

**Public Safety Committee
Monday, July 10, 2023
Remote via Zoom
Burlington, Vermont
APPROVED MINUTES**

Members Present: Karen Paul (Chair), Melo Grant, Tim Doherty

Staff Present: Jon Murad (Police Chief), Shannon Trammell (Executive Assistant to Chief of Police), Michael Beliveau (Acting Detective Services Bureau Lieutenant), Jared Pellerin (Assistant City Attorney), Shakuntala Rao (Police Commissioner), Mary Cox (Police Commissioner), Sarah Hernandez Timm (Public Information and Community Engagement Officer)

Public Present:

Colin Hilliard, Virginia Farley, Kay Goodsfeed, Maggie Pace

Meeting called to order at 5:36 PM by President Paul.

1. Adopt the Agenda

1.01 Adopt the Agenda

Motion to Adopt Agenda as is.

Motion by Councilor Doherty, Seconded by Councilor Grant

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

2. Adopt Draft Minutes from May 9, 2023

2.01 Adopt Draft Minutes from May 9, 2023

Councilor Grant raised concerns that her statements regarding officer recruitment and retention were not reflected accurately and wanted to submit revisions clarifying her position. Councilor Grant also requested Public Safety Committee meeting recordings be posted on Civic Clerk for the public's and Council's reference. President Paul stated the Committee would postpone adopting these minutes pending Councilor Grant's revisions.

3. Public Forum

3.01 Verbal Comments

Colin Hilliard, a Ward 3 resident and Deputy Director of the Burlington Business Association, stated public safety is the main issue downtown business members are concerned about. Hilliard praised Burlington for confronting its problems with drug addiction and overdose but emphasized the need for more state and federal partners and hopes the Committee can be that voice and help move the needle forward in a positive direction.

Virginia Farley, Director of Retail Operations at Outdoor Gear Exchange, described how public safety issues are not only affecting staffs' work lives but their personal lives, for those who live and work in Burlington. Farley added OGE has seen an average 30-40% decrease in foot traffic, a direct reflection of the impact public safety concerns are having on who comes to the city to shop, eat, and otherwise enjoy Burlington, which is not a sustainable trend for OGE or any business.

Kay Goodsfeed, a bouncer at Manhattan's Pizza, shared that in the past week, on 3 separate occasions, women have approached the bar for safety and shelter because they had been assaulted or were being followed. Goodsfeed said it seems to be occurring more frequently and is hearing many instances of folks not feeling safe or being safe and wanted to bring attention to it because Burlington is not what it was 10 years ago, and it breaks his heart for his community.

Maggie Pace, a Burlington community member, detailed walks through downtown last week, over the course of which, Pace witnessed a number of public safety concerns related to drug use, public defecation, and overdose and wanted to hear from the Committee what she could do as a community member to support the effort to address public safety needs. President Paul responded Pace could email any of the Councilors and referenced the City's website for Councilor contact information. Councilor Grant offered to schedule a time to meet with Pace.

Public Forum closed at 6:01 PM.

4. Chiefs' Reports

President Paul clarified this agenda item will be a regular item and that these reports will be treated as consent items.

4.01 BPD Report from Chief Jon Murad

No discussion on Chief Murad's report.

4.02 BFD Report from Chief Michael LaChance

The Fire Chief's report was not attached to the public agenda at the time of the meeting. Attorney Pellerin confirmed the report would be posted on Civic Clerk following the meeting.

Councilor Grant called special attention to Marsha McCrombie, BFD's new EMS Battalion Chief, being the first female command staff member in the history of the BFD, and commended this great accomplishment and step forward.

5. Deliberative

5.01 PIO Update

President Paul clarified that though the title of the agenda item is PIO Update, PIO is really Public Information & Community Engagement, and the purpose of this agenda item is for the Committee and public to hear from BPD progress on community engagement.

