City of Columbia, Missouri

Meeting Minutes

City Council

Tuesday, September 8, 2020 6:00 PM	Pre-Council	Council Chamber Columbia City Hall 701 E. Broadway

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at approximately 6:00 pm.

Present: 7 - Trapp, Thomas, Peters, Treece, Skala, PItzer, and Fowler

Community Policing

Attachments: Community Policing Update

Community Policing Update Presentation

Mr. John Glascock, City Manager, introduced Chief of Police, Geoff Jones. He stated that the Community Stakeholder Meetings will have a report at the second meeting of October.

Chief Jones explained that the report was not new information, it provides background information for the discussion. This is not a new program, this is a progress update for community policing which is based on input over the past few years. He still would like input from the community. He invited Sgt. Clinton Sinclair and Lt. Michael Hestir to present the information.

Sgt. Sinclair defined Community Policing, which they are calling Columbia Policing. The big tenets are partnerships, communication, transparency, and openness with the community members served. The intended outcome is to promote a shared power and responsibility between the community and the police. The Vehicle Stop Committee advises on data collection and change for training practices in vehicle stops. A team at MU will look into factors affecting traffic stop decisions. The citizens are also a community partner, whether to be to solve crime or solve issues in the community. He explained the community outreach process. The community should be able to come to an officer about issues that affect their quality of life.

Sgt. Sinclair explained the expansion of the area of responsibility for officers into sub-beats. Officers should get to know the area, there are 2 officers assigned to the geographic area. The expectation is that officers should know what is going on in their area at all times, and should review anything that happens in that area. Getting to the root of the problem is critical for solving problems. The officers should receive feedback from the citizens to identify areas where more work is needed for improvement. Columbia policing is enforcing the law where applicable and holding those accountable who are decreasing the quality of life. He provided an example of the Community Outreach Officers assisting other police units. The officers should be available where people gather, since officers are a part of the community.

Sgt. Sinclair explained that the 8 beats were subdivided into 16 sub-beats. This helps with dispatching calls since it is a more defined geographic area. Travel time across a

beat could be 15-20 minutes, the subdivision will allow for manageable areas for building meaningful relationships with the community. He presented a map that displayed the 16 sub-beat system, each original beat was divided in half. He introduced the Community Outreach Officers for each sub-beat. The Community Outreach Unit operates at the Community Outreach Substation in Beat 40 W. He asked if the Council had any questions.

Councilperson Skala asked if there was a substation in the other areas. Sgt. Sinclair responded that this is the only substation, which is on White Gate Drive. The Columbia Insurance Group donated the space and equipment for operations.

Lt. Hestir stated that Columbia Policing is building upon the initial Community Outreach Unit. New Chapter Coaching is preparing a final report based on input from the community. Community Service Aids are going to start enforcing parking in the downtown area. This will allow for more police personnel to be in contact with businesses and citizens, downtown will eventually become a new sub-beat. He reviewed the efforts and programs to recruit officers from Columbia. Officer Maria Phelps oversees the day to day management of the Police Explorers, which is a program where people from the ages of 14-21 can obtain police training to grow into police officers. This program helps lead individuals to a career in policing.

Lt. Hestir was appointed as the lieutenant over the training division. He reviewed some of the training for police officers. A professor from Kentucky University trained on racial and cultural differences. There have been classes on bias and impartial policing. He would like citizen input in the future, citizens can come in to talk about their experiences. The new officers go through a class called “Total Community Policing”. CPD wants officers to be able to solve long term problems through communication, partnerships, transparency, cooperation, and long term resolutions. This training also goes to in-service officers. Before officers can be embedded in the community, they have to be safe. Safety tactics are a large part of training so officers are able to respond. There is a goal for community members to be able to attend this training. The training is being adjusted to create a “Total Cop”. The “Total Cop” is someone who is safe and doesn’t feel like they are on edge, allowing for meaningful conversation with community members to obtain long term resolutions. Officers should be able to master technology, and maintain long lasting relationships. The “Total Cop” would be able to accomplish long term resolutions to problems. He acknowledged that changing the shape of the response of police officers takes time.

Lt. Hestir explained that when officers are empowered to act as guardians, there are different views on what that could mean. A guardian is put in charge of something very valuable. Chief Jones has empowered officers to go after the people who are threatening the peace of the community. When the community is driving the police response, it creates a validity to the police actions. The reorganization of the department allows officers to have a stake in the community. The priority isn’t clearing out calls, it’s to help solve long term problems. The Chief has been working with the Assistant Chiefs to provide clear and concise operational objectives for the officers. The Internal Affairs, Training and Policy Units have meetings every 30-60 days to address complaints from the community. They want to make sure that there is an equitable response by listening to the community, and have a balance taking care of the community while reducing the danger to the community. Some individuals feel over-policed, while some individuals want a police response. Every violent occurrence threatens Columbia’s financial future, peace, and safety.

