



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

SPECIAL COMMITTEE: POLICE & COMMUNITY

CITY COUNCIL
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Date: March 24, 2022

Time: 3:00pm

Location: 1st floor conference room; Holliday Bldg 620 SE Madison (*virtual attendance was available as well*)

Committee members present: Councilmembers Karen Hiller, Sylvia Ortiz (Chair), Mayor Michael Padilla

City staff present: Chief Bryan Wheelers (TPD) LT Jennifer Cross (TPD)

1) Call to Order

Chairwoman Ortiz called the meeting to order at 3:00pm. Committee members introduced themselves.

2) Approve minutes from February 24, 2022 meeting

Committee member Padilla made a motion to approve the minutes. Motion approved unanimously 3-0-0.

3) Mosaic Partnership & TPD

LT Jennifer Cross participated in the first Mosaic Partnership class in 2021, as a paired partner, and discussed pieces she took away from the program and has begun implementing within the TPD Training program. She has signed up to coach for this next session. She referenced the Mosaic Partnership's website and listed some items related to the intent of those partnerships, which included:

- Perception of another person being a good team member, or community member, occurs when there's a depth of understanding of who the person truly is.
- Positive results that can occur in the community, a change in people's unconscious judgements of others based on culture and difference.

LT Cross noted that the police department has participated in bias based policing and fair & impartial policing training for a number of years, however over time the programs become stale and participants do not feel as challenged or connected to the content in a meaningful way. Although topics such as implicit and explicit bias, she feels that people tend to fail to recognize what their implicit biases are within themselves. After attending the Mosaic Partnerships program, she felt this piece was missing from the traditional training at TPD. The pairings and interpersonal relationships that resulted were an easy way to highlight our similarities rather than our differences. She went on to describe her experience,

and noted that through this partnership, biases were discovered that went far beyond biases related to race. And that this process could better help officers acknowledge and understand what their biases are, and be more inclined to see them as positive ways to address them rather than negative connotation. LT Cross noted she had met with Tara James-Wallace, Pastor Marcus Clark, and SGT Harmon from the Sheriff's Office to begin the process of figuring out how the pieces of this program could be shaped to work within the police recruit program. The concept they are hoping to present to the top echelon of City of Topeka is a concept of human library books. This may look like inviting individuals to come to the table and giving participants a chapter from their "book", with no other context, and then asking the participants in the room to help finish writing the story. She feels this would be very telling and introspective for participants...to see that sometimes we may not be aware of what our biases are, but that they do exist. LT Cross has begun inviting some of the "library" members, and noted they will include a diverse group such as a domestic violence victim, recovered addicts, unsheltered population, parolees, to name a few. She is hopeful that this can begin rolling out in the summer of 2022.

Chairwoman Ortiz noted the motto of the committee has been "looking through the lens of the other person" and noted that it was important to be able to sit down with someone and really listen. LT Cross agreed and noted that the hope is to move toward less focus within diversity only on the outside, and move toward becoming more divers through thought processes and accept diverse perspectives and to be open to hold those conversations. She noted that in a bias training recently, there was a point made that everyone has a bias and that people need to become knowledgeable on what their bias is and how to recognize it, and that understanding and recognition is what they are hoping will come to the forefront through this human library concept. And to learn how to get past what you see of someone at the first meeting and how to move past that bias to get to the in-depth conversations.

Committee member Hiller noted that one of the issues that reoccurred was about training. With LT Cross having that "ah-ha" experience and wanting to take back some of those pieces for training with bias and diversity, it was timely to bring this information forward to the committee. LT Cross noted there had been a number of changes within the Training of the department over the past six months, moving forward the department will not only be able to provide detail on the number of hours that were spent in training but also able to describe the type and topics of training that were provided.

