

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

**(NO PHYSICAL LOCATION)**

**CM JOYCE MORGAN CM BOYLAN**

**SAFER TOGETHER WORKSHOP MINUTES**

**FEBRUARY 4, 2021**

**6:30 pm**

Meeting Convened: 6:30 pm Meeting Adjourned: 8:32 pm

Attendance: CMs Morgan and Boylan

Also: Peggy Sidman, Office of General Counsel; Heather Reber and Jeff Rodda, Auditor’s Office; Richard Distel and Yvonne Mitchell, Council Research; Dr. Tammy Hodo and Dr. Brian Van Brunt

CM Morgan started the meeting by detailing the aim of the workshop and said that today’s workshop would be focused on community policing. CM Morgan turned it over to the facilitators, Dr. Tammy Hodo and Dr. Brian Van Brunt.

Dr. Hodo gave an overview of what was discussed at the last meeting and said the goal of this workshop was about improving the relationship between the community and the police.

Director Mike Bruno introduced JSO Assistant Chief Derrick Mitchell for Community Engagement

Asst. Chief Mitchell detailed the Sheriff’s Watch Program which has about 3,000 members. There are 17 Sheriffs Watch sectors. This program focuses on crime prevention and each zone has a safety fair every month. Police officers bring out toys and introduce the members of the sheriff’s office to the community. During these events they are also able to listen to complaints from the community. Each November, there is an annual meeting at First Baptist Church.

Assistant Chief Mitchell talked about the Police Athletic League (PAL) Program. The PAL program serves about 4,000 kids at 5 locations around Jacksonville and they teach 6 sport activities. Also there is a kid’s leadership program for ages 14 to 18.

Dr. Hodo asked how the community feels about the ability of the police to handle complaints. Chief Mitchell said that he thinks they are happy because they get direct response from one of the zone commanders.

Kelly Coker, Duval County School Board Member, said she is happy to be aware and a part of the meeting so she can learn to best work together in the process.

Dr. Hodo asked about community walks. Chief Mitchell said that community walks are one of the most important things that they do at JSO. Once they identify a criminal trend in an area, they find about a mile long area where they can knock on doors and reach out to the community for answers as to who is involved in the criminal activity.

Dr. Hodo said snitches get stiches. Chief Mitchell said that is a concern in lower income areas and said residents may report to Crime Stoppers to stay anonymous.

Chief Mitchell talked about National Night Out and the Faith and Blue, which are two events that help to connect the police closer to the community they serve.

Chief Mitchell talked about a partnership that JSO has with Bethune-Cookman University. This initiative helps to bring the community and law enforcement together.

The Police Explorer program is focused on youth aged 14 to 21, and lets them experience a 6-week academy with JSO and helps them plan for a future of possibly joining JSO.

Dr. Van Brunt asked about the process from moving from PAL or the Explorer Program into JSO, and if there is tracking to see how many people end up joining JSO connected to those programs. Chief Mitchell said they do not track the specific numbers.

Carnell Oliver asked about the quality of the PAL program. Chief Mitchell said he believes the program is very strong and helps to build great partnerships with community organizations.

Bobbie O’Connor asked about the complaint system and if the community is happy with the system. Chief Mitchell said he can speak to the system when the time he was a zone commander and he felt that it worked well but acknowledged the ball can sometimes be dropped in the process.

David Williams said he wants officers to have more dedicated service in a neighborhood. This will allow those residents to feel more comfortable sharing information with the police. Chief Mitchell said he understands wanting officers in one area but said that changes will happen, and it is most important that when they do leave the zone there is training and strong transition with the new officer.

Dr. Hodo echoed the importance of having a connection in the same zone officers. Chief Mitchell said it is important to not lose information when someone leaves a zone.

Erik Avanier, News4Jax, asked how JSO defines Community Policing, whether or not Community Policing is helpful in identifying violent crime, and if there a bigger effort to recruit/hire those living in the community they will serve.

Director Bruno said they are always aggressively recruiting in the community and that the officers should reflect the community they serve. Director Bruno says that they look to hire everywhere and do focus on historically black colleges. Director Bruno stressed the importance of having the community and police officers working together to have successful community policing.

CM Boylan asked how often the police watch program have difficult conversations with the community. CM Boylan asked Chief Mitchell to talk about those conversations. Chief Mitchell said that they have some in person meetings, but people are hesitant to come out due to COVID-19.

Stanley Scott asked how many officers were arrested by JSO last year. Mr. Scott also said there should not be an issue reaching out to the community with technology.

Director Bruno said that 68 employees were arrested in the last 5 years, and 11 officers last year. This encompasses all employees of JSO, not just sworn officers.

Wells Todd said there are issues in terms of police response to those who are mentally challenged. Dr. Hodo said this topic will be talked about at the next meeting.

Mr. Todd asked what is being done about culturally training officers. Director Bruno said that they follow State certifications for education. Director Bruno agreed that it is a good idea to have members of the community educate police officers and have done that previously.

Carnell Oliver asked about the diversity programs and the ability to recruit outside of the community and look towards southern Florida. Mr. Oliver has issues with citizen complaint system because he feels that institutional knowledge can help an officer manipulate the system.

Nahshon Nicks asked about de-escalation tactics. Dr. Hodo said this will be addressed at the next meeting.

CM Morgan asked about how many officers are involved in PAL. Chief Mitchell said that 7 police officers and 1 sergeant are designated to PAL.

CM Morgan said that with all these programs going on, she wondered why there is such a disconnect with the community. Wells Todd said this has to do with the historical relationship with law enforcement and the African American community. He said the understanding from white officers is not always there and there can be a cultural disconnect. Chief Mitchell talked again about the work being done with Bethune-Cookman University. Carnell Oliver talked about the distrust of the police in the African American community.

Stanley Scott told Director Bruno that he needs to find more respect. Mr. Scott said to not assume where he lives. Stanley Scott said the data that JSO sharing was wrong.

Carnell Oliver asked what it will take to get upgrades to PALs. He said it is a critical part of reducing crime by starting at the PAL centers.

CM Boylan said his takeaway from this workshop is the importance of the PAL centers. Dr. Hodo detailed the future meetings and what will be covered in the workshops. March 5th, 2021 at 9:30am is the next meeting and it will be focused on mental health.

Minutes: Richard Distel, Council Research

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