

**Public Safety Committee
Tuesday, May 9, 2023
Remote via Zoom
Burlington, Vermont
APPROVED MINUTES**

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

Staff Present: Jon Murad (Acting Police Chief), Shannon Trammell (Executive Assistant to Chief of Police), Michael LaChance (Fire Chief), Jared Pellerin (Assistant City Attorney), Susan Comerford (Police Commissioner), Shakuntala Rao (Police Commissioner)

Public Present:

Debbie Ingram (VIA), Judd Allen (Human Resources Institute), Kelly Devine, Jeff Nick, Mark Bouchett

Meeting called to order at 6:36 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 March 23, 2023

2.01 Adopt Draft Minutes from March 23, 2023

Draft Minutes from March 23, 2023 recognized by President Paul per Attorney Pellerin's recommendation and placed on record.

3. Public Comment

3.01 Public Comment

- Kelly Devine, the president and director of Burlington Business Association, emphasized the importance of public safety measures for the Downtown area, for the safety of employees as well as to improve visitor perception and ensure Downtown feels welcoming and safe to the greater community.
- Jeff Nick, who previously served on the Marketplace Commission, shared his assessment that we are at a low point in the downtown corridor with high levels of violence, drug dealing, retail theft, and graffiti, and said the City Council needs to do more to support police and police presence. President Paul mentioned the police budget hearing would take place at the next Board of Finance meeting on May 15th at 5 PM.

- Mark Bouchett, the Marketplace Commission Chair, said that merchants' main concern was people's perceptions of Downtown and noted he is pleased with the enhanced patrols and the interactions he has observed between police officers and the public on these patrols.
- Councilor Grant commented on the importance for the Committee to take a holistic approach to public safety in the city, as solving problems in one area without a fuller understanding can lead to creating problems in other areas.

President Paul closed public comment at 6:53 PM after seeing that there was no one else present who wished to speak.

4. Updates from BPD and Police Commission

4.01 Update on CNA Work

Executive Assistant Trammell and Commissioner Comerford provided an update on CNA progress.

- Police Commission approved all edits and changes to DD43 – Reporting Corruption and Misconduct and will be distributed shortly.
- DD03 – Fair and Impartial Policing is going before the Police Commission next week (5/16/23), and the Commission will be looking for input from the community on bias indicators for supervisors and colleagues.
- DD01 and DD40 are in progress.
- DD13.1 – Interacting with Persons with Limited English Proficiency is behind because Commissioner Rao is waiting on feedback from several stakeholders but will forward the work to Executive Assistant Trammell as soon as the feedback is received.
- Commissioner Comerford stated DD13.2 and DD13.3 are in progress.
- President Paul noted DD40 requires a substantial amount of work and would work on adding these updates to the timeline approved back in March for tracking purposes.

4.02 Update from Chief Murad Regarding Retention and Recruitment

Chief Murad summarized that recruitment efforts are ongoing and of the 64 sworn officers, 26 are patrol officers, which is higher compared to last year. Chief Murad emphasized this number is still lower than the ideal, but the Department is still limited in resources and trying to make use of expanding alternative roles such as Community Service Officers and Community Service Liaisons. Chief Murad pointed to the nationwide struggle for recruitment and retention as a factor in these numbers and that departments across the board are starting to offer more competitive packages.

Councilor Doherty inquired about officers' motivation for leaving the department. Chief Murad said it was due to a number of factors, including the stress of the profession that has been exacerbated by BPD's staffing shortages.

Councilor Grant added policing is still not equitable and that the contract approved by the City Council did not reflect the community. Councilor Grant advised against the need for more officers and staff while attitudes remain unchanged.

4.03 Update from Chief Murad on Downtown/Commercial Safety Plans for the Summer

Chief Murad said two officers are permanently assigned to Downtown Tuesday through Friday during the summer, in addition to what was articulated in the Priority Response Plan last May. The reason for two officers and the set hours is to ensure that officers are still available to respond to calls where police officer presence is required. Councilor Doherty asked if this patrol would go into the fall when college students return, to which Chief Murad responded that they would assess the need once summer was over.

