



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

SPECIAL COMMITTEE: POLICE & COMMUNITY

CITY COUNCIL
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Date: May 28, 2021

Time: 3:00pm

Location: 1st Floor Conference Room; Cyrus K. Holliday Bldg 620 SE Madison
(virtual attendance was available as well)

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

City staff present: City Manager Brent Trout, Police: Chief Bryan Wheelles, SGT Matt Cobb, DET Ryan Hayden, Gretchen Spiker

1) Call to Order

Chairwoman Ortiz called the meeting to order at 3:00pm. Committee members introduced themselves. Chairwoman Ortiz noted she had received correspondence from members of the public who would like to hear more information regarding chokeholds. She reminds everyone that the Committee will continue working through the topics, but have appreciated the input.

2) Approve minutes from April 30, 2021 meeting

Committee member Padilla made a motion to approve the minutes. Committee member Hiller seconded the motion. Motion approved 3:0.

3) Continued Discussion: Recruitment

[This presentation was initially presented at the April 30, 2021 meeting and can be found on the committee's webpage]

SGT Matt Cobb is a member of the Recruitment team, and answered additional questions about the recruiting process for TPD.

Committee member Padilla referenced the more wholistic approach that Chief Wheelles and SGT Campos spoke to in the previous meeting. This idea is to “sell” the city, to then work on promoting the department. And that it is not only the applicant who is recruited, the family is recruited. Committee member Padilla inquired if additional conversations had come from a recent meeting with TPD and members of the Greater Topeka Partnership. SGT Cobb stated there had not been. Since the meeting, his biggest takeaway is how significant the internship

program is. He reiterated some of what the program offers and the goal of it as it relates to recruiting for the department.

Committee member Padilla stated that another important part of the internship program is the vetting process and being able to allow those interns to ask questions about the profession of law enforcement, TPD, and the City of Topeka as an organization. SGT Cobb reviewed how the internship program used to be and that he felt it was not effective as a recruitment and hiring strategy. A few years ago, the program was reviewed and reformatted. This is only the second year offering the program, as the COVID-19 pandemic hindered the program from happening in 2020, to allow for more in-depth participation throughout the various bureaus within the department. Before the program ends, the interns will complete the written and physical exams, have their first interview, and begin the background check process with the intention being to hire these students.

Committee member Padilla inquired if there was a point during the internship where the families were involved, whether virtually or some other way. SGT Cobb stated that it was not uncommon for the family or spouse of an intern or potential applicant to have questions and concerns about their loved one's choice of career. The Recruitment and Training units take the time to explain the extensive training, facilities, the TPD academy being almost double what the State requires, the six months of riding with a field training officer, and the additional six months during probation when they receive intense supervision from the supervisors, and how their loved one will become part of another type of family. Going through those aspects seem to help put concerns at ease more than simply providing statistics.

Committee member Padilla inquired if there was a support system component as the interns continue through the process. SGT Cobb confirmed that at the end of the internship, that the recruiting team would keep in touch with them, even if it was in more of a friendly level rather than professional one. When the team goes back to the universities for testing or career fairs, they have had previous interns stop by to converse.

Committee member Padilla noted that he has heard the question from people who assume the department is not doing as much work as they could be to hire people of color. His observation has been that the department is much more diverse now than it ever has been and asked about the diversity of the recruitment team and the candidates that we are drawing into the program. SGT Cobb stated that the most recent academy had nine, four of which are minorities. The universities that

TPD recruits at: Ft. Hays State, University of Southern Mississippi, have higher than average diversity pools.

SGT Cobb stated that the significant thing to remember is that we need to stay competitive. The applicant “pool” is now more of a “puddle”. If there are fewer applicants coming to the table, we have to find ways to be more competitive to get them to choose TPD. Applicants now are chasing money. They will leave for another department for an additional dollar per hour.

Committee member Hiller reminded that when people are asked about what is most important in a job, employees generally want to feel valued and working in a place of excellence more than just the pay. They want to feel their contribution and roll is valued and important. She appreciated the new TPD intern program and feels it gives the potential applicants and new recruits a good idea of what it is like to be part of the TPD, as well as if the city is the place they want to live. It puts a responsibility to all of us, to make Topeka a place where people want to live and work.

Committee member Hiller inquired if there was any feedback, from the interns reactions to the recruiters, which we could work on. SGT Cobb stated the tough part is less about recruiting, and more about retention. The attrition rate is at 39% since SGT Cobb began in 2006. The national average is 15-17%. SGT Cobb provided numbers, stating the department had hired 300 officers since 2006, and that since that time, 117 are gone. That makes it tough on the department, community, everyone. Committee member Hiller followed the question up by asking if it was SGT Cobb’s opinion that people not staying for the length of a career was a generational shift and the mindset is not as determined to stay in one place for the long run, or are there other reasons we are losing people. SGT Cobb responded it was not uncommon for people to change agencies, and that he felt comfortable if officers stuck with TPD for 3-5 years. Committee member Hiller noted the topic of the residency requirement was part of the larger picture, with this regard, and that there are two sides where we want to improve the retention but also want people to want to move here.

