

**Chief's Advisory Committee  
October 1, 2024, at 2:30 p.m.  
Administrative Conference Room**

---

**Meeting Participants:** Chief Buttice, Captain Eric Knudson, Earl Gooding Jr., Mark Higgins, Noah Leavitt, Steve Moss

**Absent:** Ruben Hernandez, Terry McConn, and Dick Morgan

**Chief's Welcome**

**Status of Recruitment and Staffing**

Chief Buttice gave a personnel update. Two officers completed the training; however, one additional officer did not make it through the probation process. The overall city fund has a significant budget shortfall for 2025-2026. The officer vacancy cannot be filled until the funding issue is resolved. Additionally, we have one officer out on leave without a return date. In summary, we have 43 officers (not counting the Chief and two Captains).

Over the years, the law enforcement academy has increased from 11 week to 19 weeks. Even with extending the academy duration, graduating officers still need additional training when they return to Walla Walla. The academy training is now offered at three locations – Burien, Spokane, and the Tri-Cities. We are grateful the State is now paying the local academy bill of \$4,900 per officer. We still pay the officer salary, overtime, and purchase the clothing and gear needed for the academy. This is the larger expense.

With the city's financial shortfall, our training budget has also been cut to essential training only. Our goal is to try to bring instructors here to save on the travel expense and get more staff trained. Chief Buttice's five-year Strategic Plan has four goals, and the main one is regarding succession planning for the Walla Walla Police Department (WWPD). Growing the staff's leadership has been put on hold.

Steve Moss voiced it is important not to change the city's perception of how many officers the Police Department needs. Remind the City Council the standard you need to meet.

Mark Higgins asked what caused the City's budget shortfall. Steve Moss responded that our expenses have increased more than our revenue has.

Chief Buttice noted (prior to the city's financial challenge) we hired a consultant to complete a staffing survey. The recommendation for growth was to hire four additional officers, an additional administrative sergeant, and an additional captain. Our calls for service have increased. Additionally, some types of calls previously only had a single officer dispatched, but for safety reasons we now must send two officers to respond to (such as a domestic situation).

We are also exploring a sustainable path for funding the 9-1-1 Dispatch Center (WESCOM). The WWPD user fee is the largest portion of WESCOM's funding; this year

the WWPD's portion was approximately \$865,000. If we are successful in getting a 2/10<sup>th</sup> of 1% of sales tax, then this would free up funds to pay for these six additional positions and not drain the City's general funds. Visitors to our town use emergency services, yet currently none of the sales tax from their purchases goes to support our 9-1-1 system. Visitors should help pay for the emergency service they are also using. Whether to place a dedicated 9-1-1 sales tax on the ballot would be a County Commissioner decision. Assuming they agreed, then at least 50% of the population would need to vote to approve an additional sales tax for it to pass.

### **Flock Cameras**

There was a discussion about the new Flock technology system the department has begun utilizing. Captain Knudson was trying to increase our officer capacity without adding personnel when he learned about the Flock system. It uses License Plate Recognition (LPR) to capture objective evidence without compromising individual privacy. The group visited the City's website and reviewed the *Flock Safety Transparency Portal* for an explanation on the ALPR technology, access the portal, access policy, and then watched the information video. The transparency portal can be found at <https://www.wallawallawa.gov/government/police/crime-prevention/flock-safety-transparency-portal>.

Noah Leavitt asked if it's a year-by-year lease with Flock Safety, and Chief Buttice responded yes. Before deciding to renew, we will evaluate on the success of the system. We are tracking the outcome to see if it's worth the expense.

### **Task Force**

The Regional Drug Task Force recently concluded a 6-to-7-month operation that resulted in seven federal indictments for drugs. Because the Task Force has been partnering with neighboring task forces, we were able to utilize license plate information obtained from a neighboring county's Flock system to help with this investigation. Chief Buttice commended Captain Knudson on the work they are doing.

Our Task Force focuses on middle to upper drug dealers. Forfeiture funds and grant funds also helps pay for the task force. The state gets 10% right off the top on seized funds. The federal government might also share. There is a cost sharing based on the departments that were involved. There is a formula, and the federal government sets the formula.

The Police Department Public Information Officer uses Facebook to give updates. We use social media to push out a positive message on the wins.

### **Wrap Up**

There was a discussion on what the Police Department can and cannot do about mobile campers. Being homeless does not mean the person has mental health or drug issues. Our Code Enforcement Officer has built a first-name relationship with many of the mobile campers living in our community.

Earl Gooding Jr. removed the power outlets from outside his business location. This has cut back on the number of people sleeping and congregating in the area, since they could no longer recharge their phones there and plug in their other electronic devices.

**Next Meeting**

The next Chief's Advisory Meeting – date to be determined—Chief's Conference Room.

The October 1, 2024, meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Submitted by Deborah Minter