Sarah Hernandez Timm, BPD's new Public Information & Community Engagement Officer, summarized her ongoing projects and strategies for community engagement, which include:

- Drafting and sending out press releases
- Media interactions such as responding to inquiries from local media and Burlington community
- Navigating people to existing resources on BPD's website and other platforms
- Contributing to monthly submissions to local publications
- Managing BPD's social media platforms, mainly Facebook, YouTube, Front Porch Forum, and Neighbors Public Safety Service on the Ring app
- Supervising and collaborating with BPD's Digital Media Redaction Specialist to work on video projects regarding use-of-force narratives and informational series to inform public about BPD, the most recent videos of which have been about Community Support Liaisons and emergency response units
- Meeting with community members, city leaders, police commissioners, communication directors, and attending Neighborhood Planning Assemblies in every ward as well as other community events
- Attending BPD trainings and assisting the recruitment team on projects and initiatives, gathering BPD content through photography and film
- Shadowing and interviewing officers and other employees

Councilor Grant asked Hernandez Timm to describe Neighbors on the Ring app. Hernandez Timm clarified Ring is a free app designed to help residents connect with their communities, stating herself and other officers have access. Currently, BPD is using it to post public service notes about street closures.

Councilor Grant suggested to Hernandez Timm that she look into sharing content on BPD's Instagram account, to reach a broader range of the public and emphasized the need for consistency with information across platforms.

President Paul added she noticed a positive change in the press releases, as they now convey the time of incidents in standard time instead of military time, which is more recognizable to the general public.

5.02 Burlington CARES Update

Executive Assistant Trammell reviewed that status of Burlington CARES on behalf of Chief Murad:

- The Medical Center has now been involved.

- An ad was released for the Assistant Director of CAIP, for which at the time of this meeting, the Department had received 5 applicants.
- The team meets every other week with the Mayor's Office and overall, it has been a large coordinated effort.
- Efforts are going into securing a van to outfit for a medical response.

Commissioner Cox was also able to provide more information on job descriptions being developed under Burlington CARES:

- In the last Police Commission, Commissioner Cox's feedback to Chief Murad was to add more specialized training for responding to drug overdoses and mental health crises.
- Whether the job description would be for an EMT or a paramedic was still undecided.
- Overall, Commissioner Cox has high hopes for the program and thinks a non-police response to overdose and mental health crises will be beneficial for the community.

Councilor Grant requested a copy of the working position be sent to the Committee and agreed with Commissioner Cox that more training would be important. President Paul mentioned the latest version of the job description may be with Kerin Durfee, the City's Director of Human Resources. Executive Assistant Trammell volunteered to confirm that information and follow up with the Committee.

5.03 BFD's Phone Response, Hours for Walk-ins, and Proper Expectations for the Public Regarding Response Times Given Current Staffing Levels

Executive Assistant Trammell stated the Department is aware the phone tree is a frustration. Councilor Grant suggested a diagram could help. Executive Assistant Trammell agreed a graphic representation of the phone tree is something that should be posted on BPD's website.

Executive Assistant Trammell stated that at one point, BPD encouraged people to call dispatch instead of 911. However, due to staffing, citizens are now being encouraged to call 911 to reduce the burden on dispatch. Executive Assistant Trammell stated she would coordinate with Hernandez Timm on this messaging. Councilor Grant supported this action and noted with more drug activity being reported, the community is contacting the police more often so setting clear expectations would be important.

Councilor Grant asked for clarification regarding how online incident reports are reviewed internally by BPD. Executive Assistant Trammell responded the incident must be entered into BPD's system in order for an incident or case number to be created. A records person will do this or officers if they are available. Once the report is entered, an officer will analyze for solvability and follow up. Chief Murad added reports are turned into cases within 2 to 24 hours and are reviewed by a supervisor before being assigned to one of BPD's 3 reserve officer. Reserve officers, who are fully-certified level 3 police officers that either retired or left the Department but still want to maintain their certification, were used to pick up extra shifts on patrol, but now exclusively are working on follow up to online reports, and

the Department is several weeks behind on these reports. At least 20 call categories are now online report only, according to the Priority Response Plan due to staffing, and Chief Murad reiterated that anyone who needs to call BPD should call 911 and let 911 report and triage appropriately.

Councilor Grant asked Chief Murad to clarify how a complainant could best obtain a copy of their report. Chief Murad responded complainants could either make that request specifically in the report itself or they can go through the Public Records Request portal on BPD's website. Executive Assistant Trammell added BPD's homepage has 3 links or buttons at the top: the first link being to the Priority Response Plan, the second is for filing an online incident report, and the third is to request a copy of the file. Executive Assistant Trammell also shared the network administrator at BPD is working on a better way for the public to file and access incident reports and that time would be spent with Hernandez Timm to update instructions on filing in the meantime.

