

**Public Safety Committee
Thursday, May 16, 2024
Remote via Zoom
Burlington, Vermont
APPROVED MINUTES**

Members Present: Melo Grant (Chair), Mark Barlow, Carter Neubieser

Staff Present: Joseph Dempsey (Public Information Officer), Michael LaChance (Fire Chief), Shannon Trammell (BPD Executive Manager), Lacey Smith (CAIP Assistant Director), Sarah Hernandez-Timm (BPD Community Engagement Officer)

Public Present: Melissa Desautels, Jeff Nick, Todd DeLuca

Meeting called to order at 5:38 PM by Councilor Grant.

**1. Adopt the Agenda
1.01 Adopt the Agenda**

Motion to Adopt Agenda as written.

*Motion by Councilor Barlow, Seconded by Councilor Neubieser
Final Resolution: Motion Passes
Yes: Unanimous*

**2. Adopt Minutes
2.01 Motion to Adopt Minutes from March 21, 2024**

Motion to adopt Minutes from March 21, 2024 as written.

*Motion by Councilor Neubieser, Seconded by Councilor Barlow
Final Resolution: Motion Passes
Yes: Unanimous*

2.02 Motion to Adopt Minutes from April 18, 2024

Motion to adopt Minutes from April 18, 2024 as written.

*Motion by Councilor Neubieser, Seconded by Councilor Barlow
Final Resolution: Motion Passes
Yes: Unanimous*

**3. Public Forum
3.01 Verbal Comments**

Melissa Desautels, a business owner of multiple stores on Church Street, voiced concern for employees' safety and business' ability to thrive in the Downtown due to the high levels of retail theft since 2020. Desautels described employees' struggles to handle individuals who are trespassed from their businesses, the lack of police response, the drop in sales and traffic due to the environment, and the perceived lack of action on the local and state level to address these problems. Councilor Grant suggested leaning on other public safety resources, such as Street Outreach. CAIP Assistant Director Smith advised on trespass procedures specific to the incident Desautels shared and how CAIP can offer more support in future situations. Assistant Director Smith also offered to meet with Councilor Grant at a future time to provide her insight and experience. Desautels added that a customer, who is also a state representative, commented "[The Downtown's] really bad; it is such a Burlington problem", and Desautels wondered why that perception exists and why the City could not partner with the State Police or other state resources. Councilor Grant assured Desautels those options have been vetted, and at the least, more and more representatives seem to be coming around to overdose prevention centers and the reality of the problems Burlington faces. Councilor Grant also asked Desautels to forward the name of the state representative if possible. Councilor Barlow echoed the need to take action against retail theft and the other public safety issues because Church Street's current trajectory is not sustainable.

Jeff Nick, a previous member of the Church Street Marketplace Commission for 23 years, expressed gratitude to the Committee for taking on the issues related to public safety in the Downtown Core, emphasizing that the Marketplace Commission's motto was "clean, safe, and fun", and that from Nick's perspective, the Downtown is barely clean. Nick advocated for the City Council to support the current Chief of Police's reappointment and support the Department's ability to enforce laws.

Todd DeLuca brought the Committee's attention to an abandoned encampment on North Prospect Street in need of cleaning up. Councilor Neubieser said the location does not appear to be on City property, so whether the Parks & Recreation has authority to clean it up is unclear, but the City is aware of the encampment and hazards associated with the trash and debris left behind. DeLuca also raised other issues related to City employee conduct, one incident in which a City employee or security personnel for the City, appeared to ignore an individual's disorderly behavior, and another incident where a City Park Ranger's handling of an encounter caused DeLuca concern.

Public forum closed at 6:14 PM.

4. Chiefs' Reports

4.01 Police Chief's April 2024 Police Commission Report

The Committee reviewed the Police Chief's April 2024 Police Commission Report:

- BPD organized and controlled traffic for Eclipse Day on April 8.
- BPD responded to the arson incident at Senator Bernie Sanders' office on Church Street and made an arrest less than 48 hours after the crime.

