

**City Commission Workshop
Meeting Minutes
January 30, 2020
(DRAFT)**

1/30/2020 - Minutes

1. ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Mayor Eugene Fultz, Terrye Howell, Al Goldstein, Robin Gibson, Curtis Gibson

Staff Present: Kenneth Fields, City Manager; Jennifer Nanek, City Clerk

Mayor Eugene Fultz called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Kenneth Fields, City Manager, said this workshop allows these issues to be discussed in a casual setting. No formal action will be taken. If there is consensus on an issue then an action item will be brought to a future Commission meeting for a vote. He then introduced Police Chief Chris Velasquez to provide background on police training and community policing.

2.1. Police Training And Community Policing

Chief Velasquez shared a slide show about the police department, community policing and the training they receive. He first explained about the organization of the police department. He introduced Lt. Mike Smith the Operations manager, Lt. David Black is over Criminal investigations, and Lt. Nick Crosby is over Support Services. He said that many of their officers are born and raised in Lake Wales. Chief Velasquez shared statistics about investigations about officers. There were 10 citizen complaints last year. 8 were resolved without corrective actions. Most often the citizen does not understand police procedures. There were 2 incidents that required corrective action such as a reprimand. Chief Velasquez described the procedure for an internal investigation.

Chief Velasquez reviewed the required training for a police officer. This training includes understanding of different cultures and how to handle a crisis without someone going to jail when possible. Law Enforcement Officers start with a 1 year probation. There is an extensive vetting process before someone is hired. Officers are continually required to go through training on a regular basis. Chief Velasquez reviewed the different training required and required education. Chief Velasquez reviewed the 3 values constantly promoted in the department. They are quality, accountability, and professionalism. He then described efforts to always be out in the community. They are happy to help wherever asked. They want to build relationships.

Chief Velasquez then reviewed street patrol procedures and crime suppression efforts. He said that all officers are encouraged to interact with citizens. He then described community policing that its a philosophy with them. He shared some of the activities they participate in.

Commissioner Goldstein said he lives in a low crime area and commended the Police Department on the good job they do. He noted the positive response Lt. Smith got from the public during the Martin Luther King Parade. He is proud of our police force although there is always room for improvement.

Commissioner Curtis Gibson asked about the complaints. If the number of complaints have dropped is it because citizens are afraid of retaliation? Chief Velasquez said they do hear complaints from citizens in the community that they look into that are valid. A citizen has nothing to fear from filing a complaint as long as they tell the truth. A misunderstanding is understandable. There are consequences if they tell a lie. Some citizens just need to vent. He reviewed the complaint process. Mr. Fields said that complaints can be filed with Human Resources at the City Hall. Commissioner Curtis Gibson asked if

the Police Department has a way to track complaints. Chief Velasquez said they do. Commissioner Curtis Gibson asked about Community Policing if there is a policy. Chief Velasquez said they do have a policy but its much more than a policy. Its every day behavior. They look for opportunities to help. Commissioner Curtis Gibson said he supports law enforcement but we need to build good relationships with the community. Citizens should not be afraid to come to law enforcement for help. He said he appreciates what they do. It is probably only a few employees that are having issues.

Commissioner Howell asked if there was a policy on officers with repeated complaints. Chief Velasquez said they have an early intervention system. It is a mechanism to deal with issues. There are disciplinary actions taken. Commissioner Howell said that there are a few that make the rest of the police force look bad. There are a few officers that do the same things and nothing seems to happen to them. Chief Velasquez reviewed the levels of discipline and said there is progressive discipline for repeated problems.

Deputy Mayor Robin Gibson said that regarding the situation with the Elks lodge and reviewed information from Lakeland related to a similar situation. He said that respect is needed from both sides. He said he is disturbed by things he has heard lately.

Mayor Fultz said when he was a supervisor he knew who his bad actors were. Those bad actors need to be notified to clean up their act. He doesn't know about the Police Department as he is not over them. He has heard about bad practices in the past. If an officer is doing the same thing over and over and nothing is done what does that say to other officers? We need a special effort to keep positive relationships in Lake Wales. We need to do what we need to do to make sure our citizens are protected.

