

Chief's Advisory Committee

August 17, 2021, at 2:30 p.m.

Meeting Participants: Chief Bieber, Captain Braman, Roger Esparza, Sandy García, Earl Gooding, Kanasha Henderson, Noah Leavitt, Dick Morgan, Steve Moss.

Guest--Chief Troy Tomaras of the College Place Police Department

Absent: Captain Buttice, Brooke Bouchey, Ruthell Martinez, Curtis Phillips, Roberto Rodriguez

- 1) **Body Worn Cameras** —Noah Leavitt and Steve Moss spoke last week with Jennifer Lee of the ACLU of Washington. Recently ACLU of Washington issued an article on law enforcement utilizing body worn cameras.

We invited Chief Tomaras of the College Place Police Department (CPPD) to attend today's meeting and explain their experience since implementing body worn cameras in early May. The CPPD chose the Axon body worn camera (BWC) system due to the software system, ease of use, and high quality. The Axon BWC is always recording. It captures the thirty seconds before the officer turns it on. It automatically captures the video if the officer draws their firearm or taser. If an officer turns on their camera, then the cameras of adjacent officers will automatically activate too. And there is no way an officer can delete a video. Only Chief Tomaras can delete a recording, and this can only be done if City Administration gives him permission.

College Place purchased the system for transparency and to build trust. Trust is very fragile. His officers requested BWC. They planned to implement a BWC system in 2022. Due to social injustice, implementation was bumped up a year. The CPPD has only received one disclosure request since the system was implemented. The CPPD has fourteen officers. (For comparison, the WWPD employs forty-eight officers when fully staffed. Currently we have five vacant officer positions.)

Chief Tomaras would like to implement car cameras along with the BWC so the whole story could be obtained; however, their funding was limited. General fund dollars funded the CPPD's body worn camera project. It's likely the Walla Walla County Commissioners will approve the Walla Walla County Sheriff's Office purchasing BWC. Chief Bieber noted the WWPD has obtained a quote from Axon for approximately \$500,000 implementing both a BWC and dash camera systems.

BWC protects the officers, the community, and reduces liability. Chief Tomaras noted the Walla Walla County Prosecutor and the College Place's Attorney can access the video recordings for free. The CPPD follows the state archive rules for destruction. When a

CPPD officer speaks with people who are being recorded, the officer first states his name, clarifies the conversation is being recorded, then starts gathering information on the situation at hand.

The CPPD received no complaints last year. There was one internal investigation the previous year, and that officer was exonerated. The CPPD is a small-sized agency. Officers often work alone (especially during the night shift), so the camera is the “second officer” to protect them. Chief Bieber noted the Guild and WWPD officers do not oppose implementing BWC.

Roger Esparza inquired if it would make more sense to hire additional officers or to provide BWC. Chief Tomaras responded he has worked thirty years in law enforcement and never witnessed an officer applying excessive use-of-force. Studies show the more officers present, the less violence displayed by both parties. Having more officers involved in an event makes it safer for all involved.

Chief Tomaras clarified there are different restrictions on public records disclosure for events involving a body worn camera. The requestor must be involved in the recorded event, and the department can charge for the redaction service. So far, the CPPD has received one records disclosure request and the person has yet to pick it up nor to pay the fee.

Every year the City of College Place issues a community satisfaction survey; most years law enforcement has ranked as the #1 priority. The CPPD wants to maintain that trust. Before purchasing the BWC system, Chief Tomaras cautioned College Place’s City Administration that officers are human, and mistakes will be made. Mistakes will need to be amended and misconduct will be addressed. At times we will get something on camera that is controversial. Many people perceive the formula as:

Body worn cameras = transparency = trust

Roger Esparza sees being involved with a community and relationship building is a big trust builder.

Steve Moss pondered if we should add a question to the City of Walla Walla’s Citizen Satisfaction Survey to help us clarify how to move forward? This fall Cobalt will survey about one thousand local citizens.

- 2) **Next Meeting**—August 31, 2021, from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 in-person at the WWPD.
Topic—Differential Call Response and the Community Paramedic Program.

The August 17, 2021, meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.
Submitted by Deborah Minter