of your officers comes in from patrol, sees his Sergeant about an incident and asks to talk to a Detective. He goes to the DB, talks about his findings, then leaves and heads to dispatch while passing two of his fellow officers in the hallway, goes into dispatch in order to get a printout of his response times and suspect information. While in dispatch the officer gets sick, throws up on the floor. You immediately don your PPE and take his temperature. The reading on the thermometer is 101.8 so you immediately send him to the hospital to get a COVID-19 test. First question, the minute he leaves, the minute you send him to the hospital, what is your first action? The second question is, the very next day the test comes back positive, what do you do then?

Sgt. Irwin: My first action is going to lock down dispatch and call Wilbraham PD which is our alternate...and ask them to assume responsibility for all 911 communications. The second call is going to be to Westcomm in Chicopee, the regional dispatch for Chicopee, Longmeadow and a few other agencies and just put them on notice for that too. My next thing, this is all assuming the officer has already gone to the hospital, we have already taken care of him?

Mr. DeBarge: Yes.

Sgt. Irwin: Yes, okay next thing is to get a count on who and how many people who were in the building when this happened. Alright and then interview them to see what level of contact they may have had. I think it goes without saying an order would come out for everyone to put masks on right away and then once the COVID-19 test comes back then follow our policy to put them in quarantine as required.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay, so level of contact that were close to that officer, right?

Sgt. Irwin: Well, like I said first I am going to find out who was in the building and then talk to them and go what was your level of exposure alright because if I have an officer down in the breakroom having his dinner break and this happened in the hallway between dispatch and the DB for instance, then that officer is less likely, is not going to need to stay home. So, that's why I am saying follow the policy as required based on my findings.

Mr. DeBarge: I'm sorry did you have the last thing; I was just trying to write everything down. After the level of contact with the officer.

Sgt. Irwin: After I find the level of contact well then it went to the second part of your question. So, once I have done that, I found out everything that has happened. I am now going to go with the next

day the COVID-19 test comes back positive then I am going to refer to the policy and quarantine people as appropriate and that dispatcher is going home and the officer on his next break can likely come back the next morning. In accordance with our policy and whatever the town has to for the policy on employees.

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Mr. DeBarge: Thank you very much, that is all I got.

Mr. Goncalves: How are you?

Sgt. Irwin: Good, thanks.

Mr. Goncalves: I think I have done every police interview I think since I have been on the Board. I see the problems on the streets and I understand that this is going to be a supervisory position, but I can't forget that we still have issues on the street. Do you believe that drug problem in Ludlow is more or less than it was four or five years ago?

Sgt. Irwin: I do think that it is a little less than it was four or five years ago. I think that it is because a proactive stance that we have taken in the department as far as you know making treatment a priority, placing them into protective custody for drug use rather than just arresting them. I think that unfortunately COVID-19 put a halt on it but as I had mentioned at the last interview, I was considering, I talked with an Officer who is very involved, very close to the Michael J. Dias foundation and I wanted to try and institute a policy or institute training for teaching people CPR, which I think is that critical stop gap between someone overdoses and then we get there for the professional treatment and the professional equipment. Having someone to further that chain of survival in the interim, I think that would help a lot. I think there you know there is a lot of awareness out there now. I think that the pathways to recovery program is excellent and that Officers go out and make contact with victims of drug abuse, of addiction to see how they are doing and I think it sets a good tone and a good message to them as far as we are not "the enemy" as far as we don't have the stigma attached to it. We are not judging you; we are not looking to arrest you; we are not looking to deprive you of rights and your freedom to move about and all of that and we are just trying to be yet another resource out there. I think Massachusetts and the Department in general have done a great job of trying to get as many resources out to people in need.

Mr. Goncalves: Do you believe...

Audio cut out due to storm. Could no longer hear Mr. Goncalves or Sgt. Irwin.

Ludlow Board of Selectmen

All related documents can be viewed at the Board of Selectmen's Office during regular business hours.