

VERMILION CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION MEETING

Minutes of September 8, 2022

8:00 AM ★ Vermilion Municipal Court Complex, 687 Decatur Street, Vermilion, Ohio

ROLL CALL: Jeff Lucas, Chairman; Dave Deucher, Vice Chairman. Absent: Dan Kernell

J. Lucas called the Thursday, September 8, 2022, meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

J. Lucas MOVED; D. Deucher seconded to approve the meeting minutes of April 7, 2022. Vote 2 YEAS. **MOTION CARRIED.**

New Business:

Police Officers Current List/Hiring Discussions

Chief Hartung said one of the issues the police department has been running into is recruitment and retention of personnel. The market for police officers has become very competitive over the past couple of years. A lot of younger people seem to be put off from the profession, so they are not getting the candidate pool. He said when he and Scott Holmes tested there could be 100-150 people that were testing for one spot. He mentioned the City of Lorain went to a 20 year/20 percent longevity and VPD does 11 percent at 25 years. The larger agencies are killing Vermilion in recruiting, and they have lost personnel. He has had conversation with the mayor regarding the upcoming contract negotiations on how they are going to deal with the incentives. He said years ago they brought representatives in from the National Testing Network (NTN) and Pradco to discuss initial hire training and the sergeant's promotional training, but this suggestion was not adopted, so he would like to revisit this with the commission. He said the major benefit is how much it readily expands their gene pool, and it allows people to take their test from satellite locations. He said this program will take a lot off their department as well as Gwen Fisher's responsibilities and duties when it comes to the testing process.

Sergeant Scott Holmes explained to the commission that this type of testing is occurring across the country and region. He said a lot less people want to be police officers now a days because of the climate of how things are and with changes of attitude. All jurisdictions are fighting over the same small group of people that are interested in being law enforcement officers. He said he along with the Chief went through a Certified Law Enforcement Executive program (CLEE) and his presentation at the end of the course was a recruitment and retention program for the department and how to implement it with changes that needed to be done. They have done some of these changes and have revamped their website to include recruitment. They redid a recruitment brochure to hand out. He goes to the academy classes to do a short presentation on trying to recruit to Vermilion. The problem with this, is that everybody is thinking about this, so when he goes to these academies to talk he has Westlake in front of him that pays \$42.00 per hour to their patrolmen and Avon, Broadview Heights, and the Erie County Sheriff's Department, so they are all lined up and candidates are able to pick and choose, and shop. Now, candidates can look at which departments have take home cruisers, 12-hour shifts, a beard policy, a tattoo

policy, outer carriers, longevity, and they are able to compare all these things and make their decision that way. The current testing process for entry-level may be a bit dated with having one test date and coming to a physical location, which he believes is hindering Vermilion in getting a larger group of candidates.

He explained the National Testing Network (NTN) is where the vast majority of departments are going to. Local departments currently utilizing the NTN are Amherst, Oberlin, Willard, Bellevue, Perkins, Avon, Clyde, Port Clinton, Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, and so on. NTN has been around for a long time and their testing process and tests have been through litigation as far as lawsuits that could come down the pike. It is a tried, true, and tested process. He said Vermilion as a city civil service would reach out to NTN and tell them they are interested in using their product as the city's testing process. There are three different ways to sign up for this and there is a \$500 annual membership fee for the city to join and in the first year NTN gives a 15% discount, and this opens up to continuous testing. This is an online testing process virtually or there are physical locations if someone does not have access to take a test online. They give the test at Ehope, Tri-C in Parma, and Tri-C in Cleveland. The NTN pushes the continuous model of testing, which he is recommending Vermilion does as the test is open always. He said if Vermilion signs up then a customer representative will meet with civil service to find out what product they are looking to have them do. They work in all the extra credit for military, having the academy, and college into their program. Then Vermilion would get put up on the list in Ohio as there are approximately 400 departments on the list. The candidates would then sign up with NTN and it costs them \$55 to sign up with one test; \$12 each additional test if they want to submit their tests to multiple departments. They can take one test and can basically sign up for as many departments as they choose. If Vermilion signs up then they will be put up on the board as a department that test results can be submitted to and a candidate can go on and take the test and submit it to Vermilion, Avon, or however they pick. He said Vermilion will have a portal and if the Chief says they have an opening, then civil service will pull the list and the top ten is drawn from that list as it sits at that point and it is passed onto the Chief to go through the process. The other method NTN has is short term testing where basically it is a 30-day minimum, so civil service would say they are testing from October 1 to October 31, and candidates would only have that month to take the test and submit for Vermilion. The third option is an invitation only process where they already have candidates, but he does not know anybody who would do this. He said the opening continuous has its benefits because they have academy classes and academies are doing about three a year, so as the academy classes graduate at LCCC, Sandusky, Ehope, and Tri-C, then they have a whole new pool of fresh academy graduates that will be looking to take tests. The physical agility portion of the testing can be maintained to what they have now. Obviously, they will need a background check and everything else that is required.