Chairwoman Ortiz inquired about the number of interns that will begin with the summer program. SGT Cobb responded 11.

Chairwoman Ortiz inquired as to how many interns the department was hoping to keep from that 11. SGT Cobb responded he would like to see the department hire 5. When the program ran in 2019, there were 17 interns of which 5 were hired.

Chairwoman Ortiz would like to have further discussion regarding retention strategies in a future meeting.

Chairwoman Ortiz inquired if there was an exit interview taken to help provide information into why people are leaving. Chief Wheelles confirmed the City's Human Resources Department oversees exit interviews, however TPD has a form of an exit interview as well for staff who wish to partake. SGT Cobb suggested having "stay" interviews to know what the reasons are for those staff who continue to stay on with the department.

Chief Wheelles wanted to state for the record that the Recruitment Team has been nationally and internationally recognized. The internship program that TPD is offering is one of perhaps only two being done, in this format, in the nation. He stated he felt it spoke highly of the team and the department, and that in every challenge there is an opportunity.

4) Crime Reduction Strategy & Drug Takeback Program [video 38:00 minute mark]

[This presentation can be found on the committee's webpage]

CPT Jamey Haltom provided information about the Safe Disposal for Medications and for Medical Sharps. These collection boxes can be found in the Law Enforcement Center lobby. Policy 6.1 can be found on the Committee's webpage, and was reviewed during this segment. These safes are for residential use only, not for commercial disposal purposes. Chairwoman Ortiz inquired if liquid medications could be disposed of through these boxes. CPT Haltom confirmed that liquids such as cough syrup could be disposed of there, however there are some types of medications that could not such as aerosols or inhalers.

Committee member Hiller inquired if both boxes were seeing usage. CPT Haltom confirmed that the medications and sharps boxes are used a great deal. The Narcotics Supervisors check the boxes weekly and organize the safe disposals for both.

Committee member Hiller inquired if there had been any recent public awareness for these disposal sites. Chief Wheelles stated that had been part of the Chairwoman's intention for bringing it to the committee meeting, but that bringing it back to the public's attention again is a good way to keep it in front of minds.

Chief Wheelles noted that Crime Reduction was his top priority.

Highlights:

- Crime Strategy Meetings
 - Occur every two weeks
 - Involves TPD Senior Command Staff, Crime Analysis Unit, Criminal Intelligence Unit, Crime Stoppers, Sheriff's Office Command, District Attorney's Office & TPD Media Team
 - Looking at the "what", "when", "who" and "where" of crime trends, by reviewing statistical data.
 - Goal is to be more effective and more responsive with resource allocation of police manpower to address crime in the capital city.
 - The same crime issues may be addressed for long periods of time, until the numbers decrease, and may be brought back to subsequential meetings.
 - This is a general view into how the department operates as it does. It is not completely reactionary approaches. There is a lot of data analysis that goes into this process.
- Field Operations Bureau Efforts
 - 2021 Power Shift Projects included all three shifts on different dates, completed 31 patrol projects, from all over the city.
- Community Outreach Bureau Efforts -
 - There is no crime reduction strategy that does not incorporate community outreach efforts. We need communication with the citizens.
 - The Community Outreach Bureau participates in community outreach events, but also works through property crime initiatives, retail business

crime initiatives, surveillance operations, fugitive apprehension operations.

- Multi-agency Operational Collaborations
 - Operation Frontier Justice was recent collaboration with US Marshals. Yielded impressive statistical outcomes and national media attention from the 10-day operation.
 - Federal taskforce partnerships with ATF, FBI, US Marshals, KBI's Northeast Kansas Child Victims Taskforce.
 - Important because it is a force multiplier and provides access to federal prosecution beyond state laws.
 - Chief, Sheriff, DA meet weekly. Communication is key.
 - SNCO Drug Taskforce
 - Registered Offender proactive investigations
 - Fugitive apprehension program
- Prosecution Efforts
 - Meets with Shawnee County District Attorney weekly to discuss issues and refinements.
 - TPD Detectives complete case presentations to DA's Staff on all homicide and special victims cases. DA's office provide legal instruction in Recruit Academies and continuing education for all personnel during in-service.

