

**Public Safety Committee
Thursday, December 21, 2023
Remote via Zoom
Burlington, Vermont
DRAFT MINUTES**

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

Staff Present: Jared Pellerin (Acting City Attorney), Jon Murad (Police Chief), Michael LaChance (Fire Chief)

Public Present: Romeo von Hermann, Tim Williams

Meeting called to order at 5:34 PM by President Paul.

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

Motion to adopt Agenda as presented.

Motion by Councilor Doherty, Seconded by Councilor Grant

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

**2. Adopt Minutes
2.01 Motion to Adopt Draft Minutes from September 21, 2023
2.02 Motion to Adopt Draft Minutes from October 2, 2023
2.03 Motion to Adopt Draft Minutes from December 12, 2023**

Motion to adopt all three sets of Draft Minutes from the dates of September 21, October 2, and December 12, 2023.

Motion by Councilor Grant, Seconded by Councilor Doherty

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

**3. Public Forum
3.01 Verbal Comments**

No public comments. Public Forum closed at 5:37 PM.

4. Chiefs' Reports

Councilor Grant recommended Chiefs' reports be considered a deliberative agenda item for future Committee meetings to allow for members to ask questions.

4.01 BPD Chief's Report

In reference to a recent CommStat meeting Councilor Grant attended, the Committee discussed the differences between CommStat's initial purpose versus what it has evolved into, as Chief Murad, President Paul, and Councilor Doherty spoke to the confidential nature of the meetings starting in 2017, and how this format was effective in making a positive impact on individuals who were struggling with substance use disorder. The Committee discussed how today, the format of the meetings are broader and open and do not address individual cases in a manner that they used to. Councilor Grant emphasized the value of the current format, and President Paul agreed the current meeting format provides important learning opportunities to the public and that there are benefits to both approaches. Councilor Grant also asked Chief Murad to share his position on overdose prevention centers, and Chief Murad responded he did not think his opinion mattered but that to his knowledge, at this time they are illegal, and he will support what elected officials decide.

Chief Murad agreed to provide the Committee with the presentation from the recent Community Forums on Public Safety. Chief Murad also informed the Committee a December 2023 Chief's Report would be presented to the Police Commission at their next meeting, and a second report compiling data from the entire year would also be released and available for the next Public Safety Committee meeting.

4.02 BFD Chief's Report

The Committee returned to this item after Chief LaChance joined the meeting.

Chief LaChance answered Councilor Grant's question about the definition of "remount", where an existing ambulance's box is refurbished and put on a new chassis or frame. Chief LaChance stated the benefits of this approach are shorter lead times and overall cost savings for the build and believes the City's ambulances are of a high enough quality to justify looking into this option.

Chief LaChance stated the ambulance purchased in 2021 was expected to arrive April 2024 and expected current prices of ambulances to have increased since but still remain under \$400,000 due to specification changes, such as opting for gas ambulances instead of diesel, to save the City money. Chief LaChance confirmed payment is not applied at the time of ordering but at the time of receipt. Councilor Grant asked if electric ambulances were available, and Chief LaChance replied that to his knowledge, chassis for electric ambulances were not available. The Committee discussed with Chief LaChance and Chief Murad the challenges associated with fleet vehicle lead times.

Chief LaChance addressed Councilor Grant's questions regarding the status of improvements to the firehouses, stating the netting to block falling concrete in Station 2 is helping for now, though it still poses a risk, and the floor is currently under review for Request For Proposals (RFP), the status of which Attorney Pellerin volunteered to follow up on. Chief LaChance said the RFP for the mudrooms has been awarded but there was no movement on a timeline yet, and that the

shoring of the floor at Station 1 is of particular concern after an engineer assessed it be done as soon as possible and by a professional.

5. BPD Community Engagement

5.01 Update on BPD Community Engagement

Councilor Grant stated she would like this to be a recurring agenda item where the Police Department provide information about the Department's community engagement efforts.

Referring back to the Police Chief's Report and in relation to BPD's recruitment strategies, Councilor Doherty asked Chief Murad if a housing incentive had been discussed as an added benefit to the police force's hiring package. Chief Murad said it had been considered as part of the Rebuilding Plan back in June 2021. However, there were significant challenges in terms of how to finance this incentive and offer it equitably, so the idea lost momentum.

