

**Public Safety Committee
Thursday, July 18, 2024
Remote via Zoom
Burlington, Vermont
DRAFT MINUTES**

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

Staff Present: Hayley McClenahan (Assistant City Attorney), Jon Murad (Police Chief), Lacey Smith (CAIP Assistant Director), Carolynne Erwin (Recruitment Officer), Anhad Bajwa (Recruitment Coordinator), Marsha McCombie (Battalion Chief of EMS), Jenal Dumas (CARES Clinical Supervisor), Sarah Hernandez Timm (Community Engagement Officer)

Meeting called to order at 5:30 PM by Councilor Grant.

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

Motion to Adopt Agenda as written.

Motion by Councilor Neubieser, Seconded by Councilor Barlow

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

**2. Adopt Minutes
2.01 Motion to Adopt Draft Minutes from June 20, 2024**

Motion to adopt Minutes from June 20, 2024 as written.

Motion by Councilor Neubieser, Seconded by Councilor Barlow

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

**3. Public Forum
3.01 Verbal Comments**

No public comment.

Public forum closed at 5:35 PM.

**4. Traffic Enforcement with Officer Mellis
4.01 Traffic Enforcement with Officer Mellis**

The Committee moved on to the next agenda item as Officer Mellis was not available to present. Councilor Grant added Officer Mellis had presented at one of Ward 6's NPA meetings and that the Committee would share the link to that recording for interested members of the public.

Councilor Grant suggested BPD do an informational video series on traffic enforcement with Officer Mellis.

5. BPD Recruitment Team Presentation

5.01 Recruitment Team Presentation with Recruitment Coordinator Anhad Bajwa and Corporal Carolynne Erwin

Corporal Erwin and Recruitment Coordinator Bajwa presented on BPD's recruitment activities:

- Corporal Erwin has been with BPD for 20 years, worked in recruitment for about 10 years, and has since stepped back into the role when the previous recruiter left BPD and mostly focuses on officer recruitment. Recruitment Coordinator Bajwa assists with advertising, applicant follow up, and handling recruitment for civilian and professional positions within the Department.
- Corporal Erwin described the conditions and challenges affecting recruitment and retention that were not as prevalent when she first worked in recruitment, including a smaller pool of applicants, different attitudes toward the profession, challenges getting in touch with applicants, and the length of the recruitment process.
- The officer recruitment activities consist of a physical fitness test, a panel interview, and a psychological exam, costing BPD \$450 per applicant. Corporal Erwin said these activities used to take months to complete, but BPD now tries to schedule them all for the same day to shorten the process. If an applicant passes, then BPD runs a background check, which still takes a couple of months because it is carried out by a detective. Corporal Erwin said it has not been uncommon to call applicants after successfully moving through all of these stages and not be able to reach them to complete hiring.
- Around 2010, Corporal Erwin said BPD saw an average of 300 to 350 applicants per year. In 2023, BPD had 112 applicants. As of July 2024, there have been 26 applicants. Of the 26 applicants, 19 either withdrew, were unresponsive, or were disqualified for background reasons.
- Corporal Erwin and Recruitment Coordinator Bajwa described their diligent follow-up procedure, reaching out to applicants twice via email before trying a phone call and even reaching out to family members or other contacts if that information is available.
- The Recruitment team has struggled with how to make BPD an attractive place to apply because while it is the biggest agency in Vermont, there is not a lot of positive content on the internet, there is not a lot of housing available and housing is much more expensive than the national average in this area, and the politics do not align with what officers typically look for.
- The team has advertised, attended job fairs, created videos, maintained a LinkedIn and Facebook account among other avenues to try and attract applicants. The team has also

proposed new incentives, one being that officers qualify for sabbatical every five years after they have been with the agency for five years, which is currently with the Mayor's Office for review.