Councilor Grant asked for the status on follow up with businesses for reports of theft, how far behind the Department was in response to those, and whether it was possible to involve another department. Executive Assistant Trammell stated reports should still be filed, even if the Department cannot follow up right away, and that another department would not be involved. Executive Assistant Trammell noted how some retail establishments are putting up cameras to deter people from committing crimes, expressing it might be in businesses' best interest to explore preventative measures. Chief Murad added any in-progress theft that is reported is stacked, not sent to online reporting follow up, but a response may take time. Chief Murad also said Vermont Statutes permit shop owners to reasonably detain people for theft.

Councilor Grant inquired about an anticipated meeting between stores' loss prevention officers and BPD. Executive Assistant Trammell responded the meeting had to be rescheduled, to which Councilor Grant asked for confirmation of when the meeting's occurred.

Councilor Doherty asked if the BPD had data available on how many referrals BPD is making to the State Attorney's Office for retail theft-related crimes. Chief Murad responded that data is not available because information past the Department is more complex and not as publicly available. Chief Murad advised going directly to the State Attorney, the Court, or Rachel Jolly with the Community Justice Center, as the CJC has a lot of data on most low-level thefts and larcenies.

Virginia Farley asked if there is specific verbiage businesses can direct their staff to use that might help escalate an in-progress incident to getting a response. Farley also commented that dedicating resources to training staff on how to detain people does not seem feasible and expressed confusion over BPD's stance on trespassing orders. Chief Murad said the verbiage BPD needs is just an explanation of what is happening. Chief Murad also stated the decision to leave the issuance of trespassing orders up to property owners came from the City Attorney's Office because of concerns from the State Attorney's Office but clarified BPD will stand by a trespass order while it is being issued if the issuer is concerned for their

safety. To address Farley's concern about detainment, Chief Murad explained that BPD would respond to an incident where a shop owner had detained someone who attempted retail theft and added the statute makes it clear that any merchant who has reasonable cause to believe that a person is committing retail theft may detain the person in the immediate vicinity of the establishment, such as in a back room, for a reasonable length of time and reasonably inquire about possessions and identifying information until law enforcement responds.

Councilor Grant inquired whether other jurisdictions could be called in if BPD officers were unavailable. Chief Murad said that while Burlington has worked with other jurisdictions, other jurisdictions are not expected to take on Burlington cases as their own in the same way Burlington is not expected to take on neighboring jurisdictions' cases. Officers may be sent as back up, but the jurisdiction in which the incident occurs is always primary on the case.

5.04 Drug Activity in Neighborhoods

President Paul gave the Committee and City Staff the opportunity to move this item as well as 5.05 into Executive Session if needed but hoped BPD would speak to the public on what they could do for this topic. President Paul noted she thinks a common misconception around drug activity is that it is only occurring in certain neighborhoods when really it is happening across the city.

Executive Assistant Trammell mentioned touching base with Hernandez Timm on coordinating an effort to inform the public on how to submit drug tips and to follow up with Councilor Grant on where that information should best be made available to the public.

Lieutenant Beliveau, who supervises the Detective Services Bureau and previously supervised the Narcotics Unit, gave a detailed overview on the Bureau's staffing, priorities, and approaches to disrupting drug-related crime:

- Currently, City of Burlington has 2 drug detectives. There are also 2-4 Street Crime Unit officers that can assist with low-level drug-related crime. Federal partners such as DEA, ATF, and HSI are being involved as needed with limited resources.
- Resources are being dedicated to investigating drug rings where there is a high potential for violence and overdosing. BPD is targeting the people who are circulating the drugs, not the user community. Cases where there is a human trafficking element involve HSI and take priority over any other drug case.
- The Bureau is backlogged on tips, but Lieutenant Beliveau urges the community to continue submitting tips (online if possible) and while it may take some time, the detectives will follow up if follow-up is requested.
- Part of the reason why progress on cases has been stalled is due to detectives being called to other crime investigations in the city, and Lieutenant Beliveau hopes to see staffing and recruitment improve to address this problem.

President Paul questioned if there is a better way for BPD to receive and organize tips or communicate that tips have been received, because the feedback from the community is that

it seems like tips receive no attention and cases make no progress. Lieutenant Beliveau stated leadership's emphasis on always following up and thinks there is an element of customer service to police work that officers forget sometimes but assured the Committee this message would be reinforced with his team.

