

MINUTES

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING

4:30 P. M., MARCH 5, 2020

A/V CONFERENCE ROOM

Keeley Steele, Chairperson, called the meeting of the Charleston City Council Committee on Public Safety to order at 4:30 p.m., MARCH 5, 2020, in the Audio/Visual Room in City Hall.

Committee Members Present:

Keeley Steele, Chair
Chuck Overstreet, Vice Chair
Naomi Bays
Brady Campbell (arrived at 5:45)
Joseph Jenkins
Deanna McKinney

1. Approval of Previous Minutes –

Councilmember Jenkins moved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on 12-9-2019. Councilmember Bays seconded. There was no objection and the minutes were approved.

2. Introduction to the new Chief of Police -

The Committee introduced themselves to the newly appointed Chief of Police, James "Tyke" Hunt. Also present: Deputy Chief Dempsey from CPD and Lieutenant Hodges of the CFD, currently serving as Director of EMS Operations

3. Current Priorities for CPD and New Chief –

Chief Hunt stated that the current priority is an assessment of the current status of the Police Department, and how they can best utilize their officers. He added that there are not enough officers out in the communities addressing 911 calls and engaging with the community. They have begun to restructure by combining supervisory rolls to shift manpower out into the communities.

Chief Hunt added that the first step was to examine the structure under Chief Smith, and then how they could begin to mold and push the department toward more community engagement, continue to enhance professionalism and ensure they are providing the service expected of them. Face to face contact is ideal, and they will be utilizing their resources, such as their in-car computers, to stay in the area as much as possible. This will increase police visibility and decrease response time.

Councilmember Bays asked about the recent restructuring. Chief Hunt replied that:

- Lieutenant Perdue is in Community Policing and Corporal Redden
- Webb is supervising the Drug Unit
- Captain Beckett is Patrol Division Commander
- Captain Abbot is the Investigative Services Commander
- Corporal Redden is in Accident Investigation
- Lieutenant Garten is in charge of the traffic side of Community Policing
- Captain Malone is in charge of the IS Division

Councilmember Bays requested that those changes be sent to Councilmembers. Councilmember Steele confirmed that part of Lieutenant Perdue's duties will be the Coffee with a Cop and Neighborhood Watch programs.

Councilmember McKinney expressed concern that she did not know a lot of the officers she had been seeing in her neighborhood and they were not approachable. She asked how that could be improved. Chief Hunt replied that he is going to mandate more walking patrols to get out into the communities, stopping into local businesses and community centers, etc. It is ideal for the officers to be able to put names to faces and vice versa. This could help situations from escalating, and allow the officers to provide better service. Chief Hunt added that he is exploring how funds, especially from Asset Forfeiture can best be spent on programs that get officers out into the community more. Councilmember Steele asked if the officers were receptive to getting out of their cars more. Chief Hunt replied that most officers were trained in this way, and that the shift had been well received.

Councilmember Steele added that, especially during the warmer months, the City has certain hotspots, with different areas having different needs. Chief Hunt responded that they are making the best with the number of officers that they do have. Additionally, the department can use statistic driven data to identify needs and hotspots around the City.

Councilmember Steele asked the Chief to further explain Asset Forfeiture. Chief Hunt replied that there are state and federal laws that mandate where the money from that can go. MDENT is solely funded by Asset Forfeiture. Councilmember Steele asked about the assets that are not cash (property, etc.). Councilmember Campbell asked if they have ever seized houses, and Chief Hunt replied that they had. Additionally, stolen property goes to Property and Evidence where the goal is to return it to the owner (how long depends on the case status). Cars can be sold to liquify the funds. Councilmember Campbell asked when the last time was the CPD seized a house; Chief Hunt did not immediately know the answer. The Chief added that the revenue from seized houses

would not go into the General Fund. Additionally, they are not necessarily wanting to take property, as whole families could be affected. They do not want to create situations that would enhance hardships. Councilmember Jenkins added that the law states that seizures of such property would require that it is involved in the furtherance of criminal activity or directly linked to the proceeds from criminal activity.

Councilmember Bays said that she had noticed a lot more walking officers downtown. She asked if the officers will stay the same or be on a rotating shift. Chief Hunt responded that the Hybrid Unit of 12 officers, a combination of the bike and walking beat, had to be reduced. As such, all officers have been instructed to increase their foot patrols. Deputy Chief Dempsey added that they would prefer that there be different officers always, as different officers will notice different things.

Councilmember McKinney said that she had been getting numerous calls concerning the homeless, especially in the Elk City area. She asked what could be done to prevent them from laying in front of businesses. Chief Hunt responded that underreporting is an issue; the non-emergency number should be used in those cases. They can also use that reporting to aggregate the data and see trends, etc. They should also be encouraged to use facilities set up to best help them. Councilmember Steele suggested that officers and businesses should carry handouts of those places listed.

