First Selectman Gets Complaints About Phony Reports to Police Digital Tip Line

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Categories : Public Safety

Tagged as : Anonymous Tips, Darien Police Department, Digital Tip Line, Tip Line

Date : April 10, 2016

Darien Police Captain Donald Anderson said the department is pretty pleased with its new digital tip line that not only allows people to send in an anonymous tip, but allows them to keep their anonymity if police send them a message asking for more information.

But First Selectman Jayme Stevenson is getting complaints about abuse of the tip line by people acting anonymously and perhaps vengefully against others, and she said she wanted to discuss with police their tone when they question kids after a tip about them comes in.

Stevenson and Anderson spoke at last week's quarterly department heads meeting with the Board of Selectmen. Anderson was filling in for Police Chief Duane Lovello, who was in New York at a training event.

Police Pleased with Tip Line

As part of the Police Department's report, Anderson mentioned how pleased police are with the new tip line. He mentioned the feature about police being able to ask further questions of anonymous tipsters.

"It's up and running," he said. "It's been fairly successful so far. It's a good resource. The folks that are out there — they're our eyes and ears, as always. We're looking for people — residents — to let us know when they see things that are not quite right."

Stevenson then interrupted him to indicate that she's heard there are some things relating to the tip line that

aren't quite right.

Stevenson Describes Complaints

"Don [...] I've gotten several comments this week about the tip line, and it's the usual challenges. I'd like to have a conversation — not today — but with you and whoever else from your department, on the abuse of the tip line: those who are using the tip line to inflict some kind of vengeance on other kids — students.

"I spent an hour talking with a parent yesterday on this very issue, and I'd like to understand from the Police Department's perspective — I think it's a valuable tool, and you certainly have to act on the information that you're presented [with], but I need to understand how you're looking at vetting those pieces of information that come to you in a way that's positive and constructive, and not simply looking to —"

At that point, Stevenson paused, seeming to look for the right word. Selectman Susan Marks, sitting beside her, offered, "Gotcha?" and Stevenson went on:

"Yeah, the 'gotcha' moments for a lot of kids and their families."

Response

"We had a tip line before that was a call-in tip line," Anderson said. "I think there were more abuses of that, and prank phone calls. I haven't seen that with this computer-based [system], and I think our officers take a very reasonable, responsible approach [...] once they're on the scene. I think they do pretty good job at making sure that we're not overreaching for something that, you know, is not there."

Stevenson asked whether people can still send in tips by phone.

"It can be texted, it can be phoned in, it can be from your computer or your phone," Anderson said.

It didn't come up at the meeting, but a police spokesman recently said that the two most recent discoveries of teenagers drinking at parties were through the anonymous tip line.

Here's the Darien TV79 video of the Tuesday, April 5 meeting. The dialogue about the tip line starts at about 24:20 minutes into the meeting and continues to 27:05:

Quarterly Dept Heads Mtg 4-5-16 from Darien TV79 on Vimeo.

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