

Citizens and Police Community Relations Advisory Committee
230 B Street, Lake Wales, FL 33853
B Street Community Service Center
Monday, January 31, 2022
6:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:

Lt. Michael Smith	PRESENT
Dwight Wilson	ABSENT
Al Goldstein	PRESENT
Andy Oguntola	PRESENT
Narvell Peterson	PERSENT
Tiffany Davis	PRESENT

POLICE TRAFFIC ACTIVITY

As the Police Department divides the city into four sectors, Lieutenant Smith provided information of police activity by sector since the last meeting, which was November 22, 2021. Sector 47 Alpha had 107 incidents, Sector 47 Bravo 109 had incidents, Sector 47 Charlie had 123 incidents and Sector 47 Delta had 45 incidents. These numbers are from incident numbers pulled and may not have generated reports. There were 13 calls for service involving firearms throughout the City. Total calls for service throughout the City were 3,677. Total arrests were 136. Regarding traffic complaints, we received 86 traffic complaints. There were a total of 417 traffic stops, 207 traffic crashes, 348 traffic citations, 58 traffic warnings.

POLICE ACTIVITY

Lieutenant Smith provided the names of our recent 10 new officers not necessarily hired since our last meeting. Officer William Douglas, Officer Riley Helgerman, Officer Esaul Hernandez, Officer Sarah Sittnick, Officer Jacob Johnson and Officer Nicholas Walters have completed their field-training program and are now out on the road on their own. Officer Jerry McDowell just started our Agency's field-training program. Officer David Morse is also currently in our Agency's field-training program. Ashley Cockrell and Christina Bullard are still in the police academy due to graduate February 14, 2022. Upon graduation, they must pass the State exam and then complete the Agency's field-training program.

DISCUSSION

Narvell Peterson asked how many minorities we have. We have two new black male officers, Officer William Douglas and Officer Jerry McDowell. We have one new Hispanic male officer, Officer Esaul Hernandez. We have one new Hispanic female officer, Officer Christina Bullard.

Al Goldstein asked if we are still waiting for the motorcycle officers. We have recently transferred a patrol officer into the motor unit; however, he is not on a motor yet, as he is waiting for the next motor class to become available.

Al Goldstein remarked about the 13 calls for service involving firearms that although it is only 13 calls, they are the most dangerous, and he asked if there were any shootings involved in those 13 incidents. Lieutenant Smith advised he did not separate those stats, but off the top of his head, he did not recall any shootings in those 13 incidents.

Narvell Peterson asked what we are going to do about the several complaints of speeding and traffic of trucks in the Northwest Section. Specifically, there are complaints of speeding on Martin Luther King Boulevard, Florida Avenue and Pearl Street. Mr. Peterson advised they have been complaining and nothing is being done. Lieutenant Smith advised he will reach out to Sergeant William Smith, as he is over the traffic unit. Mr. Peterson requested a report next month of what is being done. Mr. Peterson requested signs to be put up for no trucks. Lieutenant Smith advised as far as the trucks, there is nothing they can do. Lieutenant Smith advised that as far as the speeding, 417 citations have been written throughout the City within the last two months.

Al Goldstein initiated the discussion of the growth of the City projected to be an increase of over 8,000 people within the next five years, and the need for more officers. Chairman Oguntola advised that in November this was discussed that we need to be pro-active with the increase in officers with the growth of the City, and it was agreed that this Committee would go to the Commission in support of what the Police need. Lieutenant Smith mentioned the consultant group that recently analyzed the police department, including the foreseen growth of the City, will be here in Lake Wales on February 23, 2022 at 2:00 p.m. at the Commission Workshop to present the findings of their analysis and provide recommendations of changes and improvements of the Police Department. Lieutenant Smith invited the Committee to attend the workshop, which will be held in the Commission Chambers. Lieutenant Smith added that this consultant group, CPSM, has provided their service to many agencies around the nation.

Chairman Oguntola asked that during this time before the next meeting if we could get some extra police presence in the areas mentioned by Mr. Peterson of where there is high points of pressure when it comes to speeding. Lieutenant Smith advised he would have our traffic trailer placed on Washington, and message board placed on Wiltshire to conduct a traffic study. A traffic study was done previously in the Northwest Section, but now that all of the speed limits are 25 mph in the Northwest Section, we can do another traffic study. Chairman Oguntola asked that we also have extra police presence in the Northwest Section during this time before the next meeting.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PETITIONS

A citizen expressed their concern with the speeding and the danger of the speeding in the Northwest Section as well as frequent loud music.

Terry Christian, Sr. expressed his concern that officers and supervisors need to make better decisions when it comes to dealing with criminals with mental disabilities and asked how officers are trained to deal with these situations. Lt. Smith advised that officers are to evaluate on an individual basis. It also depends upon the individual's status when the officer is dealing with them at that moment. If the officer feels that they need to be Baker Acted, then the individual will be Baker Acted. Chief Velasquez advised that the Police Department has many officers who went through C.I.T. training, Critical Incident Training, and we are working on having all officers receive C.I.T. training. This training helps officers identify mental illness and mental disease and recognize situations that can be de-escalated and handled alternatively instead of through arrest.