Councilor Grant asked Corporal Erwin to elaborate on the sabbatical and how it would be worked into the contract. Corporal Erwin clarified the proposed structure is that at five years, 10 years and 15 years, officers can apply for a sabbatical, which must be taken within 30 months after approval. Recruitment Coordinator Bajwa added the application, which includes a written explanation of the reason for taking sabbatical, must be approved by command staff and BPOA. Following the sabbatical, officers would be required to submit a report reviewing their time. Corporal Erwin noted time taken for sabbatical would be separate from vacation, and that the intent behind this proposal is to mitigate burnout in officers, which has become increasingly difficult to manage, while also enhancing benefits in the interest of retention. Corporal Erwin referenced another incentive BPD is trying to change where officers receive an extra day off for referring an applicant. Corporal Erwin said the issue with this incentive is the officer only receives the day off once the applicant is hired, which means the officer will not reap the benefit for months. Instead, the Recruitment team wants to propose a tiered referral structure where a referring BPD employee receives an immediate benefit as the referred applicant passes certain checkpoints of the hiring process, which would serve to benefit recruitment and retention. Councilor Grant requested the sabbatical proposal be sent to the Committee for review and follow-up with the Mayor.

Councilor Neubieser inquired if the ratio of applicants who are withdrawing, if even despite the lower total number, is still proportionate to the ratio BPD saw when Corporal Erwin was initially working in recruitment. Corporal Erwin said applicants were not tracked in the same way back then and other factors have changed along with the numbers, so the answer to that is unclear. However, Corporal Erwin emphasized they are still seeing a similar range in the quality of candidates, but unresponsiveness and other unprofessional behavior stand out more because the volume of applicants is so much less. Corporal Erwin expressed struggling to find a balance of meeting potential applicants where they are at while also not lowering BPD's standards for candidates, citing there a number of applicants who have been unable to pass the run portion of the physical fitness test. Recruitment Coordinator Bajwa added law enforcement professionals have expressed similar concerns at trade events. Councilor Neubieser asked how City Council and Public Safety Committee could best support the Recruitment team, to which Corporal Erwin welcomed any ideas and connections to professional services because while the team is trying to think creatively, no one in the Department or the broader profession has faced these types of recruitment challenges before. Councilor Neubieser offered to support the Recruitment team in working through these challenges and for the sabbatical incentive.

Councilor Barlow inquired if it was possible to change the residential aspect of the academy, as that seems like a friction point in hiring. Corporal Erwin added that another disadvantage of the 17 week-long academy is recruits are required to leave on the weekends, so those who live in New York or Connecticut have to find a place to stay each weekend. Councilor Grant reported having heard from individuals that they wanted to become police officers but could not commit to the academy. Chief Murad mentioned he was on the committee responsible for revising standards of the entrance exams and also explained the idea of Chittenden County or Burlington

hosting its own academy has been explored before but is not feasible given the resources need to run the facility compared to the number of recruits BPD contributes to any given class. Councilor Grant asked if the State was considering relocating the academy to Chittenden County, given Chittenden County contributes the highest number of recruits on average. Chief Murad acknowledged the current location is disadvantageous for Chittenden County but was largely chosen because the existing building on the property used to be a sanatorium and had the infrastructure needed to support the academy curriculum while being centrally located to most agencies in Vermont. Councilor Grant said it may still be worth lobbying for relocation of the academy or funding for BPD to build their own.

Councilor Barlow inquired about BPD's success in recruiting lateral hires through incentives and bonuses. Corporal Erwin said lateral hires are more likely to come from out of state are attributable to lifestyle changes such as a spouse's job change as opposed to targeted recruitment efforts. Chief Murad added the Department has seen improvement in lateral hires from 2022 to 2024, averaging 3.2 laterals per year, where from 2010 to 2019, the average was 2.1.

Councilor Barlow recommended BPD consider strategies such as hiring a professional marketing firm, attending more trade shows as they come up, and running marketing experiments to help build the pool of applicants. Corporal Erwin advised that she has a meeting scheduled on August 8 with All-Star Talent, a recruitment firm specific to law enforcement. Councilor Grant added that a professional marketing firm may not be necessary if the Department can invest more into digital advertising and SEO and would bring this to the Mayor's attention as well.

