

Citizens and Police Community Relations Advisory Committee
Monday, February 28, 2022 6:00 p.m.
Highpoint Church
4025 N. Scenic Highway, Lake Wales

CALL TO ORDER:

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

POLICE TRAFFIC ACTIVITY

Lt. Smith reported on the police activity during the month of February:

47 Alpha 434 reports
47 Bravo 421 reports
47 Charlie 457 reports
47 Delta 273 reports
Total calls with firearms: 3
Total calls for service: 1,585
Total arrests: 77

Traffic:

Traffic complaints: 40
Traffic stops: 426
Traffic crashes: 69
Traffic citations: 192
Traffic warnings: 103

A total of 60 of the citations are from the Northwest area on the Washington area side where the directed patrol was conducted. A total of 15 citations in Lake Ashton and 2 warnings in Lake Ashton. Lt. Smith advised that the traffic study performed on Florida Avenue was done when the 30 mph speed limit signs were still up over a period of one week. During that time, 1,542 cars traveled on Florida Avenue. Lt. Smith also reported that per the traffic study that week, 85% of the vehicles on Florida Avenue was traveling at 33.5 miles per hour. We will need to complete another traffic study now that the signs have been changed to 25 mph.

Narvell Peterson expressed his main concern with the traffic was the speeders. He has been in this area all of his life and with the growth that is continuing, he is concerned about traffic. We need to make sure our young people are safe and make it home safe. Mr. Peterson told of an incident where he was sitting in his garage and saw people in line at Janie Howard Wilson at 1:00 p.m. (sometimes 12:30) to pick up their kids when school lets out at 2:30. In this one instance, cars were lined up back to Scenic Highway and this man cut in the line. Mr. Peterson advised he did take care of that situation.

Al Goldstein shared about an incident in Lake Ashton where he saw an officer give a woman a citation and he could hear her in the car insulting the officer, however the officer remained professional. He wanted to comment on how embarrassed he was for her actions in their community. Mr. Goldstein also commented that traffic is an issue in the Northwest Sector, Lake Ashton and all throughout the City.

Deputy Chief David Black spoke to the Board regarding the issue of the parent pick up line at Janie Howard Wilson. He said the police department has been working with the school on a different route to help reduce issues on Scenic Highway related to the traffic complaints and congestion.

UPDATE ON CONCERN FROM DANIELLA GIBSON

Lt. Smith advised that at the last meeting Ms. Gibson voiced a concern about an incident involving two Lake Wales officers and her neighbors. At that time, Lt. Smith was unable to answer her questions as he was unaware of the actual incident but advised he would look into the incident and provide a follow-up. Lt. Smith had learned Ms. Gibson would not be at the meeting tonight, so he reached out to her to explain what he found out about the incident. Lt. Smith introduced a video that addressed Ms. Gibson's concern and explained that the video would begin with the audio of her concern at the January 30 meeting. It then had the audio of the 9-1-1 call, the dispatch communication and body camera video of Officers Esaul Hernandez and Justin Ludlow. The video played and then there was discussion. Ms. Fay Wood spoke to the Board and explained she had issue with that concern, since recently there were people that came to Lake Ashton seeking votes for the upcoming election. Ms. Wood asked if the person with the concern (Gibson) is related to the man running for mayor, Curtis Gibson. That was confirmed and Ms. Wood wanted to know if Curtis Gibson knew Ms. Gibson brought this concern. Lt. Smith stated further that Ms. Gibson's initial concern was the officers went to her neighborhood and drew out their guns; however, the video does not show any guns. Lt. Smith wanted to inform the group that the video was shown not to belittle anyone, but to inform the community of the proper way to voice a concern or complaint against an officer. A public forum is not the way to do this. If anyone has concerns, they are to speak to staff at the police department then give the staff the opportunity to investigate it. Lt. Smith further explained the actions of the police officers that were seen in that video. Lt. Smith advised Ms. Gibson's next concern was that the officers approached her neighbors first, however they are a Hispanic family and they speak Spanish. Lt. Smith advised the officer that made contact with Ms. Gibson's neighbor is Hispanic and fluent in Spanish. Lt. Smith addressed Ms. Gibson's final concern that the officers responded to the wrong house. The officers responded to the address that was given to them by dispatch and this was heard in the video. The officers confirmed the address with dispatch two or three times to verify they were at the correct address. Lt. Smith explained further the actions of the officers after being sent to the wrong address. Ms. Gibson had also sent a complaint via E-Mail to several city authorities regarding that incident. Lt. Smith advised that after showing Ms. Gibson the video, she apologized and she wrote the officers a letter of apology, copying City authorities. Lt. Smith read the letter. There were comments from citizens regarding Ms. Gibson's complaint. There were also comments of praise for the Department and staff. There was also a request for a copy of the letter. Chief Velasquez spoke on this matter and voiced his concern on the course of action taken by Ms. Gibson to advise of her concern. Chief Velasquez also commented on the actions of the officers, as they handled the incident professionally, appropriately and exactly per policy. Chief Velasquez also spoke on