Committee member Padilla noted that, as a former law enforcement officer, he had spent many hours with training on racial profiling and biased based policing. He reflected on time providing a training session on cultural awareness and noted that it was difficult to provide that training back then, because some individuals

were set in their ways and refused to open up and learn something new. Diversity is more than just the color or gender of others. There is a tough challenge with integrating that type of training within law enforcement, or anywhere. He inquired about how this type of training is enforced within roll call trainings or other types of training to help keep the important concepts at the forefront of officers' minds. He inquired as to how it goes into the command staff meetings. Committee member Padilla stated that as a service provider, this training would be beneficial for all of the City of Topeka employees, not only for law enforcement.

LT Cross responded that a lot of past training has been done with PowerPoint presentations and makes it too easy for people to read through the checkbox of what bias looks like and say "that's not me". Instead, she turns the focus inward and building the human library. This library is from real people about their real stories. The goal is to get people into engaging people into hard conversations. If attendees do not walk away from the training feeling uncomfortable, they have not been open to the process.

Committee member Padilla inquired as to if this type of training had some leeway from the State requirements, than perhaps what it had been before? LT Cross confirmed, and stated that as long as the curriculum points were addressed, there was really no guide as to how it was taught. Chief Wheelles reminded that the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center (KLETC) standards are the minimum requirement, but that local law enforcement agencies are able to provide more training, which is what TPD has done for many years.

LT Cross noted that this training would be happening both in the Recruit Training Academy as well as the in-service training that all officers are required to attend. Her goal has been to incorporate more and more trainers who do not have a law enforcement background. She feels that the department is primed to have this type of training. The training year begins July 1st and LT Cross stated her intent was to be ready to begin the first round of this training in July.

Committee member Hiller recalled prior biased training she had attended where the conversation opened up to turn the attendees into the participants to point out bias they had been subject to over their lifetime, and that by doing that, there were many varying things that came up that would not have been included in the standard presentations.

Committee member Hiller inquired if there had been any changes to the personnel reviews, and inquired if there might be any change to finding a way to measure the level of performance an office has demonstrated for the various skills, attitudes, demeanors, and so on. Chief Wheelles stated that the personnel review forms may not see changes to languages, however there are topics that needed to get covered with assistance by the Human Resources Department. He agreed that

the ABLE training has been improving the culture at the department level, as well as other training. And stated that the department is working on changing the language in the training manual and the policies first. LT Cross noted that the Civil Service Commission has changed to begin meeting quarterly, and that they would be working on reviewing the forms and updating the language. She noted that the police department does not have the ability to make those changes, and that it must go through the Civil Service Commission for the Human Resources aspect. Chief Wheelers stated the department could show the Civil Service Commission the validity of the changes found in the training manual. Chief Wheelers noted he agreed with comments made by Committee member Padilla in that the paperwork is important however the daily conversations were more important to ensuring the culture change is occurring and sticking with the officers. The belief system and overlapping shift in culture for peer intervention to become the standard, which will be where change occurs.

4) Presentation: Defund the Police (video 47:00 minute mark)

[This presentation can be found on the Committee's webpage at <https://www.topeka.org/citycouncil/police-community>].

Chief Wheelers provided a presentation regarding the Defunding the Police topic. He noted that when researching the topic, he found it challenging and looked to leaders within the community and movement to help better define it.

Highlights:

- Topic of Defunding the Police came about in 2020.
- Defund the Police movement
 - For some, Defund the Police is a movement/stepping stone toward abolishing police departments entirely.
 - For some, the idea of Defunding the Police is limited to simply restricting money for military-style equipment.
 - For some, there should be police but their role in communities should be limited to crime prevention. The idea goes that service agencies other than police could/should respond to non-violent calls.
- Funding:
 - Police Dept. funding allocation is generally a policy decision made by governmental oversight entities
 - In 2020-2021, more than 20 major cities across the country engaged in police department specific budget reduction initiatives – scale and circumstances varied dramatically
 - More than \$870M in direct cuts to police departments across the nation resulted
 - New York, Portland, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Baltimore and other cities all had reduced police budgetary spending in 2021