Councilor Grant requested that the number of tips received by the Department be added on a monthly or quarterly basis to the Police Chief's report.

Councilor Grant asked Lieutenant Beliveau what information typically miss that would be helpful for online tips and what else the public should know. Lieutenant Beliveau responded that any and all information a person can provide in a tip is helpful, even the person thinks it will not be relevant. Lieutenant Beliveau also stated the public should know investigations are resource intensive, and even fast investigations take 2-3 months.

Councilor Grant asked if videos and photos were helpful when submitting tips. Lieutenant Beliveau said photos and videos help investigations a lot, but to manage expectations, Chief Murad and Councilor Doherty added that while citizen observations through photos and videos are helpful for furthering investigations, they rarely what constitute as evidence in a prosecuted case. For cases to be viable for prosecution, evidence has to be directly obtained by law enforcement officers. Councilor Grant proposed working with the Department to help set expectations across the board for drug and other types of crime.

Commissioner Rao thought it would be helpful to have information on how many tips are being received, as a person who has sent in many photos and videos and wondered if they were being addressed. Commissioner Rao also asked what role the community could take in supporting the Department during these investigations. Chief Murad mentioned working with Code Enforcement has worked well in the past as well as partnerships with sheriffs and helping landlords with evictions. Councilor Doherty commented that Commissioner Rao's idea to transfer pressure to landlords who are making money by repeatedly renting to drug dealers is definitely something work exploring.

Maggie Pace asked how City Hall Park factors into the way BPD is prioritizing drug detective work. Lieutenant Beliveau stated City Hall Park is not a priority because that is mostly the user community and any deals that are happening are small-scale, which requires a different approach than just drug enforcement. Chief Murad added that what happens in City Hall Park is not going to be solved by arrest work, especially because as a community, Burlington has chosen not to criminalize drug use and possession. Chief Murad voiced that while this is a good stance, the ways Burlington is dealing with those issues are not working and the, Department, City and community need to draw stronger boundaries of what is tolerated in public spaces. Chief Murad pointed to earlier this year when the Department took back the park with a focus on not policing who was in the park so much as ensuring no one was prohibited from enjoying the park that is shared space for the community. Chief Murad thought the gains experienced have since started to slip and that it would be worth revisiting that initiative. Pace agreed with Chief Murad's assessment, saying there was a noticeable difference and also praised the Department's detective work. Pace also added more public programming and organizing community members to host more events in the

park and use the space for positive purposes would help. Chief Murad, Councilor Grant, and President Paul agreed a highly-programmed park is a good thing, referencing the number of events Burlington City Arts has scheduled through the whole summer.

5.05 Home Alarms

President Paul asked BPD to clarify for the public what residents are paying for in regards to the annual \$60 fee for home alarms to link to BPD. Executive Assistant Trammell responded the City Attorney's Office has confirmed the ordinance is not written in such a way that paying the fee guarantees a response from BPD. Instead, the purpose of the fee is to protect residents from being excessively charged for false alarms.

President Paul mentioned there was a recent complaint about BPD's response to an alarm. Chief Murad explained alarms are a Priority 2* when in-progress, according to the Priority Response Plan, and so those alarms will get a response from BPD. Dependent on other factors, timing, and availability of officers, could affect the alarm's priority and may not get a response. The Department may respond to over 800 alarms in a given year and receives very few complaints regarding response. President Paul iterated the Department's goal should be to ensure when officers leave a residence after responding to an alarm, that all residents involved feel safe. Chief Murad assured the Committee the complainant was addressed and the complaint was internally addressed with leadership. Commissioner Rao added this complaint had gone before the Police Commission, and the Commission unanimously agreed BPD's response had been fair and impartial.

Executive Assistant Trammell added BPD's dispatch receives information from the alarm company on how the alarm was triggered, and that this information affects BPD's response.

6. Expected Executive Session

6.01 Anticipated Motion to Move into Executive Session

The Committee did not move into Executive Session.

7. Other Committee Business

7.01 Other Committee Business

There was no other Committee business.

8. Next Meeting Date

8.01 Discussion of Next Meeting Date

President Paul said she would reach out to Committee members and staff to coordinate the next meeting date, which would most likely fall in early August.

9. Adjournment

9.01 Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn the Meeting
Motion by President Paul
Final Resolution: Motion passes
Yes: Unanimous

The meeting was adjourned at 8:13 PM.