

Chief's Advisory Committee

October 26, 2021, at 2:30 p.m.

Meeting Participants: Chief Bieber, Sandy García, Noah Leavitt, Steve Moss, Roberto Rodriguez, Curtis Phillips

Absent: Captain Braman, Captain Buttice, Brooke Bouchey, Roger Esparza, Earl Gooding Jr., Kaneshia Henderson, Dick Morgan, Ruthell Martinez

- 1) Chief's welcome and thank you**—The meeting opened by Chief Bieber.
- 2) Body-worn cameras discussion**—The group reviewed an email from Earl Gooding Jr. that was emailed to the participants earlier that day regarding body-worn cameras. He wrote:

"...I want to briefly weigh in on the question the City Council has put before us, regarding whether the City's money should be spent on police department bodycams or on the paramedics program.

My feeling is that this is not a question that should have been put to this committee. I agreed to be part of this committee, which is an advisory committee to the Police Chief. Yet the paramedics program is not a police department issue at all. It's not a program that is or will be run by the Police Department, and the existence of the program does not significantly affect the allocation of police department personnel.

Now, if the question is 'would bodycams be a worthwhile asset to the Walla Walla Police Department,' then my answer is an absolute 'yes.' The Chief is not opposed to it, the police union is not opposed it, and based on the information we've received there are clear benefits to our entire community to having our officers wear bodycams.

But the question as to should the City spend around \$1 million of our money on bodycams, versus spending it on something else non police department related (be it the paramedics program or fixing our roads or whatever), that's a question for the Council itself to decide. It's a good question, not unlike the many other budget related issues that the City Council has to decide on. It is perhaps a good question for an ad hoc committee to voice in on. However, I did not agree to serve on an ad hoc committee for the Walla Walla City Council, I agreed to be on the Chief's Advisory Committee. So again, I do not believe it to be a fair question to be asking of this committee."

Chief Bieber noted the Community Paramedic Program fits in the differential call parameter. During a previous meeting Dick Morgan recommended that both programs be funded. We applied for a \$90,000 body-worn camera (BWC) grant and we are waiting to find out if the application will be funded. Still, that is only a portion of the project expense. It will cost just under a million for a five-year BWC contract and a full-time

records clerk to process the disclosure requests. Axon owns Taser. We would save money on tasers with an expanded contract. It will cost approximately \$188,000 more per year for the expanded contract, storage, and the PDR clerk. If we do the project, then we do it correctly from the start.

Several attendees voiced agreement with Earl Gooding Jr.'s perspective. They also saw value in the Community Paramedic Program being continued and expanded; however, deciding to fund it or the BWC project is a City Council budgetary decision. The support to acquire BWC is here and that should be the focus. Although the committee members support the Community Paramedic Program, it is not our focus.

Sandy García considered how does the Chief's Advisory Committee want to characterize our support for any program? She was still of the same opinion of supporting BWC. There is value in the Community Paramedic Program, still if only one program can be funded, then she would lean towards the BWC. We joined this committee since its creation was in response to the community's uproar to the national events that occurred during March and April 2020. We want to be clear and not contradict the message.

Roberto Rodriguez was pro BWC and supports funding them. This committee is focused on the Walla Walla Police Department (WWPD). Differential call response is not clearly tied to the Community Paramedic Program.

Steve Moss stated unfortunately there is no time during the November 1 work session for the Chief's Advisory Committee to present our update to the Walla Walla City Council. There is time available during the November 19 and December 13 work session. Which day works best for the committee members?

Curtis Phillips' perspective aligns with Sandy García's. In general, it is good to support the Community Paramedic program. Still, we are looking at approaches to strengthen the relationship between the WWPD and the community.

Chief Bieber has spoken with the City Attorney's Office and the Walla Walla County Prosecuting Attorney's Office. Both are lukewarm on BWC. They do not think it helps them try the case, yet they are required to review all evidence tied to a case. In addition, sometimes cameras miss important things. They provide a single dimension in a three-dimensional situation. The WWPD officers support acquiring BWC. They want people to know they are doing the right thing.

Previously Sandy García was a defense attorney, she compared the account the officers wrote in the report narrative to the camera recording, then looked for discrepancies.

Steve Moss pondered if funding from the recent money received from the State can be used to jump start the BWC project? Chief Bieber was not sure. It is great to have the first year's funding, still where do we get the next four years of the five-year program?

Deb Minter noted BWC have value in recruitment in the years to come. BWC build trust within the community. We can hire people with a high caliber when there is a large pool of interested candidates to choose from. There is significant value in this.

BWC help prove with reasonable doubt what occurred, especially when a single officer responded to a situation. An investigation goes more quickly with BWC and/or dash cameras.

Noah Leavitt reviewed the mission statement for the Chief's Advisory Committee. Is there a case for supporting another service like the Community Paramedic Program? Steve Moss responded Providence St. Mary Medical Center funded one person for that program to help reduce avoidable usage of the emergency room. Since the first year has so far been a success, perhaps they are interested in continuing and possibly expanding that funding.

3) Discuss WSP race/ethnicity traffic stop data collection (awaiting actual data)

Chief Bieber spoke with Washington State Patrol Sergeant Justin Destito. Sergeant Destito will see if he can provide any state data on race and ethnicity. While troopers have some training on determining race and ethnicity, race and ethnicity is not designated on the driver's license so they are making a guess to designate either.

4) Chief's announcement

Tomorrow Chief Bieber will give the City Manager his official letter of retirement effective April 30, 2022. While it is the City Manager's responsibility to fill the opening, Chief Bieber only sees two reasons to hire outside of the department. 1) If there are no qualified internal candidates (which is not the case here), or 2) the department needs significant change, and we need someone to come in and make those changes (also not the case here).

There are three types of external applicants, 1) those who are leaving something (often an issue that they were instrumental in causing, 2) retirees looking to double dip, and 3) people who are using this as a steppingstone to the next bigger place. Former Chief Chuck Fulton recently told Chief Bieber that he is only the second outside candidate selected to fill the Chief's role since the agency was formed in the 1930's.

Two officers (Ahler and Lemons) will complete the police academy in two weeks. Five more officers will be entering the academy in February 2022. The new Parking Enforcement Officer decided to return to working at the Landfill. And last Friday the Animal Control Officer resigned. There is a lot going on. This is a great community and a great department.

Noah Leavitt asked Chief Bieber how this committee can support him over the next six months? Chief Bieber responded by supporting funding for body-worn cameras and to

acquire an online reporting program for citizens to report non-violent events that are not in progress.

5) Anything for the good of the order—Steve Moss will issue a doodle poll to choose between presenting to the Walla Walla City Council on November 29 or December 13.

6) Next meeting—November 30, 2021, from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 in-person at the WWPD.

The October 26, 2021, meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Submitted by Deborah Minter