He reported on Vermilion's past testing numbers as follows: 2013 - 23 applicants; 2015 - 25 applicants; 2017 - 12 applicants; 2019 - 34 applicants; and 2021 - current list six candidates. They lose candidates for many different things that can exclude people from becoming a police officer.

He said NTN opens country wide and it would open diversity wise as far as giving Vermilion a more diverse candidate pool as far as ethnically diverse and gender diverse. In talking with Avon, they currently did an NTN, and they currently have 65 people on their list, which would be

a huge amount for Vermilion. This program will make it easier for the city and when you need a list you log into the computer to print a list. Potentially, there is a cost savings and in speaking with G. Fisher it cost \$700 for the last test and it was up to 30 candidates, but then there is advertising costs and Gwen's salary and time involved in this process, so they must take all of these things into account.

G. Fisher asked if this program is only for police officers or does it include sergeants. S. Holmes said they do have a promotional program, but the Chief had thought about going with Pradco, which is a different company. He said he is addressing entry-level police officers at this time.

S. Holmes said he was involved a couple of years ago when they started talking about the lateral entry for officers and how they can give them credit if they have five years of service with another department, so civil service addressed this. A lot of departments are going to the lateral programs as a way of getting quality vetted officers from other departments. For example, Avon currently has a lateral program where they have candidates that still must take the test and they have their rookie officers with no experience list, and they have a lateral list, and these are ranked. When a position comes open, then civil service pulls five names off the entry level with no experience and five names off the lateral and then they combine them and give them to the chief. The department goes through the list of 10 this way. He said the NTN program gives candidates the ability to take the test from home and the ability to take one test to be submitted to as many departments as they can afford or want to send.

Mayor Forthofer said what they are talking about is pulling from a pool of law enforcement officers that would like to work in Vermilion or somewhere. Sergeant Holmes said this is correct as well as those who would like to move or transfer to another department. Mayor Forthofer said in the process of the NTN, at what point are the qualifications screened. Sergeant Holmes explained this would be a process that NTN would work out before it is even implemented. He said Amherst is now requiring they have the academy first. Vermilion is only hiring candidates that already have the academy because it is very expensive for the city to send somebody through the academy. Chief Hartung said when NTN comes in and does the initial setup, they will establish all the parameters, so if they are giving them extra credit for their Ohio Police Officer Training Certification (OPOTC), Veteran Status, or whatever they are currently doing, then this is all part of this and NTN handles this. They will submit all this documentation to NTN and then NTN manages all the calculations of the extra credit. They do all the stuff that Gwen usually mulls over. Mayor Forthofer asked what the qualifications they had a problem with before were – so many years as a law enforcement officer? J. Lucas believed it was the term continuous. D. Deucher said it was full-time continuous. Chief Hartung said this was regarding the promotional exam.