Commissioner Curtis Gibson said he gets a lot of complaints on his phone. Now we know citizens can also go to City Hall to file a complaint. We need to put a band-aid on this problem and rebuild the relationship. He and other commissioners are getting many complaints.

Mayor Fultz encouraged the public to save their questions until Communications and Petitions for both issues.

Mr. Fields reviewed the rigorous hiring process for police officers. Finding qualified applicants can be a challenge.

Commissioner Goldstein encouraged citizens to call him with concerns as much as the other commissioners. He has business cards if anyone wants them.

Chief Velasquez said some issues may nor rise to the level of a formal complaint. Sometimes all that is needed is to report the issue to a supervisor and it can be resolved quickly. We will deal with inappropriate behavior and correct mistakes.

2.II. Police Body Cameras

Chief Velasquez reviewed research on body cameras. Studies do not show a significant impact regarding police use of force, trust or complaints. In some areas police complaints decreased. Incidents of resisting arrest increased. Cameras may hinder proactive enforcement or self initiated activities to rid the community of problems. Cameras can help secure convictions. The use of cameras is still being evaluated as to effectiveness. Rules concerning use of cameras are still new and are changing. There are three issues with cameras. It is not practical to have a camera on for an entire shift. Any policy when a camera should be on or off could be open to interpretation. An officer may forget in a critical situation. The cameras may discourage some citizens from talking to police during an investigation. Cameras may violate the privacy of crime victims in a bad situation. Video cameras are everywhere now and can be very helpful. Body cameras aren't on the officer they are facing others and not recording the actions of the officers. Kenneth Fields, City Manager, explained the challenges with cameras as far as public records. The rules are limited as far as victim's rights. What should be public record and what shouldn't be is currently undetermined. Videos can be around for a long time. Chief Velasquez said

these issues are present in the schools with students as well. He shared past challenges with dashboard cameras. There were lots of maintenance issues with them. Storage of the videos would also be an issue. He shared an example of cameras on tasers and how expensive they were. Mr. Fields reviewed potential costs of body cameras. The cameras are not expensive but the storage is.

Deputy Mayor Robin Gibson said he wants to know what the hard costs would be. He said we need to consult with Sheriff's office to be sure we maintain our relationship with them. He said he did some research on this issue. These cameras put an end to the he said she said problem.

Commissioner Howell said she wondered what happened to the previous cameras in the cars. As the Commission voted for those. If there were issues then that did not come back to the commission. Someone made a decision to discontinue them without consulting the commission. She said we need the cameras to protect good officers and our citizens. These may be needed more than new cars. We replace cars when damaged so we can replace cameras. We need the cameras to correct these issues and protect our officers and people.

Commissioner Curtis Gibson said he has done research on this. They protect both officers and the citizens. He spoke to Mayor Terry Hill from Palatka and one of their Police cameras. They have cameras and it has been successful causing a drop in complaints. They stop false complaints. Palatka is a small city and they afford these cameras. He suggested following their model. There is distrust in our city. We need to listen to what the people want. He said he appreciates the Police Department and all they do. More citizens should thank our police department for what they do. He said he supports cameras in the vehicles too. The Chief from Palatka is willing to come to our commission to speak on this issue.

Commissioner Goldstein said these cameras can be costly. He hasn't heard a reason to change his mind. He encouraged citizens to call and talk to him.

Mayor Fultz said he agreed that we need information on costs and study this. We maybe can put this in next year's budget. He also spoke with the Mayor of Palatka about the issues they had. He commended our Police Department and said he trusts them.

After Communications and Petitions:

Mayor Fultz said he has heard all the comments and is responding to what the people want. He said body cameras are something we need to look at. The need for unity still needs to be addressed as there is a lot of division. He said we should look into body cams for next year's budget.

Mr. Fields said he will get information on Body cams for next years budget. Commissioner Howell suggested looking for rants to cover the cost. Mr. Fields agreed and said they would. Mr. Fields said he would review the process of submitting complaints about the police department. They can find a way to receive complaints that protects everyone.

3. COMMUNICATIONS AND PETITIONS

Winston Cherry shared an experience where cameras helped him when officers entered his home.

Cassandra Leith, resident, said body cameras would be better. She has had some bad experiences with some officers but not all of them. Body Cameras will put everything in the open.