Lt. Hestir stated that the community has been fantastic with embracing honest contact.

These improved relationships help investigations. CPD responding to shootings as threatening the peace of the community is an operational priority. The focus on community safety has led to cooperation with other city workers. City staff at the landfill helped close a missing person case. There was a recent shooting in Douglass Park, the case was solved because community members trusted the police to tell them who committed the crime. Governmental agencies and the community worked together to help investigate a missing persons case at the Lamine River.

The Chief has opened command staff meetings to all CPD employees, and CPD staff can give input on the department's operations. They are trying to get a communications position in the department. CPD is trying to find different ways to communicate with citizens on various social media outlets to increase transparency. Lt. Hestir reviewed a slide on how CPD has been transparent by showing the numbers of press conferences, video briefings, and appearances by the Chief of Police. In closing, Lt. Hestir said that everything discussed tonight about CPD has been incorporated since December of 2019 in order to move CPD to a better place. It is a work in progress, and they are still waiting for recommendations from the current stakeholder process.

Mr. Skala asked if there is a social work component to the high need areas to expand community policing. Lt. Hestir responded that there are a lot of citizens in high need. He said that it would be beneficial to the City to have a social work component. Chief Jones stated that the Community Mental Health liaison through Burrell has been beneficial, but it is a limited resource. By bringing in a program where there are more services through case management or referrals, it will help with solving long term problems. He is trying to take the philosophy of the Community Outreach Unit to all operations, and mental health will be a component of that expansion.

Mr. Skala stated that there was no executive summary of the report and the City needs to convey the information in a simpler fashion to the public. Chief Jones responded with some steps CPD has been making to improve communication. The PIO function of the city has been decentralized, which will allow for timely information that is specific to CPD. A Community Outreach position was asked for in the budget, this position will help with organization and coordination. They will help manage communication efforts so it's equitable throughout the city. Internally, opening command staff meetings allows for asking questions and giving suggestions. Mr. Skala thanked the Chief and Police Officers for their work.

Mayor Treece asked if CPD reviews videos in the media to examine the situations and what could have been done differently. Chief Jones responded that he sees first line supervisors show videos of incidents, and review the videos with officers to discuss how they should respond in Columbia. Some incidents that have occurred nationwide haven't happened in Columbia, this video training gives CPD an opportunity to learn from poor outcomes. Lt. Hestir stated that this training happens often and early, and the training also looks at what CPD policy says about the situation. Officers must assess risk, look at the options, make a decision and act.

Councilmember Mike Trapp asked about the MU Research Team and their specializations. Chief Jones stated that he and Toni Messina, Civic Relations Officer, met with MU President Choi about a month ago to ask for help in this area. The academic professionals will work with the Vehicle Stops Committee, and see what they can do to see if there are any gaps in the data. Mr. Trapp said that the numbers continue to not be the results we are looking for.

Councilmember Thomas asked to summarize the specifics around recruitment, training,

and policy that has changed in the past few years. Chief Jones responded that CPD has reached out to different organizations about training. CPD is looking anywhere for recruitment. Officers recommend individuals that they meet in the community. Officers are empowered to make decisions, and are held accountable for their actions. There have been 7 or 8 homicides this year with a 100% clearance rate. In 2018, the clearance rate was 44.4% clearance rate. Mr. Thomas asked if the Chief believed the improved clearance rate was due to better communication and partnerships in the community. Chief Jones stated that the level of cooperation today has contributed to the clearance of violent crime.

Ms. Fowler said that people of color have different experiences to share with us. She encouraged Chief Jones to reach out to the new leadership that has come forward. While working through the community conversations, there are examples of community leadership now. She wanted to understand the experiences that are different from her own, and encouraged Chief Jones to ask them their experiences.

Chief Jones thanked the Council for the opportunity to present the update, and stated that this type of policing is a work in progress.

Mr. Glascock stated that the officers being empowered comes from the Council, he appreciated the empowerment that the Council has given CPD.

II. ALL OTHER ITEMS THE COUNCIL MAY WISH TO DISCUSS

None.

III. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:02 pm.

Tentative Future Agenda Topics

Members of the public may attend any open meeting. For requests for accommodations related to disability, please call 573-874-CITY (573-874-2489) or email CITY@CoMo.gov. In order to assist staff in making the appropriate arrangements for your accommodation, please make your request as far in advance of the posted meeting date as possible.