- 2021 Homicide Increases:
 - Chicago - up by 22%
 - Seattle - up by 22%
 - Minneapolis - up by 56%
 - Portland - up by 530% (five hundred and thirty)
 - Los Angeles - up by 11%
 - Baltimore - up by 26%
 - Philadelphia - 561 murders: Most in city's history
- Kansas City, Mo - May 2021
 - Mayor Quinton Lucas, with support from several city council members, passed ordinance to defund the police department by \$44M, the minimum of the city's general fund revenue and the lowest the city can devote to police funding under Missouri law.
 - [Quotes from KCMO Councilwoman Teresa Loar and KCMO Police Chief Richard Smith against the budget cut were shown on presentation]
 - May 2021 - Missouri Attorney General files lawsuit to stop budget reduction
 - October 2021 - Jackson County Court Judge found city council action to be illegal; funds restored.
- Kansas City, MO - the two deadliest years on city's recorded history
 - 2020 - 179 homicides
 - 2021 - 157 homicides
 - 2022 - 46 homicides as of 3/23/22
- Topeka, Kansas
 - No police department-only specific budget reductions implemented by city council in 2021; Common message from public at budget meetings - Fully staff/fund public safety entities - a top priority
 - 2021 Crime Statistics
 - 3 year low in summer crime
 - 6 year low in homicides
 - 3 year low in shootings
 - Significant % decrease in violent & property crime
 - 2021-2022 Police Chief Meetings takeaway
 - Met with business leaders, religious leaders, community service organizations, school leaders, government leaders and other concerned citizens.
 - Common theme - They want more police at their events and locations, not less. Many stated that police presence add to overall safety perception.
 - Topeka Police Department is very fortunate to have widespread city leadership & community support.
- Yale University Study
 - 8-week study surveying 1, 137 people about how they felt about "reforming, defunding, and abolishing police".

- The finished findings were published in the January 2022 issue of “Criminology and Public Policy” [this article can be found at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1745-9133.12572>]
 - Less than a quarter - 23% - said they support abolishing the police
 - Slightly over a third - 34% - said they supported defunding police
 - In contrast, a strong majority - 66% - supported police reform
 - The survey was conducted while the protests were underway in 2020
- Additional articles related to “From Defund to Refund”
 - 2022 New York Times - “A Year After ‘Defund’ Police Departments Get Their Money Back” - <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/10/us/dallas-police-defund.html>
 - 2022 Newsweek - “America’s Biggest Cities to Invest \$450M More in Police Following 2020 Defund Movement” - <https://www.newsweek.com/americas-biggest-cities-invest-450m-more-police-following-2020-defund-movement-1663599>
 - 2022 CNN - (Department of Justice Allots \$1.6B to Cities Due to Violent Crime Rise) “Justice Department Boosts Funds to Cities to Battle Rise in Crime” - <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/27/politics/doj-combats-crime-rise/index.html>
 - 2022 NBC News - “How Democrats Went From Defund to Refund the Police” - <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/democrats-went-defund-refund-police-rcna14796>
- (Presentation included additional two slides with quotes from both Democratic and Republican leadership supporting police funding).
- Alternative 2022 Phrasing: Public Safety Reimagined, Police Reform, Refine Justice.
- TPD Mission Statement: The Mission of the Topeka Police Department is to provide a safe community and faithfully serve out citizens with impeccable integrity, enduring professionalism, and immeasurable honor.

Questions/Comments:

- Committee member Hiller noted that when she heard initial conversations for defunding the police for Topeka, it was more questioning if police personnel and funding that was being used for mental health and behavioral crisis, and domestic violence victims, that perhaps other non-law enforcement personnel could fill those roles and take those calls. She noted that when hearing those concerns, she had known that the Topeka Police Department was ahead of the curve, or way ahead of the line, with how strongly we interface domestic violence or mental health professionals with the officers. The feedback seemed positive that both the professional services and the individuals served appreciated having a police presence on those calls, and that their training for de-escalation and managing situations that could become volatile, most people thought was very important. Chief Wheelles recalled speaking to a number of

community members to verify if instead of defunding, it was more calls for reallocation of funds. Some of the programs that major cities were wanting to reallocate to and reform, were already programs that TPD has built with partnerships throughout the city. He feels that at the time, politics had clouded some of those conversations, and that we are now in a better place to have those conversations. He feels that police reform has always been a topic of concern and feels it is an important one to continue moving toward.