- BPD celebrated Corporal Lance Taylor's retirement in early April after 25 years of service.
- National Public Safety Telecommunications Week was the second week of April, recognizing BPD's Emergency Communication Specialists.
- As of April, BPD has 65 officers of its allotted 87. Of the 65, 59 can be deployed and then accounting for injuries, military, and other considerations, 24 are on patrol, which means BPD is still below the number of officers to best serve the community.
- There are 6 CSLs and 6 out of 11 allotted CSO positions filled.
- Incidents and calls for service are up 9% from this time last year.
- The Priority Response Plan (PRP) is included in the report with the latest information on how incidents are being prioritized, where physical safety remains a top priority and incidents where that is at risk are ideally still responded to right away, and other incidents get stacked and responded to later when officers are available following a Priority 1 response. Highlighted incident types indicate when a CSO or CSL will be involved, or when something should be reported online.
- In reviewing selected incident types, overdoses appear to be down from this time last year but still higher than other years. Vehicle thefts also appear to be in decline.
- The report includes a graph on the number of Priority 1 incidents over multiple years, for which BPD has seen a steady increase.
- The report also includes information on traffic, use of force incidents, and BPD hiring details.

Following the review of the Fire Chief's Response Data, Councilor Barlow inquired about alternative solutions for staffing the Airport, rather than utilizing 7 BPD officers, noting that the number of officers allocated to the Airport used to be 6. Councilor Barlow said the issue was also raised in January when the Council considered an Airport budget amendment related to BPD and increasing staffing. Councilor Grant added there was some debate on the same issue in the past, during review of the CNA report and recommendations. Executive Manager Trammell stated that while not directly involved with scheduling shifts, knows BPD had tried to staff the airport minimally, but the FAA penalized the Airport for not having officers available when the TSA gates are open and flights are arriving. Executive Manager Trammell said there are active, ongoing discussions between the Airport, BPD, and the BPOA to find alternative solutions, such as making arrangements with volunteers, but that ultimately, discussing how the Airport may be able to satisfy its security requirements through other means than via BPD is out of BPD's scope and needs to take place at the City level.

Executive Manager Trammell confirmed for Councilor Grant that the minimum number of officers to be assigned to the Airport, per the BPOA contract, is 4. Executive Manager Trammell and Councilor Grant further discussed the issues related to individuals who use the Airport for shelter, predominantly in the winter months, and how knowing more about the Airport's specific security needs will be important to finding an appropriate solution.

4.02 Fire Chief's Response Data as of May 13, 2024

The Committee reviewed the Fire Chief's Response Data as May 13, 2024:

- Response totals for 2024 remain on trend compared to last year, with a projected decrease for the year.
- The report includes information on overdose totals and those who were transported versus those who were not, which is significant because when individuals choose to be transported, it provides an opportunity for additional treatment and care.
- BFD is looking into creating a program to provide medically-assisted treatment and are expected to present on it in June or July.
- The report also includes data on average overdoses per month and overdose response data. Incidents categorized as Unknown Problem/Person Down can also include overdose incidents or people who are unhoused. In these areas, BFD expects to see a reduction compared to 2023, based on current trends.
- Alcoholism intoxication data indicates alcoholism is still a concern in our community, in addition to substance use disorder issues, but calls to service are projected to decrease.
- Information on responses to individuals who are homeless, houseless, transient or for whom no address was provided is included in the report.
- The CRT is still active and one of the budget goals for FY25 is to determine how to sustain the program long-term.

5. State's Attorney Data

5.01 Review of State's Attorney Data

Councilor Grant reviewed data from the State's Attorney's Office on pending and closed cases for Chittenden County in 2024, in an effort to dispel any misperceptions that the State's Attorney's Office is not prosecuting cases. According to the latest information provided by State's Attorney Sarah George, Chittenden County for the month of May has:

- Roughly 3000 cases pending.

- 261 new cases filed.
- 840 cases over deposition, which Councilor Grant advised indicates the case is done.
- Closed rate: 115%, which Councilor Grant advised indicates more cases were closed than opened for the month of May.

Councilor Grant noted the backlog of cases is no longer as extreme as it was during and following COVID, and that while there are still many cases to work through, factors such as allotted court time per month and the varying degrees of complexity in cases affect the State's Attorney's Office's ability to push cases faster than they already are. Councilor Grant said the State's Attorney's Office is focused on restorative justice and movements in the Legislature to bring back more restitution for crimes like shoplifting and other changes will have an impact on the case numbers, and that it is important to remember that these systems are beholden to Vermont laws.