4.04 Update on Drug Crisis and Enforcement

Chief Murad said the drug unit is responsible for enforcement but the narcotics is limited in how they can do this because courts require specific observations and demonstrations of proof, including documented activity in the form of drug buys by the department, electronic surveillance, social media habits, and physical observations to obtain a warrant of arrest. Once a person is arrested, if no other crimes are attached, they can be released on arraignment the same or next day, so that enforcement truly only disrupts drug operations, as opposed to being effective in stopping them.

The Narcotics unit executed on two warrants within the last two weeks, and the Narcotics team is getting through the list, informed by investigations and outside tips, as fast as possible.

President Paul asked for clarification on how information from the online tip forms are used. Chief Murad clarified that a consenting tip form allows the department to follow up with that individual for more information, whereas a tip form with consent withheld allows the Department to use the data contained in that tip but restricts them from circling back with the tip source.

Councilor Grant requested that tip data be included in future police chief reports, which Chief Murad confirmed they had the data to accommodate this request.

5. Presentation from Vermont Interfaith Action and Safer Together

5.01 Presentation from Debbie Ingram, VIA Director, and Judd Allen, Human Resources Institute

Debbie Ingram, Deputy Director of Vermont Interfaith Action, shared a presentation on a proposed solution called 'Safer Together', in collaboration with community psychologist, Judd

Allen, as well as the National Policing Institute and a former police chief. Allen described how the year-long program's goals were to build trust and generate culture change around policing using a scientific approach.

The first step would be for police and community members to take a widely accessible survey. After taking this survey, police and community would workshop the findings to develop a task force. Over the next six months, the task force would work with police and neighbors. The final step would be to evaluate and celebrate progress.

VIA proposed a plan to go neighborhood by neighborhood. Commissioner Rao wanted to know what neighborhood this work would pilot in? Ingram suggested the Old North End or King Street but is open to other ideas. Ingram also acknowledged translators will be important throughout this project. Chief Murad noted that the city used to be policed by five geographical areas marked as A-E with an Area Lieutenant assigned to each section. Due to staffing, they now divide the city into three sections. Allen emphasized this plan is adaptable to the needs of the Police Department and the City.

Councilor Grant suggested showing this presentation to REIB as well.

Commissioners and President Paul noted they will need more conversations around this before making a decision.

6. Updates from BFD

6.01 Updates from Chief LaChance

Chief LaChance summarized updates from the Burlington Fire Department.

- BFD is hiring seven new entry-level firefighters.
- BFD is onboarding a new EMS Chief, who will also be the first female on the command staff in BFD's history. For the other leadership role, Deputy Chief of Administration, the Department is looking at a strong internal candidate.
- Numbers for recruits and candidates for leadership roles have made hiring difficult, though recruiting efforts are paying off.
- BFD started a new 48/96 schedule on a six-month trial basis, meaning firefighters will be on 48 hours with 96 hours off during the week. Previously, BFD followed a 24/48 model.
- To address the rise in overdoses, BFD is working closely with BPD, EMS, and the hospital to get more people into treatment.
- Chief LaChance wants to track overdoses by location as well as transport versus non-transport by location.

Councilor Grant requested that the regular report sent to the Fire Commission also be sent to the Public Safety Committee and asked for clarification on why EMS funding ran out early. Chief LaChance said this was due to a third ambulance being put into service, combined with an increase in calls but no increase in EMS supplies. The funding issue was resolved with the Chief Administrative Officer.

President Paul inquired about whether Chief LaChance thinks the public views BFD positively. Chief LaChance responded that polypharm instances affect this perception because encounters can result in aggressive acts against firefighters, but BPD and BFD are sharing resources to support each other in these cases.

7. Other Committee Business

7.01 Other Committee Business

President Paul said the next meeting date would most likely be in June.

8. Adjournment

8.01 Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn the Meeting

Motion by Councilor Doherty, Seconded by Councilor Grant

Final Resolution: Motion passes

Yes: Unanimous

The meeting was adjourned at 8:57 PM.