

MINUTES

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING

5:30 P. M., APRIL 17, 2023
AV ROOM, CITY HALL

Shawn Taylor, Chairperson, called the meeting of the Charleston City Council Committee on Public Safety to order at 5:30 p.m., APRIL 17, 2023.

Present:

Shawn Taylor, Chair
Chuck Overstreet, Vice Chair
Mary Beth Hoover
Bruce King
Beth Kerns
Kathy Rubio

Absent:

Caitlin Cook

Other Councilmembers Present:

Joe Solomon
Chelsea Steelhammer
Frank Annie

1. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES –

Councilmember Hoover moved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on 1-17-2023. Councilmember King seconded the motion. There was no objection, and the minutes were approved.

2. TO HEAR FROM PUBLIC SAFETY RELATED DEPARTMENTS -

Councilmember Taylor stated that it is the Committee's obligation to regularly touch base with the Fire Department, Police Department, etc. for the Committee to be responsive and help them better serve the public.

Police Chief Hunt submitted to the Committee the Statistical Data Overview for 2022. He summarized that while they could always do better, the Police Department was in a good place. They are doing well with the current plan that is in place, and will continue to strengthen their partnerships within the City. Some highlights from the presentation include:

- All areas of Type 1 crimes, except for Murder, are at Low/Near Low. Good communication in the community leads to trust in law enforcement.
- Two areas higher than previous years are Burglary and Larceny. These are still lower when compared to pre-Covid years.
- There is a significant increase in the number of Traffic Citations, and a reduction in Crashes. He cited the increase in citations (and citizen contacts) as the reason for the significant decrease in crashes. The number of Arrests has increased, which is related to the increase in citizen contacts.
- MDENT has allowed for major federal cases, and he credits them for helping to keep violent crime down.
- There has been a 15% increase in contacts, and a 7% decrease in the number of times they had to respond to suspect resistance or aggression.
- They have an 87% solve rate, which is much higher than the national rate of 54%.

Councilmember King confirmed that Robbery meant armed or threatening to be armed.

Councilmember Taylor pointed out that compared to 2016, there was a significant reduction in Robbery, Malicious Wounding, Burglary/B&E, Larceny, B&E Auto and Motor Vehicle Theft. Chief Hunt added that Covid did play a part, but attributed the change mostly to good community relations.

Councilmember King asked what were some of the major drug problems. Chief Hunt replied that they have been seeing heroine, fentanyl, meth and xylazine (which is the next big danger).

Councilmember King confirmed with Chief Hunt that the Department does not have a dedicated Cold Case unit, but Senior Detectives and Supervisors get involved with that.

Fire Chief Matthews stated that they are authorized to staff 168 people, and are currently staffed at 148. There are 21 new recruits. They have recently retooled training to retain recruits, and have seen success with that. The department has historically high numbers of paramedics, with 86 members and 9 in training. They are expected to have

5-7 retirements within the next 12 months. Chief Matthews is currently working to realign the Command staff and to reassign key personnel to increase firefighter safety. There will be a new EMS Division that will focus on the planning, training and operations of the EMS Units to be headed by Assistant Chief Chad Jones. It will also include a Health and Safety Officer whose main focus will be the mental and physical wellbeing of their employees and will conduct quality reviews. The position will also serve as a liaison with the CARE team. Chief Matthews added that there will be a Safety Office on each shift that will be on every scene that will command any additional safety operations that arise.

Councilmember Overstreet asked what was the Civil Service Commission's process for deciding if someone could come back after leaving. Chief Matthews replied that if someone resigns after one year in good standing, they may petition the Commission within two years to return.

Councilmember Kerns expressed concerns about bicycle safety, and suggested "bicycle rodeos," that involve the Fire and Police Departments. Chief Hunt added that the Hybrid Unit does a lot of bicycle safety by handing out helmets, sharing information, etc. He encouraged any known violations of the law to be called in.

From the audience, Councilmember Solomon asked how Councilmembers could be helpful to the Fire Department. Chief Matthews replied that they will be coming to Council with their mental health program.

Mayor Goodwin added that the CARE team has added news members to work nights, weekends and holidays. With the growing staff, they are looking for a new space for the department. They have been coordinating with the Fire and Police Departments. The Mayor added that there have been 121 treatments and referrals for recovery since the beginning of the year.

Councilmember Taylor added that the CARE Office is vital to the City to the Community and its individual citizens.

Councilmember Kerns motioned to adjourn. Councilmember Hoover seconded. Meeting adjourned.