- Committee member Hiller noted that Chief Wheelles had partaken in a number of conversations with community members who had wanted to speak about the defunding the police movement, and that through those conversations, inquired if Chief Wheelles felt those individuals were satisfied with what the City and TPD are doing? Chief Wheelles stated he found it interesting that a lot of the people who he had spoken with, had commented that they realized starting a conversation about defunding the police were difficult, however he felt there was a real understanding that that term and language were not helpful terms. It is more about conversation and collaboration, reallocation, efficiency, and that this community wants to have conversations that focus on what is going on in Topeka. He appreciates having the ability to meet with many people within the community from all walks of life, and has taken away something valuable from each of those meetings. He noted that social justice and racial justice are important issues and should continue to be discussed. The local police department is typically the most visible and accessible face of government, and carries a lot of responsibility when it comes to making those changes and having those conversations. “Justice Reimagined” is a term that resonates the best with him. If you are not evolving, you are deteriorating.
- Committee member Hiller inquired if, out of all of those conversations, there were any issues that the Committee should still look at? Chief Wheelles stated there were not, and said the Committee has done a very comprehensive deep dive into the department and issues that had come from local and national conversations.
- Chairwoman Ortiz echoed that there was a lot of information that had been covered, and that although it has taken a long time, she felt the information that was reviewed was able to really look at all of the issues that had been brought forward. And that was her goal.
- Committee member Padilla stated the TPD has had a history of being open to being adaptive and relevant to the community. But felt the City and Department needed to do a better job of letting the community know about the level of training they do, and tell their story better. He felt that all of the concerns that had been brought forward in August 2020 have been addressed by the Committee, and the TPD. The department has done a good job at

proactively looking forward to what might be happening next and trying to prepare and train for it. He thanked Chief for his and other Staff's time, and sufficient answering of any questions that were brought forward. He also thanked the other committee members for taking the time to volunteer to serve on this committee, knowing that it would be a difficult and time-consuming task, and feels the work they have done has been valuable.

5) Discussion Regarding Public Input Sessions (Video 1:28:10 minute mark)

Chairwoman Ortiz stated she feels she is ready to begin the process of creating recommendations to present to the Governing Body, and asked if any of the other Committee members have additional items they feel need to be reviewed and addressed. She would like to create the list of recommendations to be presented to the full Governing Body during a regularly scheduled meeting, at which time individuals can then come before the Governing Body to provide additional testimony speaking to those recommendations.

Committee member Padilla restated the process for confirmation: recommendations sent to Chair to compile and consolidate, the compiled list will be reviewed by the Committee at the next meeting, with a final list then being presented to the public and Governing Body. Chairwoman Ortiz confirmed and sought input on taking public comment.

Committee member Hiller suggested having the committee meet once more following the recommendation deadline, for discussion. She suggested having a second committee-level meeting to hear public comment on the recommendations, and then sending a final draft of recommendations to the Governing Body.

Committee member Padilla stated he would feel comfortable with having recommendations submitted to the Chair by mid-April, not meeting in April but then coming together in May to review and prepare for public input.

Chairwoman Ortiz requested that Committee recommendations be submitted to her by April 22nd. With a week notice in advance. The committee will meet on May 20th to review recommendations and prepare for the public input session.

Committee member Hiller inquired on the timeline: recommendations to Chair by April 22nd, Committee meeting to discuss/review consolidated list of recommendations on May 20th, set up a meeting in June for public input on recommendations, and then final list of recommendations to Governing Body in July. Chairwoman Ortiz confirmed.

6) Other Items

No additional items.

7) Adjourn

Chairwoman Ortiz adjourned the meeting at 4:45pm.

Meeting recording can be found at: https://youtu.be/Xd_9va0givU

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