Questions from the Committee:

- Does "Senior Command Staff" include Community Policing? All Captains, Majors, Deputy Chief and Chief attend. Every Bureau is involved and every unit has representation. Part of the participation includes taking out assignments for follow-up and accountability.
- Prevention is a real key on the neighborhood level. If there are situations occurring where, no crime has yet been committed, but activity is just under that threshold, would those types of things be considered in the Crime Prevention meetings to try and address before the activity becomes an actual crime? These meetings are driven by crime trends and statistical data. The type of scenario described, where no crime has been committed yet, would be difficult to measure. However, the TellTPD@topeka.org goes to the Criminal

Intelligence unit, and those types of reports and concerns would be monitored and could be viewed. But it would be difficult to measure from a statistical model if there has been no crime. There is a potential that could come into the prevention piece where, if information has been provided to TellTPD, the Commanders of the Community Police may set something up with the officers to look into those on a deeper level. Presence sometimes helps serve as a prevention measure. Criminals get the message that the neighborhood is watching them.

- In Topeka, we have the Rescue Mission and YWCA. They have been involved in programs dealing with human trafficking. Do they have a seat at the table when it comes to sharing intelligence with what they are seeing? Yes. We have a great relationship with the two agencies and many others, and they provide information. The conversations are beneficial and ongoing.
- Does the DA's Cold Case Unit still exist? And have we seen results from this? Yes, the unit is still active. The detective assigned to the Cold Case Unit has an office at TPD and reports there daily. Their sole purpose is to identify and work through the cold cases. There have been at least one or two convictions that have come from that work. Cold cases are very real for the investigators and the families of these victims. Chief Wheelers will reach out to DA Kagay to inquire if he would be able to provide additional statistics on those cases. Chairwoman Ortiz would like to invite DA Kagay to attend the July meeting to discuss this unit if he is able.

5) Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) Training [video 1:26:00 minute mark] [*This presentation can be found on the committee's webpage*]

DET Ryan Hayden presented on TPD's Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement Training (ABLE). He became involved in the program as a trainer for a few months. The program will be integrated into the in-service training as well as the Recruit Academy.

Highlights:

- The foundation of the program is not new, however the tools to understanding how and when to intervene are made more clearly in this program.

- ABLE is about empowering officers to intervene in each other's actions that may create unnecessary harm, regardless of rank. It teaches how to intervene and accept intervention. Protect those who do intervene and how to create a culture that expects and supports intervention.
- ABLE is not about internal affairs, discipline, legal mediation, or extra reporting.
- First successful peer-intervention program was "Friends don't let friends drive drunk". Other successful bystandership programs include airline pilots, operating rooms, and college campus sexual assault awareness programs.
- There are risks in policing. One risk is mental baggage. Part of the program is helping to identify, and verbalize these issues.
- Primary and secondary trauma in policing, defined and examples of what it may look like.
- Three main pillars of benefits to the program: Reduce mistakes, prevent misconduct, and promote health & wellness.
- Two types of bystanders: passive and active. Working to create an atmosphere of active bystandership within an agency.
- Discussed examples of experiments that reviewed the bystander effect.
- We commit to intervene when we see something that puts members of the community or harm to ourselves or other officers at risk. The small conversations need to happen before the big incidents and conversations occur.
- Reviewed inhibitors of the buy-in with the program. Examples of these are identified, reviewed and discussed during training.
- Three steps of ABLE to determine when and how to intervene: Notice, Decide, and Act.
- PACT acronym: Probe, Alert, Challenge, Take action
- Department-wide implementation includes all rank and file, from the Chief to new recruits.

Questions:

Chairwoman Ortiz noted that the meeting time had expired by the end of the presentation and sought suggestions from the Committee. The Committee preferred to bring DET Hayden back to the next meeting.

Committee member Hiller stated she found it reassuring that the reaction of the officers to the ABLE training has been positive. DET Hayden stated that he has heard many comments along the line of “we already do this”, and that the training has been beneficial in identifying and providing additional tools. Committee member Padilla stated he felt this training helps address some of the concerns have been heard from the public. And that it is not about discipline, but rather reinforcing positive action to help officers do the job to the best of their ability.

6) Set Next Meeting Agenda & Date [Video 2:12:30 minute mark]

Chairwoman Ortiz and Chief Wheelles reminded that the Click It or Ticket campaign would be occurring over the Memorial Day holiday weekend.

Chairwoman Ortiz will be coordinating the agenda and next meeting date with the City Council Assistant. To receive notice of future meetings when they are posted to the City of Topeka’s Public Calendar, please complete the information found on the E-Notify program at: <https://www.topeka.org/e-notify/> Citizens wanting to speak on the items may contact the committee. Questions or comments should be sent to the Liz Toyne, City Council Assistant, at etoyne@topeka.org .

7) Adjourn

Chairwoman Ortiz adjourned the meeting at 5:15pm.

Meeting video can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/th0DKIDUu8Q>