

MINUTES

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING

6:00 P. M., JULY 17, 2023
AV ROOM, CITY HALL

Shawn Taylor, Chair, called the meeting of the Charleston City Council Committee on Public Safety to order at 6:00 p.m., July 17, 2023.

Present:

Shawn Taylor, Chair
Chuck Overstreet, Vice Chair
Caitlin Cook
Mary Beth Hoover
Bruce King
Beth Kerns

Absent:

Kathy Rubio

Other Councilmembers Present:

Chelsea Steelhammer
Frank Annie
Joe Solomon
Larry Moore

1. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES –

Councilmember Hoover moved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on 4-17-2023. Councilmember Cook seconded the motion. There was no objection, and the minutes were approved.

2. To hear from public speakers on public safety related topics.

None

3. TO HEAR FROM PUBLIC SAFETY RELATED DEPARTMENTS -

Interim Police Chief Dempsey added there were no pressing issues at the moment. Recruiting numbers were still trending down. This is a national trend. They are about to have another test for recruits. He added that the feasibility study for the Public Safety Building will likely be ready soon.

Councilmember Kerns added that it seemed like having all of the force in one place would be more efficient. She asked what they could do as Councilmembers to help with recruitment. Chief Dempsey replied that the best recruiting is word of mouth.

Councilmember King asked about the national trend concerning recruiting. Chief Dempsey replied that the more populated areas are having trouble recruiting people. The pandemic is likely part of the reason, but there is no solid explanation for it. Mayor Goodwin added that this is frequently a discussion during Municipal League meetings, adding that the trend is also true for most positions within City government. She confirmed with Chief Dempsey that they go to high schools during career day events.

Chief Dempsey added that they are also about to start a new group of the Junior Leadership Academy. From the audience, Councilmember Steelhammer confirmed with Chief Dempsey that the ages will be approximately 12-14 years old.

Fire Chief Matthews stated that they currently have 161 firefighters (budgeted for 169), adding that one is currently out for long-term injury. This number includes the recent 21 probationary firefighters sworn in last month. He added that they have all passed the Academy. He credits his staff, who re-tooled the program based on feedback. The May recruit class is now out of the probationary period. 18 of those are now entering paramedic school, which brings the number of paramedics within the department to 82. Since 2016, every person who joins the Fire Department is also required to be a paramedic. The Chief added that they are trying to keep their training class size to 8-10 for various practical reasons. The new Safety Officer position went live on June 12, and he has received a lot of positive feedback about it.

Chief Matthews added that they had 26 calls for service during the Regatta, 4 of which were false alarms.

Councilmember Kerns confirmed with Chief Matthews that they currently had 3 female firefighters.

Director of CARE, Taryn Wherry, stated that from January to June, the CARE Office responded to 212 overdoses and sent 275 individuals for treatment. They added 4 staff members in March. The team is out every day, and has been focused on housing among other things. For the year so far, they have reunited 82 people with families.

Councilmember Kerns asked if they had observed anyone suffering from the smoke pollution from the recent fires. Wherry replied that they had, and added that many unhoused may not be aware of current events that would impact their environment and health.

Chief of Staff, Matt Sutton, added that Senators Manchin and Capito had been very supportive of the CARE program.

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