Councilmember Bays asked what can be done about the vandalism of property. Chief Hunt said that it first must be reported in a timely manner. He added that familiarity with the area is essential to recognizing something out of place. Councilmember Bays asked if there were any plans to do short PSAs on social media to promote the non-emergency number. Councilmember Jenkins added that the Councilmembers could add to the reach of the videos by posting it in their various neighborhood groups. Councilmember Steele added that it would be beneficial to introduce officers on social media so that the public can be familiar with them, especially if they are going to be seen walking the streets more. Councilmember Jenkins added that Community Services is very active on Facebook. Councilmember Bays added that social media is a simple, cheap and effective tool to get information to the public. Councilmember Jenkins suggested that it would be beneficial for Councilmembers to meet with the officers/cars assigned to their Wards. Chief Hunt said that ride-alongs with officers would be helpful for Councilmembers and community leaders. Councilmember Stelle added that she had been on a ride-along, and it was a very informative experience.

4. Potential/Upcoming Retirement Numbers –

Hodges stated that the CFD recently had a recruitment drive which went well. They are currently short 15 positions, and are estimating an additional 10 more by summer. They have been recruiting through social media, radio, news, flyers and educational facilities, and have received a total of 213 applications. Councilmember Jenkins asked what the starting salary was. Hodges replied that they say it is mid \$40,000 due to several variables involved. Of the applications, 192 were residents of West Virginia, with 33 within City limits. Councilmember Steele confirmed that a lot of the applicants are

attending high school. The code requires that they be at least 18 upon application and have a high school degree or equivalent upon instatement. Councilmember Steele confirmed that the test results will be back within the week. They will give the CPAT test to 50 individuals and 20 will likely pass. Hodges added that they want to have a group of 12 ready by July 1, 2020, then another 12.

Chief of Staff Matt Sutton asked if they had a lot of repeat applicants. Hodges replied that they did not, probably because the list is good for 3 years. From the audience, Councilmember Pharr asked what would prohibit someone from failing the background check. Hodges replied that the state level prohibits all felonies. Councilmember Overstreet added that the physical test is now standardized within the valley. Applicants are now allowed to practice beforehand. Councilmember Jenkins asked if EMS applicants would need to take the same physical test. Hodges replied that they would want to keep the requirements as they are, since the department is dual role. In order to separate EMS, the Charter would have to be drastically changed.

Chief Hunt stated that the CPD currently has 17 vacancies. 20 officers could potentially leave, however 8 are ready to go to the Academy, 6 will be sworn in shortly, 2 are set for the July Academy and the first of 2 tests will be given in a week's time. The CPD has implemented a pre-hire program, a 4-week program that will get officers ready to enter the Academy and transition to the particular needs of Charleston Police Department. Councilmember Steele confirmed that 4 officers are currently away on military service, and are expected to return by the end of September.

Councilmember Bays asked if Lieutenant Davis will still be sending out press releases. Chief Hunt replied that he didn't think one person should be known for doing that, and each Department Head should speak on whatever issue is current. Additionally, all Councilmembers will be included on any press releases or other important communications from the CPD. Councilmember Bays asked how many officers had only a few years to go until they are eligible for retirement. Chief Hunt replied that it was probably close to 53 officers with 15-20 years served. Councilmember Jenkins confirmed that the average starting salary is just under \$41,000 with built in overtime. Chief Hunt added that overtime is not a big incentive to younger applicants, but the benefits are attractive. Councilmember Pharr confirmed that the included overtime averages out to roughly 4 hours per week. Additionally, there are pay rates associated with rank and longevity.

Councilmember Bays asked where recruits were coming from. Chief Hunt answered that while he did not have that information with him, they are mostly from within West Virginia, but they currently have officers from New York, Ohio, etc.

Chief Hunt added that having one building associated with the CPD would go a long way to help with the department's identity and recruitment. It would help streamline information and increase efficiency. Councilmember Jenkins added that bonds are at the lowest rate they have been in a long time for such a long-term project.

5. Minority and Female Recruiting –

Chief Hunt added that they have recently created a division dedicated to recruitment and retention to be headed by Lieutenant Davis. He added that there are currently 7 minorities and 5 female officers, which is not a reflection of the community.

Councilmember Overstreet confirmed that the CFD currently has 6 minorities. Hodges added that they cannot ask for race or gender on applications. Of the applications that they have accepted by hand, roughly 20 have been from minorities and 8 from females. Chief Hunt added that of the 8 that are to be recently sworn into the Academy, 2 are female and 0 are minorities. The CPD and CFD provide study sessions for their tests.

Councilmember Campbell motioned to adjourn. Councilmember Bays seconded.
Meeting adjourned