

## **Chief's Advisory Committee**

### **September 21, 2021, at 2:30 p.m.**

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**Meeting Participants:** Chief Bieber, Roger Esparza, Dick Morgan, Steve Moss, Roberto Rodriguez, Earl Gooding Jr., Kanisha Henderson, Curtis Phillips

**Absent:** Captain Braman, Captain Buttice, Sandy García, Noah Leavitt, Brooke Bouchey, Ruthell Martinez

- 1) Body-worn Cameras versus the Community Paramedic Program** — Chief Scott Bieber began the meeting by opening up the discussion on whether the committee should recommend the City Council place extra funds toward body-worn cameras or the Community Paramedic Program.

An updated quote was received from Taser International which reduces costs of body-worn cameras if it includes tasers, dropping it to approximately \$89,000 per year for five years. This would save an additional \$10,000 from the current budget because real and practice cartridges for the tasers are included in the annual subscription price, where as the WWPD currently pays per item. This essentially reduces the total cost to an annual amount of \$80,000 per year for five years. Additionally, a new Public Disclosure Records Clerk position is estimated to cost \$100,000 with salary and benefits bringing the grand total estimate for body cameras to \$180,000 per year for five years including tasers, software and cloud storage. The WWPD applied for a federal grant for body-worn cameras, however it is only for \$90,000 over the five-year period. If the grant is awarded to the WWPD, this would bring the costs down to roughly \$800,000 for five years. A decision on the grant is not expected until November or possibly into December.

Curtis Phillips provided the handout from the last meeting showing the estimated cost to add 2-3 medics to the Community Medics Program at approximately \$115,000 per medic per year. This program has been hugely successful in reducing the usage of the ambulance and emergency room services. In the 5 months since this program began, it has saved Providence St Mary's Medical Center approximately \$168,000 in ER costs. With this program being so successful, it is highly likely that Providence will remain supportive of this program and could possibly expand it. There are also several additional funding options for this type of program available and all options are being reviewed by Chief Bob Yancey.

The City Council has requested the committee provide their recommendations at the November 1<sup>st</sup> work session.

A lengthy discussion was had on the pros and cons of the body-worn cameras versus the Community Medic Program:

- Sandy stated in an email that she is confident Providence will continue to support the Community Medic Program and they are tapping into other funding sources such as scholarships and grants. The presence of body-worn cameras will increase and maintain community trust.
- Noah stated in an email that he does not feel a need has been demonstrated for Walla Walla to have body-worn cameras and there is quite a bit of relevant data and cost savings potential by putting funding into the Community Medic Program. Based on the article by Chief Bieber that he read, he concludes that expanding the Community Medic Program even more will fill the gaps that have been created by the new legislation.
- Kanasha believes that the success of the Community Medic Program will most likely ensure its support and continuation. WWPD needs to build trust in the community and having body-worn cameras will do that. If we do not fund body-worn cameras now, she feels the issue will be dropped and not revisited at a later date when funding is available. Chief Bieber noted that if WWPD were to be awarded a grant, the City Council would be forced to revisit the issue by deciding whether to provide the additional funds for the program and accept the federal dollars or deny the grant and pass on funding.
- Dick stated that after Chief Yancey's presentation on the Community Medic Program, he was leaning towards the funds going there. Then we had an officer involved shooting and he now believes that the WWPD officers needs body-worn cameras.
- It was discussed that due to the new legislation there are several call types that officers are no longer responding to. A large number of those calls are falling through the cracks. Callers are frustrated and angry about the WWPD being unable to respond, along with having long wait times for a comprehensive mental health advocate to arrive. The new legislation has created changes in the way service providers are responding to calls as well. Child Protective Services is now having the judge sign an affidavit ordering law enforcement to assist when CPS needs to take a child. This gives law enforcement legal right to respond with CPS to the call. Adult Protective Services used to send law enforcement to check on any tips they received regarding abuse, but now they are handling the welfare checks themselves and then notifying law enforcement if any crime has been committed which allows law enforcement to co-investigate the incident. Adding to the Community Medic Program would put in place the infrastructure to help the people the WWPD can no longer assist due to the new legislation, which also benefits law enforcement.
- Curtis mentioned that because the focus of the Community Medic Program is based on reducing costs for medics and Providence, this could cause the program to change and lean more towards cost savings than helping the community. Steve stated that by blending the funding resources that allows us to be at the table to negotiate what the program expansion will look like and ensure its sole focus in not on just saving Providence money.

- The WWPD officers have all spoken out in favor of having body-worn cameras, which shows they are confident they are doing the right thing in dealing with the public and in situations where someone can become combative. Complaints on officers are down when body-worn cameras are used because there is a recording of exactly how the incident played out. Chief Bieber stated body-worn camera footage is usually released prior to the completion of an investigation. This frequently exonerates the officers' actions and pacifies the public, but it can also go the other way and the additional information gleaned from the investigation is needed. This can cause more tension in the community when the body camera footage does not match the finding of the completed investigation. Body cameras are one dimensional and only a small piece of the evidence.
- Roberto believes the body-worn cameras are the more pressing need. He agrees that the Community Medic Program is off to a good start and will continue to have support by Providence due to the large dollars they are saving. If the City puts funding in body-worn cameras, the Community Medic Program will not go away as it has funding and support from other sources. If the City puts the funding to the Community Medic Program, the body-worn cameras will probably not be funded.
- Roger stated that the Community Medic Program is currently only one man, and this community needs at least three. He feels the issues happening across the country with law enforcement are not happening here in Walla Walla. Our officers are trained very well, and we are not paying them \$10 per hour like other agencies which are having these problems. The people that distrust or dislike law enforcement will continue to do so regardless of whether the officers are wearing body-worn cameras. Mental health is currently one of the biggest issues the country is facing and is a huge problem here in Walla Walla. He feels strongly the extra funding should go to the Community Medic Program.
- Everyone agreed that the preference is for the city to fund both programs. Additional discussion is needed during the next meeting to finalize the decision on what to recommend at the November 1<sup>st</sup> work session of the City Council.
- Curtis would prefer the City fund both programs but feels that this committee was created to work with the Police Department. The Community Medic Program is great, but it is not a WWPD program and even though it does strengthen law enforcement efforts, that will continue to happen with support from Providence and those outside agencies. He feels cameras are in direct alignment with WWPD efforts and the purpose of this committee.
- Chief Bieber stated that the City of Walla Walla completes an annual citizen satisfaction survey and historically the WWPD is ranked in the top three overall departments. Statistically the members of this community have a positive view of the WWPD, even during the past year with everything happening across the country. The Chief would like to see both programs funded but did state that law

enforcement does not have the training to handle mental health calls, so the Community Medic Program does indirectly assist the WWPD.

- Earl feels the Community Medic Program does not fall in line with what this committee was created for. They were asked to review the pros and cons of body-worn cameras and now the City Council is asking them to make a recommendation on a program not in the scope of the committee. Steve stated that the committee initially came together regarding body-worn cameras and differential call response, which is how he feels the Community Medic Program ties into the committee.

**2) Next Meeting**—October 26, 2021, from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 in-person at the WWPD.

During the next meeting the group will continue the discussion whether to recommend the City Council place extra funds towards body-worn cameras for WWPD personnel, or to fund additional personnel for the Community Paramedic Program.

The September 21, 2021, meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Submitted by Stephanie Young