Corporal Erwin informed the Committee Recruitment Coordinator Bajwa is working on creating digital content and collaborating with a local news station now. Councilor Grant suggested also reaching out to the Media Factory and Town Meeting TV because their production resources are high quality and less expensive.

6. BFD Presentation on Harm Reduction Plan

6.01 Harm Reduction Plan Presentation with EMS Battalion Chief Marsha McCombie and Special Guests

Battalion Chief McCombie presented on her work with the PREVENT initiative and CityLink:

- BC McCombie has been with BFD for a year now and is the first chief of EMS, which has been a unique experience. BC McCombie shared this initiative and her work with BFD is very personal and believes these initiatives will make a difference in the prevalence of substance use disorder in Burlington.
- PREVENT started at Vermont Department of Health and the UVM Medical Center with Dr. Daniel Wolfson that allows for EMS and Fire to administer pre-hospital buprenorphine out in the field to qualifying patients, based on the Clinical Opiate Withdrawal scale.
- The PREVENT initiatives goals are:
 - Providing immediate access to medications for opioid use disorder
 - Reduce opiate overdose incidents

- Implement preventative measures and rapid response protocols to address overdose effectively
 - Improve continuity of care
 - Strengthen community partnerships and health partners and organizations
- The PREVENT initiatives objectives are:
 - Train first responders
 - Develop and implement protocols
 - Establish a referral system
 - Monitor and evaluate progress
 - Raise public awareness
 - Burlington will be the second place to pilot this program in the state, with Bennington Rescue being the first. If the programs prove to have a positive impact, the State plans to incorporate it into state protocols.
 - BFD has submitted a variance request to allow AEMTs to administer pre-hospital buprenorphine, which BC McCombie said is essentially suboxone mixed with naran, where right now, BFD has to call paramedics to arrive on scene for qualifying patients. Buprenorphine is a controlled substance, which is why there are strict controls over who can administer it. In anticipation of the variance request acceptance, training has been provided to BFD members and the Department has purchased drug boxes that only AEMTs would have access to and would be installed in ambulances.
 - The procedure is that BFD responds, assesses and counsels the patient. If the patient is interested in buprenorphine, then a paramedic is called. If the patient refuses, BFD follows standard harm reduction protocol, which includes offering a naloxone leave-behind kit and connecting them with services. BC McCombie stressed that patients have to consent to treatments and referrals to services.
 - BC McCombie agreed to provide the Committee with the protocols for their review but advised the protocols are sensitive information.
 - The State uses Image Trend, which is free to agencies, and BFD has worked with the State to create a custom form to track data from this program. The State is also working on MOUs with partners like the Howard Center to collect their data, in the interest of creating a program that change and adapt at the pace of the opioid crisis itself. BFD is limited by HIPAA laws, but if consent from patients and MOUs with community partners can be established, then patients can receive more intentional follow-up.
 - CityLink refers to the partnership and creation of a network between UVM, CEDO, BPD, Howard Center, Turning Point, Vermont Department of Health, CAIP, and Burlington CARES, and other entities focused on this crisis.

Councilor Grant expressed excitement at the prospect of information-sharing between these public and private entities through CityLink and is encouraged by the support from the State. Councilor Grant also requested a public-facing copy of the presentation be sent to the Committee.

Assistant Director Smith added CityLink was a natural progression from CAIP's current relationship with BFD and explained that the goal is that if someone from BFD calls dispatch and asks them to send someone from CityLink, then dispatch will internally triage based on what partners are available, which will help maintain continuity of care, allowing CAIP and other partners to take over after BFD has done their part and free up BFD to return to their duties.

CARES Clinical Supervisor Dumas, who moved into the position at the end of March and has a history of working with the various agencies in CityLink, is looking forward to CityLink coming into fruition.