Sara Jones, resident and President of the Lincoln Avenue Community Development Corporation, said she brought this request forward after discussions between the Elks Lodge and the city. She expressed support for Law Enforcement and the City. This issue has reoccurred in the City repeatedly and needs to be addressed. She shared information researched on community policing and body cameras. There was discussion as to how much time she should speak. Ms. Jones said she would shorten her comments. She said there is a trust problem in this City with a few of the police officers. She said that similar to the Sheriff's Office complaints should be able to be submitted online. Many are uncomfortable submitting complaints in

person. There is some fear of retribution if something is said to the Police Department. There needs to be evidence of individual behavior of officers.

Narvell Petersen, resident, expressed support for body cameras. This is advancement. Lake Wales needs cameras to be held accountable. There needs to be more officers and leaders that look like us. He said to Commissioner Goldstein that people don't know him yet. People will call him once they get to know him. He noted who came to the recent Martin Luther King events and who wasn't. He encouraged the leadership of the city including the City Manager to become more involved in the community.

Jonathan Simmons, resident, said he speaks to those he knows and trusts such as Commissioner Howell. He said body cams will provide accountability and trust that we need for the police to serve us.

Rex Demming, Public Defender for Polk County, said that our country is divided and there is no faith in the news media. We need trust in our criminal justice system. Our justice system is important. He said that the body cameras are costly and time consuming but they are needed. Lake Wales can lead on this. The citizens need to perceive that justice is being done. Privacy can be protected.

Burney Hayes, resident, said we need better communication between the police and the citizens of Lake Wales. It shouldn't be us against them. Cameras can cut down on a lot of riff-raff going on. He encouraged the City Manager to come and be a part of the community. We have a lot of great kids and citizens doing a lot of great things being overshadowed by a few negatives.

Terry Christian, non-resident, said perception is important. A person should be innocent until proven guilty. He has reached out to law enforcement concerning his Elks Lodge. He closed down his facility until issues could be resolved. We need people to do the right thing. Some officers don't. He shared some stories that he has heard about officer interactions where people are stopped or ticketed for no reason and are then violating probation. This is a serious matter.

JJ Pierce, resident and Pastor of the First Institutional Baptist Church, said that there is a breakdown in communication somewhere. He has been in Lake Wales 27 years. He has never been afraid to speak out on issues. He reviewed some of the past projects he has been involved in. He said we have a wonderful City and Police Department. We should not let what goes on nationally affect us. We can work together to make it better.

Jill Tuman, Private Investigator with 5th Grade Investigations, said she speaks on behalf of those afraid to speak about their experiences with the Police Department. This is what she has been told. She said she is a former deputy and it is a dangerous job. A body cam will protect officers and provide accountability. She reviewed a list of incidents that she has been told about. These stops primarily involve African Americans and the same officers are mentioned repeatedly. She expressed support for body cams.

Jayde Coleman, Attorney with Public Defenders Office, said there may be grants to cover costs of the body cameras. If there are cameras then the costs related to lawsuits may go down. She said police officers protect one another all the time. Officers need to protect citizens not themselves. We do need more minority and female officers. Trust needs to be built. Videos may create more work but will help in pursuing justice. Officers miss items in their reports frequently.

Tonya Christian, non resident, asked if we are serious about these issues in Lake Wales. They deserve our full attention. She said some speakers get more attention than others from the Commission.

Lamar Davidson reported some of his experiences with police officers including being punched, called vulgar names, and his head hit onto the car.

Narvell Petersen, resident, reported being disrespected by police officers questioning him or when he has helped the Police Department. The Police Department needs a better attitude when talking to the public.

Brian Martin, Operations Manager at Harmsco at the corner of M. L. King, Jr. and J A Wiltshire, said that increased patrol in the area is because of incidents at his facility. He loves this community and we can do

better. He sees everything and has been called into court 4 times. He shared examples of things he has seen recently in the area.

Rev. Walter Nelson, Pastor in Lake Wales, expressed his love for the city and its people. He invited those interested to join him for prayer after the meeting.

A resident of Lake Wales (name inaudible) shared her experiences with Lake Wales Police Department when her 12 year old son was falsely accused and no report on the incident was filed. This is why the Police Department can't be trusted. There should be body cameras.

4. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 8:16 p.m.