D. Deucher confirmed that if a candidate applies to different departments, then they must pay a \$12 fee. Sergeant Holmes said the initial \$55 includes one test, and each additional department submittal is \$12. D. Deucher asked if there was a way to promote someone to consider Vermilion. J. Lucas asked if there was a marketing aspect. He would suspect that they would be able to link this portal from another portal by which they could market the viability of Vermilion over other areas. He looked at the website this morning and saw how many in the State of Ohio there are – Sandusky, Perkins, Erie County Sheriff's Office, and Oberlin, and they are all local, so they are

competing against the pool. It also lists which departments have an opening. He asked what makes Vermilion different – how do they drive people to the portal first, and then how do you get Vermilion's interest verses Oberlin or Lorain. Lorain or Avon may pay \$42 per hour, but their work environment is much different than the work environment in Vermilion. When you look at all the crimes for 2021 verses other areas, they are very different. Therefore, how do they make people want to work at a police environment in Vermilion. He would be curious if NTN could present something to Vermilion on how they can differentiate Vermilion verses Oberlin or Perkins. How do they grab that person? Chief Hartung said this is a mixed question of law and fact. As far as the marketing, they are basically like a Kirby salesman – they must get out and meet with the academies and talk with the kids. Any time the colleges call him about people needing credit, he will take on police interns. He said they will need to see if the department can try and get comparable again through contract negotiations. He said Lorain undercut everybody with fancy incentives, but from reading the paper in the past - in a few years they could run out of money, and they will need to layoff. A lot of what the other agencies are doing are not going to be economically sustainable in the future. G. Fisher said Vermilion will have a nice new police station, which also could be an incentive. Sergeant Holmes agreed 100% it will be an incentive.

J. Lucas said if he goes to the portal will it show what the benefits are for each location. Sergeant Holmes said the candidates are doing the research and he was not sure if Vermilion submits their benefit package. Mayor Forthofer said he would think they should investigate some marketing aspects. Sergeant Holmes said that NTN is more than willing to present a PowerPoint to the Civil Service Commission. J. Lucas felt it would be worth it to get their questions answered. He said 2021 was the last time they certified candidates, so this list runs out soon. He said they need to reconsider what is an acceptable timeframe to enact something like this.

G. Fisher said if they go with NTN, they will have to do a lot of revamping of the civil service rules, which then must go to public hearing before it goes into play. She said the law director would need to prepare the amendments. She noted there are a lot of hours of her time that goes into civil service testing. Sergeant Holmes said testing includes a lot of hidden costs such as posting, administering a test, scoring, extra credit, advertising, labor costs, etc., so he thinks NTN will streamline the process for the city. Mayor Forthofer told Sergeant Homes that he did an excellent job selling this program, but what are the downsides. Sergeant Holmes did not know of anything. Chief Hartung said he does not see a downside and if you see the number of agencies that are switching to NTN it just makes sense as they need to garner a sufficient number of names.

J. Lucas said as far as the exam itself when it is in a virtual setting, what does this look like from a capability of the applicant if they do not have the equipment at home to take the test. Sergeant Holmes said they have the onsite capabilities of Ehope or Tri-C where they can go and physically take the test. They are only taking the test once and it is a much more structured test geared towards what the departments are looking for – not knowing what the first capital of Ohio is as possibly be given on the Clancy test. He said how does this help their department as to being a good police officer if they do not know that Chillicothe was the first capital of Ohio. Their testing process is pretty substantial - 94 minutes for a situational judgment test, then a report writing portion, which is very important for their job, and then they have a reading test and a public safety self-assessment. The test is incredibly involved, and it is geared toward the type of person

they are looking for rather than knowing that Chillicothe was the first capital of Ohio.

J. Lucas said he would like to have a presentation as soon as possible from NTN. D. Deucher asked if there are any other companies like NTN. Chief Hartung said not to this scale. Sergeant Holmes said NTN does not do testing for street or water departments, or anything like that. Mayor Forthofer asked what the timing is for getting this moving. Chief Hartung said Kyle John's deployment was cancelled, so this has considerably eased the burden on the necessity. He felt they have six months to get something in place. G. Fisher said she would set up the meeting. (Clerk's note: The zoom presentation given by NTN in an open meeting is scheduled for September 20, 2022, at 9:00 a.m. at City Hall, 5511 Liberty Avenue, Vermilion, Ohio – Lower-Level Conference Room).

J. Lucas adjourned the meeting upon no further discussion.

Transcribed by: Gwen Fisher, Certified Municipal Clerk