standing. He stated there was not any standing for anyone to complain. The person that complained was not the person that lived at the residence. Nor was the person that complained the individual who potentially was experiencing the crisis. This was an outside bystander that saw something and made inaccurate comments in a public forum and that was why we provided this response. Chief Velasquez spoke further on the gravity of bringing to a public forum a situation that did not occur. Additionally, if you do not have standing in an incident we may not always have a response for you since we have a responsibility to protect the rights and privacy of citizens. Committee member Tiffany Davis reiterated the Chief's message that if you have any type of complaint it should be addressed directly to the police department.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PETITIONS

Narvell Peterson opened the meeting up for comments.

Chief Velasquez thanked Pastor Jack Hilligoss and Highpoint Church for letting us use their facility.

Al Goldstein commented on our police department that they are staffed at 100% where there are cities our size lacking 30, 40% of officers. He also stated that it speaks volumes that officers want to come to our department from other agencies.

Ms. Fay Wood mentioned that she would be happy to distribute to Lake Ashton information of each of the meetings.

Narvell Peterson reminisced of previous years in law enforcement and encouraged everyone as times are changing to pray for our City and Nation, show more love with each other and be more patient.

Discussion was held about the location of the next meeting. Chief Velasquez advised we were going to reach out to the east side of the city, possibly using the Art Center or somewhere in that area. Ms. Davis offered the use of her business, Wales Pointe Restaurant and Bar located at 207 East Park Avenue. Lt. Smith advised that once we determine the location of the next meeting, Ms. Gladue would post it on Facebook.

Chief Velasquez spoke briefly on the study that was recently completed for the Lake Wales Police Department by the Center for Public Safety Management (CPSM), which is a group under the International City County Managers Association. The city contracted with CPSM to do a full-scale in-depth analysis of the Police Department and our operations. Chief Velasquez advised CPSM presented the full report to the City Commission at the last City Commission work session and that it was very positive and included 47 recommendations that we will be implementing. Chief Velasquez advised each of the board members have received a copy of the report and a copy of the report is on our website and on the City of Lake Wales website.

Ms. Fay Wood welcomed everyone to Lake Ashton Clubhouse on March 7, as she will be hosting the annual meeting with the Lake Wales and Winter Haven police chiefs as they discuss what is going on in the City.

Mr. Goldstein spoke on the current and continued growth of the city and encouraged everyone to be involved in the City Commission meetings as decisions are made for the services and officers needed for the growth of the City.

Lt. Smith invited everyone to attend a swearing-in ceremony on Thursday, March 3 at 5:30 p.m. in the Commission Chambers where two new officers would be sworn in, two officers promoted to sergeant and one sergeant promoted to lieutenant. Lt. Smith added that the new lieutenant would be the first female lieutenant in the history of the Lake Wales Police Department.

The meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.