6. Downtown Public Safety Update

6.01 Downtown Public Safety Update

Executive Manager Trammell updated the Committee on the Downtown's Public Safety Plan Chief Murad plans to finalize and release soon, stating officers would be assigned to the Marketplace for 4-day shifts, meaning that the assigned Marketplace officer will change every 4 days. Executive Manager Trammell also said the Public Safety Plan intends to make use of available Parks & Recreation staff and park rangers to fill in the gaps. Executive Manager Trammell added that whether or not assigned officers would be ordered to only respond to incidents in the Downtown Core may not be a feature of the Public Safety Plan this summer because it limits the ability to respond to other incidents in the city, but this decision and the plan overall would be finalized toward the end of the month. Councilor Grant added that once the plan is finalized, the Committee would be interested in reviewing it, and that Mayor Mulvaney-Stanak is convening a group to focus on community safety, with their first meeting coming up soon.

7. Budget Presentation Dates for BFD and BPD

7.01 FY25 Budget Presentation Dates for BFD and BPD

Councilor Grant informed attendees that BPD and BFD are due to present their budgets at a Special Board of Finance meeting on May 29, the details of which can be found by going to the City Calendar on the City website and clicking on the event in the calendar.

8. Community Engagement Update

8.01 Community Engagement Update

Executive Manager Trammell updated the Committee on community engagement efforts with the NPAs and coordinating events and activities with Community Engagement Officer Hernandez-Timm. Executive Manager Trammell expressed that overall, NPAs were eager to

provide feedback and willing to have BPD participate in their meetings, though some want to interface with the Department in a different manner and Executive Manager Trammell plans to follow up on brainstorming alternative engagement ideas for those wards. With the upcoming close of the budget season, Executive Manager Trammell plans to devote more time to this initiative and hopes to re-implement a pre-COVID practice where a lieutenant or sergeant would attend NPA meetings to be available for residents to voice concerns.

Councilor Barlow referenced a community event that took place on Church Street Marketplace last week, coordinated between a couple retailers and BPD and asked if more events like that were being planned for the near future. Executive Manager Trammell shared it was a well-attended and overall successful event, so planning similar ones in the future for the Marketplace and other areas of the city would be part of the broader community engagement strategy.

Councilor Grant inquired about the status of BPD regaining access to its inactive Instagram account. Executive Manager Trammell advised the Department is still locked out and that resolving this issue fell to the wayside due to competing priorities within IT, where the IT Network Administrator position is currently vacant at BPD. Councilor Grant suggested reaching out to Scot Barker, the City's Chief Innovation Officer, for ideas, and creating a new Instagram account so the Department can start creating and posting content while tagging the old account. Executive Manager Trammell agreed to collaborate with Community Engagement Officer Hernandez-Timm on exploring those solutions.

9. Police Commission Follow-up Items

9.01 Police Commission Follow-up Items

Councilor Grant volunteered to follow up with the Police Commission on finding a permanent staffing solution for their vacant clerk position as well as following up on progress updates for the CNA recommendation implementation, which the Committee has not had a chance to catch up on but strives to make a priority for this year. Councilor Grant also noted how data will be an important part of the conversation around the CNA recommendations because the Police Commission did not file an annual report last year because they did not have the means or capacity to pull and compile data.

10. Legislative Updates Related to Public Safety

10.01 Legislative Updates Related to Public Safety

Councilor Grant said a number of bills were proposed this legislative session related to public safety, especially for retail theft, car theft, and overdose prevention centers, and that some of these bills were being passed. Councilor Grant also expressed satisfaction with the level of communication from the City's lobbyist, who has provided regular updates to the City Council on lobbying activities, all of which can be accessed through Civic Clerk by going to the Consent Agenda under Regular City Council meetings.

11. Future Business

11.01 Other Committee Business

Councilor Grant addressed the Police Commission follow up items, and the Committee agreed to meet on the third Thursday for the next three months, being June 20, July 18, and August 15.

12. Adjournment

12.01 Motion to Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned with no objection by Councilor Grant at 7:09 PM.