Councilor Barlow voiced his excitement for these initiatives' upcoming launches.

7. Chiefs' Reports and Other Data

7.01 BFD: Chief's Update July 2024

Councilor Grant summarized Chief LaChance's most recent data report, available to view with this meeting's agenda on Civic Clerk, noting a slight increase in overdose responses, an increase in individuals refusing transport, and that responses are increasing overall throughout the summer, as anticipated. The report also includes data on 'person down' incidents and the Community Response Team.

7.02 BPD: Chief's Update July 2024

Councilor Grant asked Chief Murad to forward the July report to be added to the agenda files and discuss at next month's meeting.

Chief Murad summarized BPD currently has 66 officers and is losing one officer but onboarding four on Monday, so the total count will be at 69, bringing the Department back to January 2024 levels. Incidents are up 3% from last year and are up roughly 5% from 2019. Improvements have been made in lateral hiring, but there is still more work to do.

7.03 State's Attorney Sarah George: Monthly Backlog and Clearance Data

A formal report was not available for the month of July, but Councilor Grant advised cases have been consistently around 3,000 for Chittenden County and that if members of the public want to follow up on a case with the State's Attorney's Office, they need to have an incident number. Councilor Grant also said she would follow up with State's Attorney Sarah George about presenting at a future meeting.

8. Retention Update

8.01 Retention Update

This item was addressed as part of Item 5.

9. Community Engagement Report

9.01 YES Program Response Plan

Community Engagement Officer Hernandez Timm shared BPD is participating in the Creemee from a Cop program for the summer, which is run by the VT Agency of Agriculture and supports community connections with local police departments and dairy farmers. Members of the public can obtain coupons from officers as a reward for safe behavior that can then be redeemed at participating locations for a small free creemee. Participating locations are the Bagel Cafe and Deli on North Avenue and the Burlington Bay Cafe. Councilor Grant suggested an officer attend the Old North End Ramble to distribute these coupons. Councilor Barlow wondered if the Creemee from a Cop program would also have a scheduled event where members of the public could eat a creemee with a cop, as was historically done through this program. Community Engagement Officer Hernandez Timm said it is the first year the VT Agency of Agriculture has revived the program since the pandemic and that they have removed that component. Councilor Barlow and Councilor Grant voiced support for sponsoring such an event or something similar.

Councilor Neubieser said he would be interested in brainstorming or promoting community engagement activities within his ward. Community Engagement Officer Hernandez Timm expressed intent to continue attending NPA meetings and bringing officers as they are available. Councilor Grant asked if BPD could attend an NPA meeting in the Old North End for the fall.

10. Social Media Access Update

10.01 Social Media Access Update

Community Engagement Officer Hernandez Timm said BPD is in the process of starting a new Instagram page and it would be a collaboration between her team and Recruitment and Retention.

Councilor Grant suggested some potential projects or opportunities for BPD to engage the public more intentionally through social media:

- Attending the ONE Ramble on July 27.
- Developing a social media campaign to include Instagram and Front Porch Forum targeted at recruitment.
- Interviewing officers about their favorite aspects of BPD and the community.

Community Engagement Officer Hernandez Timm added the latest informational video from BPD focused on recruitment was available to view on BPD's YouTube channel, and that the Facebook page has been utilized to highlight recruitment posts and community engagement efforts such as Creemee from a Cop. Community Engagement Officer Hernandez Timm said her team is also active on Ring Neighborhoods Public Safety, releasing regular safety tips and street closure and event notices, and on Front Porch Forum, but that their account is limited to 2 announcements per month. Councilor Grant said she would help look into whether the Department could be allotted more announcements.

11. Upcoming Meeting Dates

11.01 Upcoming Meeting Dates

The next meetings are set for Thursday, August 15 and Thursday, September 19.

12. Adjournment

12.01 Motion to Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned with no objection by Councilor Grant at 7:56 PM.