Troy Schulze, a representative of the Northwest Neighborhood Association, thanked the Police Department for being involved in practically every event that they have hosted and have attended meetings and addressed community forums such as this. In addition, Officer Amanda Ayers suggested community movie night, which she and Officer Palmer attended. Troy Schulze complimented the police on their efforts with other events as well. Troy Schulze also commented on the recruitment of officers as was mentioned in the meeting and gave his personal experience with the challenge of recruitment, stating it is easy to talk about but difficult to do. Troy Schulze encouraged everyone to be a part of the recruitment, and not only in conversation but being boots on the ground and being a part of it.

Lt. Smith commented on the recruitment discussion. Lt. Smith advised he is currently in a Command Development course, and there are 50 in the class from 50 different agencies. There is not a single agency in the class that the agency is fully staffed. The Lake Wales Police Department currently has one opening. Lt. Smith advised that of the 50 agencies represented at the class, the lowest number of openings for those agencies is 12 openings. The agency with the most openings has 50 openings.

Narvell Peterson expressed his concern that there is only one black officer that patrols the Northwest Section. He went on to explain that if an officer comes to his house and looks like him, he would be more comfortable talking to him. Terry Christian, Sr. and Burney Hayes spoke up about their concerns on this issue and racial disparity. Burney Hayes suggested that the analytical driven patrol could create racial profiling in investigating incidents. Chief Velasquez advised that the Lake Wales Police Department does not do that. Other agencies may be analytical patrol driven and some agencies are extremely analytical, but the Lake Wales Police Department does not do that. The Lake Wales Police Department analyzes crime not individuals.

There was a discussion brought up by Burney Hayes about trust of officers in the Northwest Section, and Terry Christian, Sr. also spoke on this.

Chairman Oguntola brought up a topic of a substation in the Northwest Section, and asked if there is a plan to add a substation. Chairman Oguntola added that it seems that when there are concerns of noise, stops, speeding, it always comes back to a suggestion that if we had a substation in the Northwest Section, we would not have these issues. Al Goldstein advised that in the budget, there has not been any plans, but it is a good point and perhaps we should start thinking about having a substation in the Northwest Section. Narvell Peterson agreed with Mr. Goldstein. Chief Velasquez advised we have had substations in the past, such as at the Mall, in the Northwest Section, the former Sunrise Park and appreciates the support for this; however, with a City our size, which is less than two miles from the police department, it just does not make sense for that expenditure. Chief Velasquez advised we want the officers out in the field, and we want them out moving around and not in a substation. Burney Hayes advised that regular patrol is not seen in this community. He added that if a patrol car is seen, it is sitting, and that does not allow relationships to develop.

A citizen by the name of Karen spoke up that she is from Los Angeles, and she has never heard the noise from vehicles as she hears in Lake Wales adding that her house shakes from the noise. She suggested to start ticketing the people with the loud music from their vehicles. She added that the more tickets that are written, the more money would be made. Chief Velasquez

acknowledged the frustration with the noise and wanted to add clarification to the amount of money the police department receives from tickets. Chief used an example of a ticket for \$150.00 that the police department may receive a few dollars from that ticket, and that money goes into a training account to be used for officer training. He added that a training class could cost \$600.00, so that money is a drop in the bucket. Chief Velasquez was appreciative of this question, for this is what these meetings are about, to bring understanding.

Chairman Oguntola opened the floor for one more citizen to speak.

Daniella Gibson asked to know exactly what the procedure is. She advised she witnessed something last week when she was about to take her children out for ice cream. She said she saw the cops coming so she stopped. She saw them turn off their lights, turn on her street and stop in front of a house. She said she did a U-Turn and then came back to the house. She said she saw two officers with their guns drawn at the house of one of her nicest neighbor's house. She said that the officers were at the wrong house, and the incident could have gone wrong, because English is not the first language of the residents. Ms. Gibson said that the officers were supposed to be at 970 Roberta, and they were at 980 Joyce. She wanted to know what the procedure is on this. Chief Velasquez advised he does not know what kind of call it was, but it was obviously something in progress, but he does not know about that incident. Discussion was held regarding the mistake of the officers. Chief Velasquez advised he would look into this. Lt. Smith asked what date it was, and Ms. Gibson advised it was last Sunday.

Chairman Oguntola thanked everyone for coming out to the meeting and for the great conversation.

Chairman Oguntola advised about the next meeting, that the meetings are always on the fourth Monday of every month. Lt. Smith suggested the next meeting to be at Highpoint Church. We will get with Jack Hilligoss regarding having the next meeting at his Church.

Meeting adjourned at 7:32 p.m.