6. Review of City's Emergency Plan

6.01 Discussion & Review of City's Emergency Plan

The Committee returned to this item after Chief LaChance joined the meeting.

President Paul asked Chief LaChance to speak to how people are notified about gunfire incidents in light of a reader's letter to the editor from Seven Days, included with the agenda materials, criticizing emergency responders' follow-up with the community regarding the shooting on November 25th, and to address former Councilor Perri Freeman's concerns about notice related to an incident that occurred near their home on Church Street.

Chief LaChance said emergency responders currently do email blasts, press releases, and alerts through the VT Alert system. Chief LaChance recommended Burlingtonians sign up for this free service that sends regular notifications to users regarding public safety updates in their respective county and suggested Samantha Sheehan, the Mayor's Communications Director, as a resource to learn more about it.

7. Dispatch Update

7.01 Dispatch Update

Chief Murad updated the Committee that there are currently 12 full-time Emergency Communications Specialists, 5 or 6 of which are dual-certified, meaning they can work Police or Fire dispatch. 3 of the full-time Emergency Communications Specialists are from BFD, and 9 are from BPD. Chief Murad explained that the model is to have 3 Emergency Communications Specialists for every hour of the day with 2 for Police dispatch and 1 for Fire. The ultimate goal is to have 14 full-time Emergency Communications Specialists, plus the Emergency Communications Manager, to adequately cover minimum staffing requirements because currently, gaps in coverage are filled through overtime and police officers. The first step toward that goal will be to get 10 Emergency Communications Specialists dual-certified, which the Department is steadily working toward. Challenges to this goal are the amount of time and space staff can devote to training Emergency Communications Specialists on the job, as dual-

certification requires accumulating a specific number of hours working both Police and Fire dispatch. Some currently-employed Emergency Communications Specialists have shown interest in becoming dual-certified, and Deputy Chief Brian LaBarge is overseeing their training. Achieving the goal of 10 dual-certified Emergency Communications Specialists would also mean that the Fire Department does not need to run its own dispatch, which is ultimately more efficient for BPD and BFD.

8. Online Incident Reporting Review

8.01 Online Incident Reporting Review

Councilor Grant asked Chief Murad if there was a way to get a report on how many incidents have been submitted, how many have been backlogged, and how many got worked on for a given period. Chief Murad said he would look into getting Councilor Grant the clarification on why the lag between cases being referred to the State's Attorney's Office and the date of the incident report exists.

Chief Murad added that online incident reporting has recently been updated to make it so residents cannot use the online incident report functionality for incidents that should not be reported online, which will help reduce the backlog and streamline BPD's response. Chief Murad described how retail thefts that do not get reported when they are happening will not be addressed and discouraged retailers from using online incident reporting to report a retail theft. With these changes to online incident reporting, delays are expected to reduce from months to days or hours.

Romeo Von Hermann asked about the availability of the presentations from the community public forums, as it was communicated they would be made available on Civic Clerk. President Paul stated that she would follow up with the Mayor's Office on when and where the presentations will be posted. Councilor Grant suggested they be posted to the Community Forum events listed on the City Calendar and Civic Clerk.

~~9. BFD & BPD Data Overview~~

~~9.01 BFD & BPD Data Overview~~

This item was consolidated with Agenda Item 8 per Councilor Grant.

910. Burlington CARES Update

910.01 Burlington CARES Update

Chief Murad stated they have had interviews with a number of clinician candidates for Burlington CARES and that interviews are moving forward. In regards to UVM providing the medical component of the program, while an understanding between the non-legal parties has been reached, UVM's legal department is still in the process of drafting an agreement. The Department looks forward to sharing more substantive updates in the future.

101. Future Business

101.01 Other Committee Business

President Paul suggested the Committee revisit the resolution and Community Forums at their next meeting in January.

The Committee set the next meeting for January 24th, 2024 at 5:30 PM.

Romeo Von Hermann proposed a quarterly public safety forum inviting all public safety officials to present to the community.

112. Adjournment

112.01 Motion to Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned with no objection by President Paul at 7:03 PM.

DRAFT