

Chief's Advisory Committee

October 31, 2023, at 2:30 p.m.

Administrative Conference Room

Meeting Participants: Chief Buttice, Captain Bayne, Captain Knudson, Mark Higgins, Kaneshia Johnson, Sandy García (via Zoom), Earl Gooding Jr., Noah Leavitt, Dick Morgan, Steve Moss

Absent: Robert Dixon

Chief's Welcome

Staffing—Change to PST

Previously the Walla Walla Police Department (WWPD) used our own test to screen entry level officer candidates. Using a local application process limited our entry level officer pool to those candidates who applied locally. Our candidate list was rapidly shrinking during the background investigation. Recently we started using the state's Public Safety Testing (PST), which gives a state-wide opportunity to bring candidates into our potential pool. PST uses ongoing testing, so our civil service will need to approve the list every month. The test can be done online, and it is proctored. Candidates can record themselves doing the physical test. We are competing with regional law enforcement agencies, so the first agency extending a conditional job offer will likely be the hiring agency. The WWPD needs a streamlined hiring process, such as doing a precursory background check earlier in the process. A long-standing goal is to increase the diversity in the department. So far using PST has provided a more diverse pool of ethnicity and gender. On Thursday some interviews have been scheduled with bilingual/bicultural candidates. Still, Chief Buttice reiterated we also hire for the right fit.

Sergeant Huxoll retires today, and Officer Morris is being promoted to Sergeant. Succession planning is important. Another goal is to have staff who are knowledgeable in all aspects of the police department. Sergeant Smith is moving to the Investigations Division and Sergeant Maiuri is moving to Patrol. We are actively working with interested sworn personnel to develop, mentor, and become "supervisor ready" before the current WWPD leadership retires.

Dick Morgan inquired how many officers could retire right now. Captain Bayne responded that ten officers have less than two years of experience. Even with the significant number of officer retirements during the past few years, about 20% of the department's officers are retirement eligible. With Sergeant Huxoll's retirement today, we have three officer open positions.

Noah Leavitt wanted to understand more about the new PST process. Many law enforcement agencies are using PST now. Candidates can be reviewed from throughout the state. Most people are looking for work within their region. The WWPD will pay PST a total of \$3,000 per year.

Last year (while using our local testing process) we added a mentor process. This new process goes so fast there is a short window to connect with candidates. We are getting the numbers needed to potentially hire candidates.

Discuss WWPB accreditation—next steps

Chief Buttice applauded Captain Knudson, Captain Bayne, and Sergeant Nick Loudermilk for their efforts on getting us ready for the WASPC accreditation review. During our onsite assessment we failed one item. Within a week the non-compliance issue was remedied by installing an alarm in the evidence area that notifies Walla Walla Electric if triggered, and Walla Walla Electric then calls dispatch. Both the WWPB and the previous reviewers failed to note the need for monitored alarm security for the evidence area. Maintaining accreditation is very important. The reviewer praised our Property and Evidence Technician, Nikki Williams, for being able to locate the requested items within a short time. Steve Moss agreed the chain of evidence is important.

Body Worn Camera update—how it's going

Captain Knudson has found the body worn camera program is going well. The placement of the docking stations has been re-worked, and some additional docking stations will likely be purchased next year. While wearing body worn cameras, tactical discussions can be muted due to their tactical nature. Recently body camera footage documented how calm and professional Captain Bayne was in attempting to de-escalate the language and behavior of an individual who came to the lobby of the WWPB. The body worn cameras create a safety barrier for both the officer and the parties involved. Dick Morgan would like window cameras to be installed in the Record area to capture activity taking place in the lobby area.

Chief Buttice finds mental health issues have become more prevalent than what he experienced as a new officer. Mental health issues are different from people acting poorly. Steve Moss extended his support in communicating these concerns on the regional level.

Kaneshia Johnson would like to see more financial support going to the sleep center. Many people using the sleep center would benefit from having services brought to them. Since the sleep center became a 24x7 service, Earl Gooding Jr. has seen less homeless population in the downtown area.

Sandy asked if the incidents of unsavory interactions decreased with body worn camera implementation. Captain Bayne did not find it lowering the number of incidents; however, it does document the way officers interact with the citizens and how the officer was treated.

Update on change in drug law—what that look like

Captain Bayne noted that currently when a person is arrested for a narcotics crime, the charges could be deferred if the individual agrees to do treatment. However, the treatment must be

signed up for right then. Before the jail was releasing people on low-level misdemeanor charges, and if they did not show up for court, then we are attempting to locate them again.

Captain Knudson noted the regional drug task force is focusing on fentanyl reduction. Unfortunately, we are losing the Byrne JAG grant that funds the task force. The governor plans to provide proviso adjustment that will last a year. Beyond that year, drug task force operations operating around the state must locate additional funding. There have been eleven fatal fentanyl deaths documented in Walla Walla since January 1, 2023. We are working on a way to keep the community informed on the stats. Steve Moss asked for more information so that he can communicate with the local, state, and legislative leadership.

Captain Knudson appreciated getting WWPD staff back into the schools. Nikki Raver recently did the *“hidden in plain sight”* program, which educates participants on signs of possible substance use and risky behavior. Plus, it gave tips on how to start difficult but necessary conversations. Chief Buttice thanked Mark Higgins for this opportunity.

Community Mapping strategy partnership for response

Greater Columbia Basin Health is looking at the gaps in mental health services without reworking the wheel. Captain Knudson and Captain Bayne are trying to get our local stake holders at the table to identify gaps in service and brainstorm how to fill those gaps. The result may look like the Community Medic Program. The goal is to have 24-hour coverage and a vehicle available with a paramedic and a designated crisis responder. The paramedic and crisis responder would go out together and try to assist people who are in active crisis.

Kanesha Johnson is seeing a lot of elderly homeless situations currently. A referral would be helpful.

Thank you, Sandy, for serving the Advisory Committee

Chief Buttice extended appreciation to Sandy García for her guidance, especially in getting the body worn camera program here at the WWPD. And for investing several years of time to serve on the Advisory Committee.

Wrap Up

Steve Moss asked for clarification on how the red flag laws are or are not working here.

Mark Higgins noted two levies are coming up to vote that will affect the Walla Walla School District. A replacement *“Learning Levy”* and a short-term *“Outdoor Athletic and Activities Facilities Capital Levy.”* He would appreciate the community’s support.

Next Meeting

The next Chief’s Advisory Meeting will be scheduled for some time in early 2024.

The October 31, 2023, meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Submitted by Deborah Minter