

# Chief's Advisory Committee

May 25, 2021, at 2:30 p.m.

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**Zoom Meeting Participants:** Chief Bieber, Captain Buttice, Sandy García, Kaneshia Henderson, Noah Leavitt, Steve Moss, Roberto Rodriguez

**Absent:** Captain Braman, Brooke Bouchey, Roger Esparza, Earl Gooding, Ruthell Martinez, Dick Morgan, Curtis Phillips,

- 1) **Chief's Welcome**
- 2) **Thank you, Roberto**—Several committee members acknowledged and thanked Roberto Rodriguez for mentioning our group during the recent interview he had with the Walla Walla Union Bulletin.
- 3) **June 30<sup>th</sup>—Town Hall**—The Town Hall Meeting was tentatively scheduled for June 30 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Walla Walla Community College Theatre Room. It will be live-streamed and have a ninety-minute format. An agenda is being drafted. Chief Bieber inquired what the Committee would like to share with the community regarding our short-term, mid-term, and long-term plans, and the Differential Response Work Groups progress. We will ask the community to provide us before hand with topics to address during the Town Hall Meeting, so the agenda can be tailored that direction. The Walla Walla City Manager has arranged for State Representative Skyler Rude to provide an update on the law enforcement related legislation that recently passed.
- 4) **Brainstorming—Ideas to Recruit Officers from Diverse Backgrounds**—We have been trying for around five to six years to recruit Latino and Latina members of the community to more accurately staff representing our community population. This year we finally saw some fruition to that effort when five bilingual and bicultural applicants were placed on our civil service list. Unfortunately, three of the candidates pulled their names from the list for various reasons. While we extended conditional offers of employment to the other two remaining candidates, unfortunately, each failed to pass one of the required pre-employment checks. Those checks include a psychological test, polygraph exam, physical test, and a background check to see if anything in their background would exclude them from employment in law enforcement.

We are going to test for entry-level police officers during June and we are open to ideas on how to reach bilingual, bicultural candidates. Offering tuition assistance was considered, plus reaching out to the following groups:

- Walla Walla Community College Foundation

- Walla Walla Police Foundation (for fund raising)
- Community service organizations, such as the Rotary Club of Walla Walla and the Walla Walla Exchange Club
- Walla Walla Immigrant Rights Coalition (WWIRC)
- Blue Mountain Action Council AmeriCorps Program
- Guidance counselors at local high schools and colleges/universities

The Civil Service Commission consist of three individuals who are residents of the City of Walla Walla and who are appointed by the Walla Walla City Council. The administration piece goes through the City of Walla Walla’s Human Resource Office.

Public Safety Testing provides us with the test that is used during the testing process to create a civil service list. We purchase this test because it has been vetted for cultural bias. Some of our officers have donated time on a Saturday to meet with potential officer applicants to explain and demystify the testing process. A study guide for the test can also be obtained through us. Since a physical agility test must be passed to get admitted into the law enforcement academy, the officers have also donated time to help people with a mock physical agility test.

From start to finish historically 80% to 90% of candidates do *not* make it through the process, regardless of the ethnicity of the candidates. Normally it is the polygraph and psychological exams that screen out candidates. We will not hire a candidate that lied during the polygraph exam or has a felony in their background.

Chief Bieber has made a commitment to hire the best candidates and not hire to simply fill a vacant slot. We also have a goal to hire diverse candidates, which is unfortunately not happening as quickly as we hoped.

Kanesha Henderson asked if we have any female officers employed at the WWPD— Chief Bieber responded there are two female officers and both work in the Detectives division—Detective Kathy Loney and Detective Chris Ruchert. It has been challenging to recruit candidates for about four to five years, even before the George Floyd incident. As of June 19, the WWPD will have seven police officer openings, which is 15% of our work force.

- 5) **Plans for Upcoming Year**—Where does the committee members want to go moving forward? Noah Leavitt was interested in obtaining more community responses to the Town Hall Meeting, so we know what the community wants to know and happen. This is an opportunity for a public analysis, exploration, and information sharing. Steve Moss recommended being purposeful in sharing we welcome outside comments, so we can take up those issues.
- 6) **Anything for the Good of the Order**—Noah Leavitt shared the following comment/question with the Committee, which was posed by a citizen: *“For WWPD meeting: People of Color (POC) do not want to be tokenized. They want to see equity in*

*how people of color are treated by all police. POC should not be doing the work to educate white people. If they are hired with that thinking then pay them double. Pay POC more. POC see how police officers act outside of their work. Their social media, their cars with flags, how they vote, the jokes they make. The thin blue line flag is a symbol of white supremacy. Please share anonymously."*

Steve Moss recommended educating people during the upcoming Town Hall Meeting on the history of how the flag was created within the law enforcement profession and address the different connotations in different parts of the world.

During Chief Bieber's entire career, the thin blue line flag has always been a tribute to officers that have died doing the course of their duty. Unfortunately, in recent times the thin blue line flag has been used for other purposes. He was not deaf to the fact that other peoples have a different history with the flag.

Kanesha Henderson agreed both sides need to be educated on the different perspectives. It goes both ways. No one wants to be tokenized. The thin blue line may simply be a misunderstanding. Our committee is trying to come together, build trust, and accomplish things together. There was agreement that we are trying to unite people, not to divide people.

Chief Bieber encouraged the members to share at the Town Hall Meeting why they joined the Committee—to share a diverse perspective to get as much input and questioning as possible. It is not possible to have a committee comprised of the entire local population, so we need representatives of those groups to bring the whole picture.

Roerto Rodriguez noted he was unaware of how hard we are trying to create diversity in the WWPD staffing until he became a part of this committee. We are not just saying this to people; we are really trying to hire diverse law enforcement members.

Sandy García's position is that any alteration of the flag, including altering the colors used, contrary to 4 U.S. Code section 8 is an unlawful act, regardless of the intent. However, she respects people's First Amendment rights. Tokenism: She felt it. It's part of being a "successful POC" and being in her profession. She was happy to be included and invited to the table. As the co-chair of her organization's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee she agrees with this person's position that POC should not carry the burden of educating. However, she also believes we have a duty to be open to having conversations to move towards a more equitable society.

- 7) COVID-19 Legislation on Hate Crimes—If we have probable cause to believe a COVID-19 related hate crime act was committed, then the WWPD will enforce the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act. Just as we enforce the law regarding other hate crimes. Sandy García noted this is a good venue to start this discussion, still the Prosecuting Attorney also needs to be involved. Chief Bieber will reach out to the City of Walla Walla City Attorney and the

Walla Walla County Prosecuting Attorney to see if they are available to attend the June 29 meeting to discuss this issue. If they are available, we could spend the first part of the upcoming Chief's Advisory Committee Meeting discussing the legislation and prepare for the Town Hall Meeting. The WWPD does not control the legislation. Steve Moss would like to obtain a District Court Judges perspective on the new legislation by inviting a Superior Court judge, such as District Court Judge Hedine, to attend a future meeting.

- 8) **Next Meeting**—June 29, 2021, from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 on in-person at the WWPD. Chief Bieber prefers that everyone participates on the same platform, so we do not have some people meeting in person and others via Zoom. He will check with the other committee members to see their comfort level with holding an in-person meeting. The June 29<sup>th</sup> meeting will be our last meeting prior to the Town Hall Meeting and our last opportunity to finalize a draft agenda.

The May 25, 2021, meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Submitted by Deborah Minter